

**Paul's Theology and Thought, Part 2:
The People of God, the Future, Problems with Paul
And the Pseudonymous Letters**

Redefining the People of God

The prophet Joel envisioned a day when God's Spirit would be poured out on all God's people (Joel 2:28-29, quoted in Acts 2:17-18). Paul and the early Christians clearly believed that they were those for whom this prophecy had come true: all who believed and were baptized received the Spirit – a clear sign that God had accepted Gentiles as well as Jews to be his people (cf. Gal 3:2). Indeed, for Paul the Spirit is the essential mark of someone's being a true Christian. Just as there is a basic contrast in Paul's thought between life "in Adam" and life "in Christ," so another clear dichotomy is between life "according to the flesh" (Greek: *kata sarka*) and life "according to the Spirit" (Greek: *kata pneuma*). (Horrell, 94)

In Galatians 2.11–21 Paul homes in on the crucial issue between him and Peter in Antioch: what does it mean, in practical terms, to be a member of God's people? Peter, by separating himself from uncircumcised believers, is implying that if they want to belong to God's people they must take on themselves the identity of ethnic Jews by getting circumcised. There then follows the first ever statement of Paul's doctrine of justification by faith. 'We', affirms Paul, 'are by birth Jews, not "gentile sinners"; yet we know that one is not justified by works of Torah, but through the faithfulness of Jesus the Messiah; thus we too have believed in the Messiah, Jesus, so that we might be justified by the faithfulness of the Messiah and not by works of Torah, because through works of Torah no flesh will be justified.' I have translated *pistis Christou* and similar phrases as a reference, not to human faith in the Messiah but to the faithfulness of the Messiah, by which I understand, not Jesus' own 'faith' in the sense either of belief or trust, but his faithfulness to the divine plan for Israel. The passage works far better if we see the meaning of 'justified', not as a statement about how someone becomes a Christian, but as a statement about who belongs to the people of God, and how you can tell that in the present. (Wright, 111-112)

Dunn highlights the fact that Paul often focuses his critique not on "the law" per se, but on "the works of the law" (see Rom 3:28; Gal 2:16; 3:2, 5, 10, etc). What Paul objects to, Dunn proposes, is the way in which the Judaism of Paul's time used the law as a boundary marker, defining a particular ethnic and cultural group as inside the covenant and others as "out". Circumcision, food laws and Sabbath observance were the most prominent examples of the "works of the law" to demarcate Jews from Gentiles. Paul is not therefore criticizing legalism, nor the doing of good deeds, when he criticizes those who depend on the works of the law. Rather he is criticizing the use of the law to mark out certain people as belonging, as coming exclusively within the sphere of God's grace. To this nationalistic and ethnocentric exclusivism Paul poses his gospel message that salvation is available to all who have faith in Christ, both Jew and Gentile, without the need for Gentile converts to adopt the marks of Jewish belonging (circumcision etc). This, in essence, is the "New Perspective" on Paul that Dunn proposes, and has worked out in great detail in commentaries on Romans and Galatians, as well as in his major summary work on Paul's theology. (Horrell, 132)

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Paul is in a profound dilemma: how can God offer salvation in Christ to Jew and Gentile without distinction, yet also remain faithful to the promises made to Israel? Romans is the letter in which this theological dilemma is most apparent, where Paul is most insistent that the gospel is an offer of salvation equally available to Jew and Gentile without distinction (Rom 10:12; cf. Rom 1:16; 3:22; etc), but is also concerned to insist that God has not been unfaithful to Israel. First of all he suggests that only some Israelites are "true" Israelites and that this is due to the election of God (9:7-13). Paul proceeds to reiterate his conviction that both Gentiles and Jews can be saved in Christ but that Israel as a whole has missed the way due to her attempt to establish her righteousness based on works and not on faith (Rom 9:30-10:21). However, he then returns to his insistent refrain: "has God rejected his people? By no means!" (11:1). This time the explanation proposed is based on the Jewish idea of the faithful remnant. Israel's rejection of the gospel, Paul suggests, led to its proclamation among the Gentiles (11:11-12), but the Gentiles' salvation will in turn make Israel jealous such that some of the Israelites too will be saved (11:14). The climactic conclusion of all Paul's wrestling to explain the purposes of God is reached in the affirmation that God's purpose in all this is to have mercy upon all (11:32), both Jew and Gentile (though Paul does not say whether he means "all" in the sense of every single person, or "all" in some collective representative case – cf. 11:25: "the full number of the Gentiles"). God's amazing plan of salvation leaves Paul lost for words and he ends with an outburst of praise to God, whose judgements are unsearchable and whose ways are inscrutable (11:33-36). (Horrell, 143-144)

All the letters of Paul can be understood as pastoral documents written to congregations to persuade them to adopt the new perspective brought about by Jesus Christ – and a radical perspective it turns out to be. Nowhere does this become so clear as it does in the Corinthian correspondence. Paul learns of the many problems that have disrupted the life of the congregation. One problem involved divisions in the church... Paul perceives that merely tinkering with the factionalism will accomplish little. What the community needs is a major readjustment of its vision. This different way of viewing God is called "the message of the cross" (1:18). Paul offers "Christ crucified," who by the criteria they use for knowing God will seem to the Jews and stumbling block and to the Greeks sheer folly, but to those who believe (including groups of both Jews and Greeks) "the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1:24). "Christ crucified" must have seemed a shocking and absurd phrase to the letter's initial readers. For them an authentic messiah ("Christ") simply could not die the shameful death of crucifixion. The notions of messiah and crucifixion were contradictory. "For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified," (2:2). The single stress is a reminder that for Paul the cross is not to be relegated to a mere stage on the way to the more triumphant resurrection. Good Friday is not simply the problem for which Easter provides the solution. The participle "crucified" in 1:23 and 2:2 appears in the perfect tense in Greek, designating an action that occurs in past time but that has continuing effects for the present. To be sure, the Christ Paul preaches in Corinth has been raised from the dead, but the resurrection does not erase the marks of the crucifixion, as if it were merely an obstacle Jesus has overcome in moving to bigger and better things. As risen, he remains the crucified Christ. The message of

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the cross has a further role to play as the norm and criterion for the life of the church. (Cousar, 99-103)

For Paul the close association between Christ and the new community means that the life of the community is shaped by and along the lines of the career of Christ. When members of the community reflect on their reason for being, they return to their constitution – the Christ event (and particularly the crucifixion) – and find there their marching orders. Examples include the practice of the Lord's Supper with an emphasis on the death of Christ, and in the Christ hymn in Phil 2:6-11 when Christ takes the form of a slave, humbles himself, and becomes obedient to the point of death. Readers are urged to conform their common life to the pattern evident in this particular recital of Christ's story. (Cousar, 139)

The people of God live as harbingers of the new age, a group that sees the new creation God has established in Jesus (e.g. Gal 6:15) but with sober eyes is well aware that the old age exists alongside the new. While living in a city that is organized as a microcosm of Rome, the Philippians are told that they really belong to a heavenly commonwealth. As citizens of this other world, they are to obey its laws, to reflect its life and manners, to sing its songs even if in a strange land. In this world they are "resident aliens." But the community is not to mistake membership in a heavenly state as otherworldliness. The return of Jesus symbolizes renewal of life here, not an escape to a celestial nirvana. (Cousar, 141-142)

The Pauline communities were composed of an interesting array of persons, living in a variety of economic and social circumstances, of differing ethnic backgrounds, some slave owners and others slaves, some well-educated and others not, some patrons and others clients, some with ecstatic spiritual experiences and others without such experiences. The diversity boggles the mind. Furthermore, the ethos within the community, as we have seen, was one of a parity of membership. Since such a notion contrasts sharply with the highly structured patterns in the Greco-Roman society in which members had grown up, it is no surprise that conflicts arose in the communities. Some of the conflicts were primarily theological in nature, others were social, many no doubt a mixture of the two. A familiar phrase Paul uses for the church in affirming both its unity and diversity is "body of Christ." On the one hand, for Paul the body symbolizes the unity of the community ("we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and we were all made to drink of one Spirit" [1 Cor 12:14]). But on the other hand, the body illustrates the community's diversity ("the body does not consist of one member but of many" [12:14]). What makes this image for the church so powerful in the letters is not the image itself (which is often used as a metaphor for other groups), but the intimate relationship between Christ and the church which it implies. (Cousar, 142-143)

Just as Christ "loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:20) and just as Christ bore the burdens of others in becoming a curse for their sake (Gal 3:13), so Christians are to bear the burdens of others. For Paul love is not to be confused with a warm, fuzzy feeling or with a fondness for a

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special few, but finds its definition in the concrete, self-giving event of Jesus Christ (see also Rom 5:8; 15:1-3). (Cousar, 151)

“Flesh” is a word with an extremely wide semantic field. Even in Galatians, it carries several meanings. It appears without any prejudicial connotation to designate a person’s physical character (literally “flesh and blood”) or to designate humanity as a whole (literally “all flesh”) or to designate the sphere of that which is human or natural (“in the flesh”). In these instances, “flesh” is a part of God’s good creation and in no way connotes something corrupt. Unlike Hellenistic dualism, Paul’s theology does not imply that “flesh” as material substance is inherently evil. But when set in contrast to “Spirit,” which is the power of the inbreaking new age, “flesh” takes on apocalyptic significance and is associated with the old age. It then is closely linked to “sin” and “world” and vigorously opposes the activity of the Spirit. The conflict between flesh and Spirit has ethical implications. In Gal 5:19-23 Paul offers a list of the “works of the flesh” and “the fruit of the Spirit.” The former includes an array of activities, some physical in nature, others spiritual, many having to do with the disruption of community. The list hardly contains surprises, but it serves to identify the flesh and what a life oriented to the flesh looks like. The latter list contrasts with the former in that “fruit” is singular (in contrast to “works” of the flesh), giving a cohesive and unified character to what the Spirit produces. It is not as if the Spirit creates in one person love, in another joy, and in a third peace. The list is indivisible. Furthermore, the list contains a number of terms that denote restraint and steadiness over against exuberance and self-assertion. Love, peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control are virtues that build community. Beyond the list of virtues promised as the fruit of the Spirit, directions are given about the practical value of the Spirit in the life of the Christian community (Gal 6:1-10).

Simply talking about the Spirit today often conjures up images of a vague, wispy force that has little relation to reality. Three features of the presentation of the Spirit in the letters help to dispel these notions. (1) The Spirit stands in relation to Jesus Christ. The Spirit is not an independent figure, but none other than the Spirit of God’s Son. As a transforming force, it does not turn human beings into divine beings but identifies them with Christ. (2) The Spirit functions as the norm and instrument of faithful living. Rather than dealing with ethereal matters, the Spirit influences the routine decisions of life. (3) The Spirit never becomes anyone’s private possession. It remains a gift to the community, and discerning its ethical directions is primarily a communal and not an individual task. (Cousar, 155)

Paul’s Apocalyptic

What has happened in the last generation of scholarship, however, is that the word ‘apocalyptic’ has been used as a shorthand to denote a specific way of thinking about God and the world, and a way of understanding Paul in particular. According to this way, the divine solution to the problems of the world is simply to break in to an otherwise unfruitful and corrupt ongoing historical process and to do something radically new. Over against any idea

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that God was quietly and steadily working his purposes out as year succeeded to year, this would-be 'apocalyptic' theology insists that, for Paul, God broke in to history, the history of Israel, the history of the world, in his action in Jesus and particularly in his cross; and God will do so again, very soon from Paul's perspective, in the second coming through which what God accomplished through Jesus will be brought to completion. In this kind of 'apocalyptic' we find the very opposite of a 'covenant' theology in which the age-old promises are to be fulfilled through the long unwinding of Israel's and the world's story. On the contrary: God is doing a new thing. Jesus bursts onto the scene in a shocking, unexpected, unimaginable fashion, the crucified Christ offered as a slap in the face to Israel and the world, folly to Gentiles and a scandal to Jews. (Wright, 51)

In the messianic events of Jesus' death and resurrection Paul believes both that the covenant promises were at last fulfilled and that this constituted a massive and dramatic irruption into the processes of world history unlike anything before or since. And at the heart of both parts of this tension stands the cross of the Messiah, at once the long-awaited fulfilment and the slap in the face for all human pride. Unless we hold on to both parts of this truth we are missing something absolutely central to Paul. The word *parousia*, often rendered as 'coming' within Christian scholarship, actually means 'presence', as opposed to 'absence'. What matters is not Jesus' 'coming', as though from a great distance, but his 'personal presence', or indeed 'royal presence' since that is how *parousia* was often used in relation to the emperor or other monarchs. The word *parousia* itself, and the language of 'meeting' which Paul uses in 1 Thessalonians 4.17, is not, like so many of his key terms, familiar from the Septuagint. It evokes the scene, familiar from much Hellenistic and Roman writing, of a king or emperor paying a state visit to a city or province. As he approaches, the citizens come out to meet him at some distance from the city, not in order then to hold a meeting out in the countryside, but to escort him into the city. 'Meeting the Lord in the air' is not a way of saying 'in order then to stay safely away from the wicked world'. It is the prelude to the implied triumphant return to earth where the Messiah will reign, and his people with him, as Lord, saviour and judge. And in that context *parousia* means what it means in imperial rhetoric: the royal presence of the true Lord. (Wright, 54-56)

Paul writes letters, not apocalypses (though the letters do include apocalyptic scenarios; see 1 Thess 4:13 – 5:11; 1 Cor 15:51-57). Nevertheless, Paul takes over the perspective of Jewish apocalyptic and adapts it in light of the Christ event. "God powerfully steps on the scene in order to change the scene fundamentally." The death and resurrection begin God's promised new age. Jesus inaugurates a new creation (Gal 6:15; 2 Cor 5:17) – the beginning of God's transformation of human history and the universe. When Jesus returns, the transformation will be complete, and the old age will come to an end. In the meantime, the present is a time of the overlap of the two ages (1 Cor 10:11). Believers find themselves citizens of two worlds and are forced to negotiate their lives accordingly. They are not to be conformed to this ephemeral, passing age (1 Cor 7:31) but are to be constantly transformed by the inbreaking of the new age (Rom 12:2). As we see throughout our study of the letters, this apocalyptic scheme provides the

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framework in which Paul interprets the significance of Christ, the character of the church, the current anguished state of creation, and the moral life of the people of God. (Cousar, 97)

Problematic Aspects of Paul – Slavery and Women

Paul's metaphorical use of slavery and slavery/freedom, slave/master polarities demonstrates that he is a man of his times. At times Paul seems unable to empathize with the slave's socially and physically annihilating condition. For example, Paul advises slaves to be content with their present state (1 Cor 7:21). He also returns the "runaway slave" Onesimus to his master, Philemon. Onesimus's lack of agency is clear. He has no voice and no say in the matter of his return. The apparent ambiguity of Paul's position on the institution of slavery in the first century and the use of Pauline texts to support modern pro-slavery ideologies have caused concern for many African Americans. One of the most quoted examples is the outright rejection of the Pauline corpus, except for 1 Corinthians 13 (the "love chapter"), by Howard Thurman's illiterate grandmother. In spite of Paul's use of slave-master relations as a metaphor for the Christian's relationship to Jesus, and in spite of Paul's rhetorical attempts to equalize relations between slaves and free-born persons (i.e., Gal 3:28, "there is no longer slave or free...in Christ Jesus..."), the apostle, because of "accommodation to the slave regime signaled elsewhere in the Pauline corpus," remained unacceptable reading in the Thurman household. Thurman's grandmother, a former slave, recalled that the white minister whom the master commissioned to preach to the slaves three or four times a year always recited the Pauline text, "Slaves, be obedient to them that are your masters...as unto Christ." Even in freedom, Thurman's grandmother vowed she would never read from "that part of the Bible." (Smith, 12)

Confronted with the potential obstacle of oppressive Pauline texts, African American women appropriated other texts to support God's call on their lives. African American women engaged in the civil rights appropriated Luke 4:18 (which cites Isa 61:1-2), "the Spirit of the Lord is upon me," rather than acquiesce to Pauline mandates not to suffer a woman to teach a man. Black women appropriated Luke's recontextualization of Isa 61:1-2, which legitimated Jesus' ministry, to authorize their own calls to teach men and women how to read, to vote, to protest, and to publicly exercise their own prophetic voices. (M. Smith, 16)

Overwhelmingly, Paul has been appropriated to provide suasion, encouragement, and insight in the face of black struggles. In the pre-Civil War period, during a speech delivered at Exeter Hall (London, England, 1843), J. W. C. Pennington looked reverentially toward Paul. To support the idea of the common family of humankind, Pennington cited Paul's egalitarian ethos in Gal 3:28 and alluded to Paul's metaphorical statement on the importance of each part of the human body in 1 Cor 12. Likewise, Henry Highland Garner, in a speech delivered to the U.S. House of Representatives, drew reverentially on the "Paul" of Acts 17:26 to highlight the contradictions of Christians supporting slavery. In the post-Civil War period, in a fight against the notion of blacks as beasts, black clergy took up the mantle of God as universal parent with a vengeance. In doing so, moreover, black clergy frequently cited the "Paul" of Acts 17:26. Thus, South

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Carolina Baptist M. W. Gilbert could write: "A true believer in the Scriptures must be equally a believer in the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of all men. For the divine record declares that God 'hath of one blood created all nations of men for to dwell on the face of the earth.'" In his essays, speeches, and sermons, Martin Luther King also repeatedly drew reverentially on Paul. King's essay "An Experiment in Love" cites 1 Cor 10:24 for an understanding of love as agape or what King called "disinterested love." In his speech "The Ethical Demands for Integration," King appealed to the "Paul" of Acts 17:26. He writes: "Paul's declaration that God 'hath made of one blood' all nations of the world is more anthropological fact than religious poetry." Likewise, in *Strength to Love*, King's "A Transformed Nonconformist" relies on Rom 12:2. (A. Smith, 35)

African Americans often critiqued Paul or interpretations of him through appeals to other portions of the biblical canon. In support of her role as a female abolitionist, Maria Stewart corrected "Paul" by appealing to Jesus, her "High Priest and Advocate": "St. Paul declared that it is a shame for a woman to speak in public, yet our great High Priest and Advocate did not condemn the woman for a more notorious offence than this: neither will he condemn this worthless worm." (A. Smith, 36)

Paul's greatest appeal among African Americans may be...his role as an outsider. He was not one of the "pillars" in Jerusalem. Some persons in his assemblies judged his speech to be contemptible (2 Cor 10:11). With regard to the earliest members of the Jesus movement, Paul speaks of God's revelation to him as one that came "last of all, as to one untimely born" (1 Cor 15:8). With his previous role as a persecutor of the church still hovering over him, Paul considered himself "the least of all the apostles" (1 Cor 15:9). Given the miseries and harsh lived realities that African Americans have faced in the rural, urban, and suburban settings of their country, perhaps many can empathize with Paul's "outsider status." Venerated or treated with suspicion, Paul remains an important figure within African American arts and letters. As William Shakespeare once noted, "Misery acquaints a man with strange bedfellows." (A. Smith, 38)

In Galatians 5:2, Paul addresses his readers: "Listen! I, Paul, am telling you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no benefit to you." The comment may not be surprising in itself, since circumcision is one of the issues that underlie the letter. But the female reader who expects to find herself addressed in the words of scripture is suddenly confronted with a second person plural that categorically leaves her out. The corporate addressee of Paul's letter, "the churches of Galatia," does not seem to change; yet Paul writes as if that addressee were male and were considering for himself the possibility of circumcision. (Polaski, 14)

The grammatically gendered structure of Greek often serves to make women even more invisible than do English language structures, particularly since the masculine plural is used when a group of men *and* women is in view. (When the group is impersonal, and particularly when the group includes items with different grammatical genders, the neuter plural pronoun

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is often employed.) The use of the masculine plural is observable both with pronouns and collective nouns. An example of the latter is the term *adelphoi*, "brothers," that Paul frequently uses. The NRSV often translates it as "brothers and sisters" when the reference seems to be general. The difficulty, of course, is that it is often impossible to know whether a grammatically masculine plural noun or pronoun refers to men only, or to men and women together. The women are grammatically rendered invisible. (Polaski, 17)

As Dale Martin has noted, "Throughout 1 Corinthians Paul attempts to undermine the hierarchical ideology of the body prevalent in Greco-Roman culture. He attempts to make the strong weak and the weak strong. He calls on Christians of higher status to please those of lower status. He insists that those who see themselves as spiritual modify their behavior, such as speaking in tongues in the assembly, to accommodate those they consider spiritual inferiors. Paul even implies that the higher-status Christians should follow his example and lower themselves socially to identify themselves with those of lower status. But when it comes to the male-female hierarchy, Paul abruptly renounces any status-questioning stance. Instead, he accepts and even ideologically reinforces a hierarchy of the body in which female is subordinated to male." (Polaski, 19)

We do not have conclusive evidence that [Jewish women] performed priestly functions, whereas pagan women in various cults both held such titles and performed such functions. Thus a Jewish woman might come to believe in Jesus as the Christ and join a community of such believers. When she did, she would be unlikely to assume, based on her prior religious experience, that she might become a religious functionary in that community. A female pagan convert to Christianity could be quite likely, based on *her* prior religious experience, to assume that she might acquire a leadership role. (Polaski, 40)

First Corinthians 14:34 commands that "women should be silent in the churches." This is likely the text most frequently quoted to demonstrate Paul's misogyny and opposition to women's religious leadership. The entire argument is clearly grounded on the presupposition that women will pray and prophesy in the assembly – the very thing the 1 Corinthians 14 passage (As in all the churches of the saints, women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak...) seems to prohibit. In short, then, it is not possible to take both 1 Cor 11 and 1 Cor 14 at face value. In 1 Cor 11, the problem Paul finally identifies in verse 5 is apparently that of women praying and prophesying in the assembly with uncovered heads. Paul's visceral revulsion to such behavior was culturally grounded. Respectable women in Paul's day wore their hair up and covered. Presumably some of the Corinthian women had removed their head covering and let their hair flow down freely to express their Christian freedom. Such a woman would have been widely understood as lewd, advertising the availability of her sexual services. Paul likely saw the Corinthian women's behavior as not only inappropriate but positively dangerous, both for the community and the women themselves. That Paul does not recognize his own logic as being either culturally or medically grounded, however, is clear in the arguments he advances for his position. In themselves, the proofs are weak, and even Paul

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admits the flaws of one of them. Paul shows himself to be a cultural traditionalist. Significantly, though, the issue in this text is *not* whether a woman is or is not to lead in worship. Indeed, the whole discussion is based on the assumption that women will lead. (Polaski, 54-56)

Understanding the background of chapter 11 in this way, we turn to the very difficult text of 1 Cor 14:33-36. On the face of it, and as it is often interpreted, this text would seem to prohibit any public speaking by women in the assembly, or at least by married women (the Greek *gyne* means either "woman" or "wife"). Yet to interpret the text this way would fly in the face of the assumptions held in chapter 11. How, then, do we make sense of this text? Interpreters have commonly advanced several options. In some ancient manuscripts verses 34-35 appear at the end of the chapter rather than as in current editions. In other manuscripts, the verses are in their usual place but with a marginal notation indicating that the copyist knew of other manuscripts that placed the verses elsewhere. These verses clearly interrupt the flow of the argument, so that modern translations often place this section in parentheses to show the break. This combination of text-critical evidence leads some interpreters to see the prohibition against women's speech as an interpolation, perhaps placed first in the margin of the text to bring 1 Corinthians more in line with the admonitions of 1 Timothy and then incorporated into the text itself. According to this view, then, it is not Paul himself but his later interpreters who wish to prohibit women's speech. Other scholars disagree. They argue that, distasteful as it might be for modern scholars, Paul's intent is in fact to rein in the activities of the women prominent in the leadership of the Corinthian congregation. A leading proponent of this view is Antoinette Clark Wire, who argues that the rhetoric of all of 1 Corinthians is directed toward making Paul's stance seem logical...toward discrediting the perspective of his opponents, the women prophets. Others who see this text as Paul's own words argue for a more limited application of them. Paul, they say, knew of specific situations in the Corinthian congregation (cf. 1 Cor 1:11-12; 5:1-2; 2 Cor. 7:7-8). He also knew of a specific situation in which a particular group of women, quite possibly young wives with no previous contact with Christianity or Judaism, were disrupting the worship by talking continually among themselves or interrupting the service to ask questions. All of these proposals for reading 1 Cor 14:33-36 have strengths and weaknesses. Scholarly consensus is building toward the acknowledgment of 14:33-36 as an interpolation. (Polaski, 56-59)

It is possible to read Galatians as the struggle to articulate the act of God in Jesus Christ – an act so strikingly radical that even its quite articulate interpreters, like Paul, speak of it haltingly and inconsistently. Krister Stendahl identifies the problem as a gap between Paul's "theological rapture" and his willingness or ability to make it a reality in his society. "I happen to think Paul was a better theologian than implementer...It seems that he saw a vision, but he did not know quite how to implement it fully." Daniel Boyarin argues that Paul made a considered choice. "He did not think this new creation could be entirely achieved on the social level yet. Some of the program was already possible; some would have to wait." Bonnie Thurston emphasizes the experience of struggle: "What I, personally, see in Paul as he is reflected in his letters is a man in process, a person struggling to understand the full implications of what God has done in

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Jesus and what, specifically, that means for him. Paul was living the tension between what had *been* his tradition and what was coming to *be* his tradition. (Polaski, 73)

Pseudonymous Letters

Open to dispute is where Paul's work ends and his legacy begins. In other words, where does Paul's writing stop and that of his successors commence? There are thirteen letters in the New Testament that explicitly claim to be written by Paul. (In addition, early tradition included the letter to the Hebrews – which nowhere mentions its author's name – among the Pauline letters. But no one today argues that Paul wrote Hebrews.) There are seven letters unanimously accepted as being by Paul himself and six letters which are frequently regarded as pseudo-Pauline, that is, written in Paul's name by someone other than Paul (Colossians, Ephesians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus). Opinions on the authorship of the other letters vary, with some scholars – especially those of a more conservative evangelical persuasion – arguing that all the epistles attributed to Paul in the New Testament are probably authentic. (Horrell, 181)

C.K. Barrett poses the basic question: "Which is the likelier hypothesis, that Paul in this letter for some reason wrote so much unlike himself, or that someone other than Paul wrote so much like him?" Pseudonymity is the term used when the actual author of a text deliberately identifies himself or herself by a name other than his or her own. Aside from pen names (Mark Twain for Samuel L. Clemens or George Eliot for Mary Ann Evans), the modern use of pseudonymity raises a host of moral and legal problems since it usually entails the production of something counterfeit and fraudulent. In the ancient world pseudonymous writings abounded, some for financial gain, others out of respect for the person in whose name the document was written and often closely imitating the revered model. Some writers clearly wrote in the name of a famous person long since dead. In the first century there was a fairly established pattern of pseudonymous writing. Each of the six disputed letters of Paul has its own peculiar characteristics, and yet in a sense all seem to follow a pattern – that of contemporizing a particular tradition. Following the apostle's death, a disciple who revered the apostle and knew his letters restated the Pauline message in his own style, as if to answer the question, "What would the apostle say if he were living today and facing this particular group of false teachers?" The actual writer's basic intent was to let the tradition address new and different situations in the life of the churches, in scenes that had changed since the time of Paul's own ministry. The use of the apostle's name in these instances was a literary device consistent with Jewish practice. As Dunn observes, "There was no intention to deceive, and almost certainly the final readers were not in fact deceived." It is not surprising then to find both strong similarities and marked differences between the pseudonymous letters and the other seven. (Cousar, 166-167)

The differences in vocabulary and style between the undisputed Pauline letters and the Pastoral letters are significant. There are a number of words which appear in the Pastorals but

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are never used elsewhere by Paul. Examples include: *eusebeia* (godliness), *sophrosune* (modesty), and *theosebeia* (piety, religion). There are also a number of words which seem characteristic of Paul but which do not appear in the Pastorals, such as *euangelizo* (to proclaim the gospel), *pneumatikos* (spiritual), and *soma* (body), etc.

Differences in theology and ethics also seem to be apparent. The Pastorals contain none of Paul's characteristic discussion of being "righteoused" by faith and not by works of the law. Indeed, in contrast to Paul's emphasis on faith as trust and commitment, the Pastorals seem to treat faith more as a body of teaching and tradition which must be safely preserved. This is often seen as one indication of the later origin of these letters, some decades after Paul's death, when a major concern was to protect and guard the teaching which the original apostles had bequeathed to the church. Instead of extended theological argument, theology in the Pastorals seems to be expressed in concise creedal statements, which are perhaps reflections of the ways in which crucial Christian beliefs were being summarized and recited. A good example is found in 1 Timothy 3:16.

Elements of household-code teaching, as found in Colossians and Ephesians, are taken up in the Pastorals. Men who are the heads of their households are to manage those households well; women and slaves are to be submissive and to work faithfully at their tasks. Women are not permitted to be in positions of authority in the Church. Some contrast with the teaching found in Paul's letters seems apparent. The Pastorals also show considerable concern over the kind of people who are fit for office in the church; bishops, elders, and deacons. To many scholars it seems apparent that leadership structures have developed beyond the rather loosely organized time of Paul's own activity. Indeed, nowhere in the undisputed letters does he mention "elders", and the only reference to bishops is in Phil 1:1. The term *diakonos*, "servant", is used a number of times by Paul to describe his own ministry and that of others. This would seem likely to represent an earlier stage of development, before the term *diakonos* began to designate a specific office within an emerging threefold order. (Horrell, 193-194)

Colossians – addressed to Christian believers in the city of Colossae in Asia Minor, states, as does Ephesians, that it was written by Paul from prison. Particularly significant features of its content are its expressions of a high and cosmic Christology, its sense of "realized" eschatology, its appeal to believers to live as the new people that they are in Christ, and its so-called "household code" – a list of duties and responsibilities addressed in turn to various groups within the Greco-Roman household: wives and husbands, children and fathers, slaves and masters. Most scholars agree that Colossians was written to confront the dangers of a rival philosophy to which some of the Christians were being attached, but what exactly it was is more disputed. (Horrell, 182-183)

Ephesians – Most scholars favor the view that the author of Ephesians used Colossians as a basis for his letter, though some propose that the relationship was the other way around. Unlike Colossians, however, Ephesians does not seem to address any particular heresy or danger in the church, and may have originated as a circular letter rather than as one addressed to the city of Ephesus. (Horrell, 183)

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2 Thessalonians – The second letter to the Thessalonians is closely related, in style, content and plan to 1 Thessalonians: it seems most likely that the second letter was based upon the first. However, while 1 Thessalonians was written in part to address concerns arising because the Day of the Lord had not yet come, 2 Thessalonians confronts quite the opposite problem: some thought the Day of the Lord had already arrived. The author's references here are obscure and enigmatic – with “lawless one” referring perhaps to an emperor or a false prophet – but depict an eschatological scenario influenced by Jewish apocalyptic literature (e.g. Dan 8:19-25; cf. 1 Macc 1:54-57; Mark 13:14; Rev 20:1-15). 2 Timothy condemns two “heretics” who are “claiming that the resurrection has already taken place” (2 Tim 2:18), a similar problem to that which 2 Thessalonians confronts. The author of 2 Thessalonians also exhorts Christians not to be idle, and not to support any who refuse to work to earn their food (2 Thess 3:6-13). Verses in the letter (2 Thess 2:2, 5, 15) may imply that some time has passed since Paul was around (there are now false letters written in his name – “a letter as if from us”; 2:2) and that here a follower of Paul is seeking to “remind” people of Paul's teaching. (Horrell, 184)

The Pastoral Epistles – The first letter to Timothy is presented as Paul's instructions to Timothy about his own conduct and about what he should teach and expect from members of the Christian congregations. The author clearly considers there to be a threat from “false teachers” who are leading people astray, though there is little agreement among scholars as to exactly what the false teaching was. He gives positive instruction about the kind of conduct which is to be expected from various groups within the congregation. Leaders are to be respectable men who govern their households well; women are to be silent and submissive, dressing modestly and not extravagantly; slaves are to honor their masters and be willing slaves. There are also indications of financial and charitable responsibilities being undertaken by the Church: elders who govern well are to be given “double honor”, which many commentators take as a reference to the payment of Church leaders; widows who lack family to care for them, who are over sixty and worthy in character, may be enrolled on a list, which presumably entitles them to support from the church.

The second letter to Timothy shares a number of these features of 1 Timothy. What is emphasized and developed more in 2 Timothy is the theme of Paul's own sufferings for the gospel, to the point of death, which is portrayed as imminent. 2 Timothy is thus perhaps the most personal in tone of the three Pastoral letters, and it is notable that the most detailed references to Paul's personal circumstances in the Pastorals are found in 2 Timothy.

Like Timothy, Titus is given instructions about the qualities required of leaders in the Church. He is urged to “appoint elders in every town.” As in 1 Timothy, there is both instruction for various groups within the churches – older men, older women, younger women, slaves – and warnings about the threat from wicked false teachers. (Horrell, 185-186)

The early church (c. second to fourth century) debated which writings should and should not be accepted. Broadly speaking, modern scholars' doubts about the authenticity of some of the letters attributed to Paul are based on some or all of the following features of a letter: its

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vocabulary and style, its theological and ethical content, and the context both in church and society which it assumes and reflects. Since scholars often mention differences between the “genuine” and the “pseudo” Pauline letters as grounds for the pseudonymity of the latter, it is worth pointing out – as a cautionary note in assessing the evidence – that even the undisputed letters of Paul vary widely in their vocabulary, content, and the situations they address. For example, the language of “wisdom” (Greek: Sophos, Sophia) is heavily concentrated in 1 Corinthians, especially in chapters 1-3; it does not appear at all in Galatians, Philippians or 1 Thessalonians. The word charisma (gift) appears often in Romans and 1 Corinthians, once in 2 Corinthians, but nowhere in the other Pauline letters. Decisions about authorship therefore are unavoidably subjective. (Horrell, 187)

It is worth asking yourself how your own beliefs and commitments affect your thinking with regard to these questions about authorship. Does it matter whether Paul wrote 1 Timothy or not? And if it matters, why does it matter? Does it detract from the Bible's authority or integrity if some of the claims to authorship made in its writings are not genuine? Or can we accept Ephesians, or 1 Timothy, as presentations of Pauline teaching which are just as valuable whether or Paul wrote them? Scholars may also be influenced by other commitments. For example, if they have developed a certain view of the development of early Christian history, they may be strongly inclined to date the letters in a certain way, such that they reveal the evolution of the Church over several decades. There are therefore no entirely objective, disinterested decisions on such matters. But that does not mean that any viewpoint is as defensible as any other. Any view of Paul and his writings has to make sense of what is actually in the letters.

It is also worth being cautious about assuming a modern view of “pseudonymity” – namely that a book which makes a false claim about its authorship is essentially deceptive, its author guilty of lying. For some Christians, this is a major reason why it is hard to accept that a letter in the Bible which claims to be by Paul might actually have been written by someone else. Writing in the name of an esteemed predecessor was a common and probably more acceptable practice in the ancient world, and that attempting to present someone's teaching and authority afresh to a new generation may be seen as a worthy and important, and not a deceptive undertaking. Indeed, there are many Jewish and Christian texts dating from the centuries around the time of Christian origins which were written in the name of a figure long since (or more recently) dead. Jewish examples include writings in the name of Enoch, Abraham, Moses, Ezra, and Solomon; Christian texts of the second and third centuries include gospels attributed to Peter, Philip, Thomas, Mary, records of the “Acts” of Peter, Paul and John, and letters such as the undoubtedly inauthentic third letter of Paul to the Corinthians. A judgement about whether a writing was theologically “sound”, sufficiently orthodox to count as truly “apostolic”, may have been more influential in its acceptance than a conviction as to who was actually its author. (Horrell, 188-189)

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