

PAUL
AS A PROBLEM IN HISTORY
AND CULTURE

The Apostle and His Critics through the Centuries



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ABBREVIATIONS

General

BCE	before the Common Era	NT	New Testament
CE	Common Era	OT	Old Testament

Old Testament

Gen.	Genesis	Song of Sol.	Song of Solomon
Exod.	Exodus	Isa.	Isaiah
Lev.	Leviticus	Jer.	Jeremiah
Num.	Numbers	Lam.	Lamentations
Deut.	Deuteronomy	Ezek.	Ezekiel
Josh.	Joshua	Dan.	Daniel
Judg.	Judges	Hosea	Hosea
Ruth	Ruth	Joel	Joel
1–2 Sam.	1–2 Samuel	Amos	Amos
1–2 Kings	1–2 Kings	Obad.	Obadiah
1–2 Chron.	1–2 Chronicles	Jon.	Jonah
Ezra	Ezra	Mic.	Micah
Neh.	Nehemiah	Nah.	Nahum
Esther	Esther	Hab.	Habakkuk
Job	Job	Zeph.	Zephaniah
Ps(s).	Psalms(s)	Hag.	Haggai
Prov.	Proverbs	Zech.	Zechariah
Eccles.	Ecclesiastes	Mal.	Malachi

New Testament

Matt.	Matthew	Luke	Luke
Mark	Mark	John	John

Acts	Acts	Titus	Titus
Rom.	Romans	Philem.	Philemon
1–2 Cor.	1–2 Corinthians	Heb.	Hebrews
Gal.	Galatians	James	James
Eph.	Ephesians	1–2 Pet.	1–2 Peter
Phil.	Philippians	1–3 John	1–3 John
Col.	Colossians	Jude	Jude
1–2 Thess.	1–2 Thessalonians	Rev.	Revelation
1–2 Tim.	1–2 Timothy		

Other Ancient Sources

<i>b.</i>	Babylonian Talmud
<i>C. Galil.</i>	Julian, <i>Contra Galilaeos</i>
<i>Hist. eccl.</i>	Eusebius, <i>Historia ecclesiastica</i>
<i>Hom.</i>	<i>Pseudo-Clementine Homilies</i>
<i>Rec.</i>	<i>Pseudo-Clementine Recognitions</i>

INTRODUCTION

A Thorn in the Flesh

Hollywood is normally the last place one looks for penetrating analysis of complicated social, religious, or cultural questions. While its moving pictures may be worth thousands of words, film is primarily a visual medium and as such has a limited capacity for argument or explanation. It excels in creating impressions, moods, and emotions. Yet like the proverbial stopped clock that still gives the correct time twice a day, Hollywood occasionally cuts right to the heart of the matter, rendering in a compelling fashion the very impressions, moods, and emotions evoked by a complex issue.

One such instance is found in the 1988 film *The Last Temptation of Christ*, directed by Martin Scorsese. Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* generated considerable debate before and after its release in 2004, but the controversy that swirled around Scorsese's production was just as great. Debate about *The Passion of the Christ* focused on negative portrayals of Jewish characters. With *The Last Temptation of Christ*, the matter was much more primal: sex. During a dream sequence Jesus imagines living an ordinary life and growing old rather than dying on the cross. One scene in the dream depicts Jesus consummating his marriage to Mary Magdalene. After Mary dies, he marries Mary of Bethany, commits adultery with her sister Martha, and fathers children by both women. Audiences were none too pleased, and widespread protests accompanied the theatrical release. One could perhaps contemplate the offending scenes as an imaginative exploration of the doctrine of the incarnation—what does it mean that, in Jesus, God became a human being, and what, exactly, is entailed by the biblical claim that Jesus “in every respect has

been tested as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15)?—but the graphic image of Jesus engaged in sexual intercourse crossed a line with many viewers in the United States and overseas.¹

Largely overlooked in the commotion was a different scene, one equally provocative, one could argue, as the scene with Mary Magdalene. Near the conclusion, Jesus visits a village where he hears a man preaching to a small crowd gathered in the street. The man is Paul of Tarsus. Jesus confronts him when he is finished and claims that Paul’s “gospel” about the death and resurrection of Jesus is a fiction. Paul continues the conversation when Jesus says that “the world can’t be saved by lies.” Paul disagrees, insisting that the “Jesus” he preaches is much more powerful than the real thing: “I make [the truth] out of longing and faith. . . . If it’s necessary to crucify you to save the world, then I’ll crucify you! And I’ll resurrect you, too, whether you like it or not.”

Like the rest of the film, the scene is adapted from the novel of the same name by Nikos Kazantzakis, first published in Greek in 1955. In the novel, the clash with Jesus and the negative portrait of Paul are even more pronounced. Shortly after marrying Jesus, Mary Magdalene is killed by a mob led by a preconversion Saul, described as a squat, fat, bald hunchback with crooked legs. “Shut your shameless mouth!” Paul tells Jesus when he denies being the Son of God. Jesus calls him “son of Satan” when he says that, facts be damned, he will not stop proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah. “What is ‘truth’ [after all]?” Paul asks, echoing the infamous question of Pontius Pilate (John 18:38). He laughs at Jesus’s objections:

Shout all you want. I’m not afraid of you. I don’t even need you any more. The wheel you set in motion has gathered momentum: who can control it now? . . . Joseph the Carpenter of Nazareth did not beget you; I begot you—I, Paul the scribe from Tarsus in Cilicia. . . . I have no need of your permission. Why do you stick your nose in my affairs?²

As Jesus weeps in despair, Paul bids him farewell and says, more cheerfully, “It’s been a delight meeting you. I’ve freed myself, and that’s just what I wanted: to get rid of you. Well, I did get rid of you and now I’m free; I’m my own boss.” Scenes such as this one no doubt help to explain why the novel was condemned by the Greek Orthodox Church and placed on the Index of

1. For discussion of the film’s portrayal of Jesus, see Baugh, *Imaging the Divine*, 51–71. The controversy surrounding the film is discussed by Baugh in “Martin Scorsese’s *The Last Temptation of Christ*”; see also Lindlof, *Hollywood under Siege*.

2. Kazantzakis, *Last Temptation of Christ*, 477–78. The image of Jesus setting the wheel of history in motion only to lose control of it may be borrowed from Schweitzer, *Quest of the Historical Jesus*, 370–71.

Forbidden Books by the Vatican in 1954—even before it was published in Greek the following year.³

Life imitates art. In this instance, it works in the opposite direction, with the art of Kazantzakis and Scorsese imitating a particular slice of life. The scene dramatizes a long-standing argument about Paul's legacy that continues to the present day. The question that has roiled a wide range of thinkers can be put very succinctly: Who founded Christianity, Jesus or Paul? To most observers the answer seems obvious. Who else but *Christ* could have founded *Christianity*? During the nineteenth century, an increasing number of historians and theologians begin to credit Paul with a formative role in the course of Christian history even more profound than that of Jesus. In the meantime, not only scholars but popular authors and public figures as well have taken part in the debate, consistently lamenting the degree to which Christian theology amounts to little more than “a series of footnotes to St. Paul.”⁴ Hazel Motes, the backwoods preacher in Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood*, starts the “Church without Christ” for others like him who are alienated from traditional Christianity. Undaunted by the difficulty in imagining it, prospective members of the Church without Paul are by no means in short supply in the modern world.

The list of those who have weighed in on the matter is long and illustrious, including philosophers, poets, professors, playwrights, psychologists, and politicians. In his 1854 diary Søren Kierkegaard writes that the Protestantism of his day is “completely untenable” because it is “a revolution brought about by proclaiming ‘the Apostle’ (Paul) at the expense of the Master (Christ).”⁵ George Bernard Shaw remarks with characteristic aplomb, “No sooner had Jesus knocked over the dragon of superstition than Paul boldly set it on its legs again. . . . He does nothing that Jesus would have done, and says nothing that Jesus would have said.”⁶ Shaw's friend H. G. Wells is no less displeased with Paul because he “imposed upon or substituted another doctrine for . . . the plain and profoundly revolutionary teachings of Jesus.”⁷ According to Alfred North Whitehead, the man who “did more than anybody else to distort and subvert Christ's teaching” was the same man about whom Robert Frost has a character in his blank verse dialogue *A Masque of Mercy* announce,

3. See Antonakes, “Christ, Kazantzakis, and Controversy in Greece.”

4. Meeks, “Christian Proteus,” 689, quoting Sydney E. Ahlstrom.

5. Rohde, *Diary of Søren Kierkegaard*, 172.

6. G. B. Shaw, “Prospects of Christianity,” xcix–c. “There is not one word of Pauline Christianity in the characteristic utterances of Jesus” (ibid., c).

7. Wells, *Outline of History*, 952. “What Jesus preached was a new birth of the human soul; what Paul preached was the ancient religion of priest and altar and the propitiatory bloodshed” (511).

“Paul: he’s in the Bible too. He is the fellow who theologized Christ almost out of Christianity. Look out for him.”⁸ Carl Jung is “frankly disappoint[ed] to see how Paul hardly ever allows the real Jesus of Nazareth to get a word in.”⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche likewise asserts that there would be no Christianity without Paul, who embodies “the opposite type to that of the life of the ‘bringer of glad tidings.’”¹⁰

What is there to commend the idea that Paul is the true founder of Christianity? He is perhaps the earliest figure whose writings the church saw fit to preserve for posterity, earlier even than the Gospels. He was not only a man of ideas but also a man of action, founding a number of communities in leading Roman cities. It is easy to take this for granted—starting churches is what missionaries do, after all. But if he had simply delivered the good news to individuals without forming them into groups, the new religion might not have had any staying power. A movement that is fundamentally social in nature, moreover, is very different from one that consists of “the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude,” in William James’s famous definition of religion.¹¹ Furthermore, these communities were composed largely of gentiles, a demographic fact of immense theological significance for the development of a movement honoring the memory of a man who once told a non-Jewish woman that he was sent “only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt. 15:24). By any reckoning Paul was the most influential champion of gentile inclusion. Finally, any number of signal Christian doctrines can be traced to Paul’s writings. Sin, salvation, faith, the end times, the Holy Spirit, the church—the church’s views on these and many other concepts would be unrecognizable without the Pauline stamp they bear.

While the notion that Paul founded Christianity should not be rejected out of hand as patently ridiculous, neither is it as self-evident as its proponents seem to think. Paul may be the earliest Christian writer, but he indicates that the movement was already up and running by the time he stopped persecuting it and became a member. He claims to be handing on traditions that he has received from others, not introducing novel teachings. Furthermore, as the ardently pro-Paul author of the Acts of the Apostles indicates, he is not the first follower of Jesus to reach out to non-Jews. And it should not count for nothing that very few Christians—and even then, only very recently—have ever thought of Paul as the founder of their faith. That title is reserved for

8. Whitehead, *Dialogues*, 307; Frost, *Masque of Mercy*, 8. Whitehead adds: “It would be impossible to imagine anything more un-Christlike than Christian theology.”

9. Jung, “Psychological Approach to the Dogma of the Trinity,” 153.

10. Nietzsche, *Antichrist*, 617 (§42).

11. James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, 31.

Jesus. It may not be found in Scripture or in any of the historic creeds, but most Christians of most times and places reserve that title for Jesus.

Who deserves the title? Answering this question is not as straightforward as it may seem. It may be the case that key terms in the debate, such as “founder” and “Christianity,” are not defined with sufficient clarity to yield a single correct answer. But this observation is hardly satisfying. Semantics are only one variable in a more complicated equation. There is something other than purely objective historical investigation going on in the various attempts to solve it. When it is said that Paul is the founder of Christianity, much more is implied than that a particular name belongs in a particular box on an organizational flowchart. Neither is giving the title to Jesus free of historical and theological presuppositions. Because Jesus is the default choice, however, it is clear that Paul’s “advocates” are trying to say something more. Indeed, they are saying more, and usually more than they realize. To call them Paul’s advocates, of course, is a bit misleading since they are certainly not his defenders. Almost without exception, to refer to Paul as the founder of Christianity is to pay him a backhanded compliment.

This is just one of many ways to register one’s protest against the outsized impact Paul has had on the church and, through the church, the rest of the world. Criticism of Paul is almost as old as Christianity itself, but it can be found with increasing frequency over the past two centuries. The sources from which it issues can be surprising. According to Adolf Hitler, “The decisive falsification of Jesus’s doctrine was the work of St. Paul,” who “used his doctrine to mobilize the criminal underworld and thus organize a proto-Bolshevism.”¹² David Ben-Gurion, the first prime minister of the State of Israel, comments that while “Jesus probably differed little from many other Jews of his generation,” it was Paul’s “anti-Jewish emphasis” that “gave Christianity a new direction.”¹³ According to Sayyid Qutb, who deeply influenced Osama bin Laden and has been called “the philosopher of Islamic terror,” Paul’s preaching “infected” Christianity from the beginning because it was “adulterated by the residues of Roman mythology and Greek philosophy.”¹⁴ And when Mahatma Gandhi explains, “I draw a great distinction between the Sermon on the Mount and the Letters of Paul,” he leaves little doubt as to which one he prefers.¹⁵ Who would have guessed that a loathing for Paul is the one tune that this unlikely quartet would sing in harmony?

12. Trevor-Roper, *Hitler’s Secret Conversations*, 63, 117–18.

13. Ben-Gurion, *Israel*, xviii.

14. Qutb, *Islam*, 37–38.

15. Gandhi, “Discussion on Fellowship,” 461–64 (quote on 464). He adds, “They are a graft on Christ’s teaching, his own gloss apart from Christ’s own experience” (464).

Consider the tone in addition to the substance of the accusations directed his way. Prolific poet and translator Stephen Mitchell calls Paul “the greatest and yet the most misleading of the earliest Christian writers.” Although there are things he admires about the apostle,

in a spiritual sense, he was very unripe. The narrow-minded, fire-breathing, self-tormenting Saul was still alive and kicking inside him. He didn’t understand Jesus at all. He wasn’t even *interested* in Jesus. . . . We can feel in the writings of Paul the Christian some of the same egotism, superstition, and intolerance that marred the character of Saul the Pharisee.¹⁶

No less ambivalent is the Lebanese author Kahlil Gibran, the best-selling poet of the twentieth century and posthumous favorite of the 1960s counterculture. Gibran describes Paul as “a strange man” whose soul is “not the soul of a free man.” Jesus “taught man how to break the chains of his bondage that he might be free from his yesterdays,” but Paul “is forging chains for the man of tomorrow. He would strike with his own hammer upon the anvil in the name of one whom he does not know.”¹⁷ In *The Fire Next Time*, James Baldwin says that “the real architect of the Christian church was not the disreputable, sun-baked Hebrew who gave it his name but the mercilessly fanatical and self-righteous St. Paul,” who, “with a most unusual and stunning exactness, described himself as a ‘wretched man.’”¹⁸ Such comments reveal a personal animus that is difficult to ignore.

Perhaps the unkindest cut of all, at least from a modern perspective, is to say that Paul takes himself and everything else too seriously. John Knox tries to put it gently:

We look in vain for any sign of humor in Paul’s letters. He would have been both happier and wiser if he could sometimes have laughed at and with himself and at and with others; perhaps he did, but surely not often enough, since in that case at least an occasional chuckle would have found its way into his letters.¹⁹

Artistic renderings of the apostle reinforce this impression: Paul does not know how to smile.

16. Mitchell, *Gospel according to Jesus*, 41–42, emphasis original.

17. Gibran, *Jesus the Son of Man*, 61–62.

18. Baldwin, *Fire Next Time*, 32, 58.

19. Knox, *Chapters in the Life of Paul*, 87. Jakob Jónsson (*Humour and Irony*, 223–42) identifies a number of humorous elements in Paul’s letters. It would likely do little to change Knox’s mind since the most common are sarcasm and mockery of beliefs he does not share—not the most endearing of traits.

Maybe Paul should be excused for being a killjoy because it is not his fault. Tantalized by his enigmatic reference to a “thorn in the flesh” in 2 Cor. 12:7, scholars have speculated that Paul was afflicted by migraines, epilepsy, a speech impediment, rival teachers, demonic possession, persecution by Satan, repressed homosexual urges, frustrated heterosexual desires, astigmatism, bipolar disorder, the evil eye, a nagging wife, psychic trauma, chronic fatigue, unrequited love, earaches, hearing loss, persistent hiccups, gangrene, arthritis, Maltese fever, sciatica, gout, malaria, ringworm, low self-esteem, depression, and leprosy—and this is only a partial list.²⁰ With so many hardships, one supposes, it is no wonder he was so unpleasant. Browsing through these theories, based for the most part on the thinnest slivers of evidence, one occasionally senses a measure of *schadenfreude* that is poorly concealed.

Whatever it was, Paul famously lamented this “thorn in the flesh” as something that disturbed and distressed him and would not go away. As one of the most significant figures in the history of Western civilization, Paul has influenced and inspired countless individuals and institutions. He has also proven to be a thorn in the side of many others. This book is about Paul and those who regard him as a problem, indeed, the most nettlesome problem of the past two thousand years. Everyone loves Jesus, it seems, but Paul is another matter. As often as not, his contributions are treated as unfortunate detours from the way, the truth, and the life of Jesus. Who is the true founder of Christianity, and would a world without Paul look radically different? Given the multitude of variables involved, a resolution to this perennial debate will for the foreseeable future continue to elude those who take part in it. The approach taken here is neither to join the chorus of Paul’s critics nor to mount a full-fledged defense but, rather, to report on the participants and to take note of the attitudes and assumptions at work. Since those who hate him—not entirely unlike those who love him—do so for radically different and even diametrically opposed reasons, it may be that the controversy divulges less about Paul than about his detractors and their contexts.

Determining what constitutes anti-Paulinism can admittedly be a bit arbitrary. Part of the difficulty has to do, in the first place, with identifying the proper object of criticism. Does Acts supply reliable information, or should it be treated with extreme skepticism? Is “Paul” to be found in all thirteen letters attributed to him in the NT or only in the seven undisputed letters (Romans, 1–2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon)? Quite apart from his deeds, it is no less of a challenge to limit one’s focus to

20. Mullins, “Paul’s Thorn in the Flesh”; Hisey and Beck, “Paul’s ‘Thorn in the Flesh’”; Leary, “‘Thorn in the Flesh’”; and Jegher-Bucher, “Pfahl im Fleisch.”

his words. J. W. C. Wand learned this lesson when he wrote *What St. Paul Said* (1952) and later deemed it necessary to write a follow-up, *What St. Paul Really Said* (1968), a title subsequently borrowed by N. T. Wright for his own contribution to the topic (1997). Sensing that the matter was not as simple as listening to “what Paul said” and that someone had to cut this Gordian knot, Gary Wills followed these works with his own—*What Paul Meant* (2006).

The guiding principle in the following pages is to err on the side of inclusivity if only because Paul’s critics do not always discriminate between “the real Paul” and, for lack of a better word, “the ersatz Paul.” Sorting out genuine anti-Paulinism from would-be anti-Paulinism on such a basis, moreover, would be to beg the question. That is to say, discovering “the real Paul” is a very difficult task about which very smart people disagree mightily. Accordingly, I will approach criticism of Paul as a wide-ranging, multifarious phenomenon and pay close attention to how this criticism is expressed in his critics’ own words. How they say it can convey as much as what they say. While it may be difficult to formulate a precise definition of anti-Paulinism, most people know it when they see it.

That Jerome in preparing the Vulgate rendered Paul’s “thorn” into Latin as *stimulus* seems all too fitting in light of his nearly unparalleled capacity to provoke. (Daniel Kirk takes a more diplomatic tack, stating that Paul is “a challenging and theologically generative partner along the way of following Jesus.”)²¹ Intellectual histories often attend primarily to scholarly responses to such provocations, even though scholars have a limited influence on the general public, much to the chagrin of many scholars. “Popular” interpretations produced by those with no special training in biblical studies deserve a place in any worthy survey of this history. In any event, the distinction between scholarly and popular interpretations of Paul should not be drawn too sharply. A number of intellectuals have held enormous sway in worldly affairs for good and ill, if only from the grave. And no matter how thick the walls, those inside the academy are never entirely insulated from the winds that blow outside. An exhaustive history of the ways in which Paul has been interpreted—be it sympathetically, suspiciously, reverently, blasphemously, politically, artistically, or any other way—is obviously beyond the scope of any single volume.²² The present volume makes no such attempt at comprehensiveness. Its focus will instead be on a narrower segment of this vast body

21. Kirk, *Jesus Have I Loved, but Paul?*, 3.

22. Surveys include Schweitzer, *Paul and His Interpreters*; Bultmann, “Zur Geschichte der Paulus-Forschung”; Ellis, *Paul and His Recent Interpreters*; Wiles, *Divine Apostle*; Merk, “Paulus-Forschung, 1936–1985”; Furnish, “Pauline Studies”; Hafemann, “Paul and His Interpreters”; Seesengood, *Paul*; and Westerholm, *Blackwell Companion to Paul*, 299–604.

of material—those writers who take a dim view of Paul—though even this niche turns out not to be so narrow after all.

The following chapters are divided between two parts. Part 1 (“Anti-Paulinism through the Centuries”) provides a roughly chronological survey of the ways in which Paul has bewitched, bothered, and bewildered people over the centuries, both inside and outside the traditional precincts of the church. Chapter 1 (“The First Hundred Years”) looks back to the NT and the earliest evidence for negative perceptions of Paul. As it turns out, his own letters provide the clearest indication that he faced opposition, and his defensiveness concerning his status as an apostle suggests that doubts about his relationship with Jesus are present from the outset of his ministry. Chapter 2 (“The Premodern Era”) traces the trajectory of this criticism as it develops among Jewish and non-Jewish observers and takes a new form with the rise of Islam in the medieval period. Paul assumes a large role in the Reformation and its aftermath, and the different attitudes toward his writings that emerge alongside new approaches to the study of early Christianity in the early modern period are discussed in chapter 3 (“The Enlightenment and Beyond”). Chapter 4 (“The Nineteenth Century”) treats this increasingly hostile narrative against the Enlightenment backdrop of shifting theological convictions and trends in the academic discipline of biblical studies. Chapter 5 (“Yesterday and Today”) follows the procession of notable participants in this ongoing argument into the twentieth century and up to the present, sampling opinions on offer not only inside the academy but in popular discourse as well.

Part 2 (“Anti-Pauline Contexts, Subtexts, and Pretexts”) expands on a number of particular topics and themes that arise at various points in the history of anti-Paulinism detailed in part 1. Paul continues to have a complicated relationship with Jews and Muslims. The legacy of anti-Semitism has led many scholars to reevaluate Paul, who frequently receives the blame for centuries of hostility that culminate with the Holocaust. Postwar treatments of this question and of Paul’s role in the “parting of the ways” between Judaism and Christianity, along with contemporary Muslim expressions of anti-Paulinism, are the subject of chapter 6 (“In the Tents of Shem”). Chapter 7 (“Jesus versus Paul”) considers the rhetorical parallels between comparisons of Jesus and Paul and the contrast between “religion” and “spirituality.” Many critics implicitly rely on hypothetical arguments about what a world without Paul might look like. Chapter 8 (“A World without Paul?”) thus attempts to situate criticism of Paul and claims about his role in the origins of Christianity

within the context of counterfactual history, an approach to understanding the past that is as controversial inside the academy as it is popular in the wider culture. Chapter 9 (“Not by Paul Alone”) examines other figures who have been nominated for the title of founder and the critical issues their candidacies raise. Whether the arguments and anxieties about the respective roles of Jesus and Paul are unique to Christianity or shared with other major world religions and figures such as Muhammad, Confucius, and Moses is the subject of chapter 10 (“From Jesus to Paul”).

PART 1



Anti-Paulinism through the Centuries

1

THE FIRST HUNDRED YEARS

The Problem of Paul in the New Testament

Criticism of Paul shoots up during the Enlightenment and reaches full bloom in the centuries following it. The view of Paul as the betrayer of the movement started by Jesus is one species of this broader ideological genus. Less appreciated is the lengthy germination process preceding its recent flourishing. Buds and sprouts of varying robustness and tenacity appear sporadically, sometimes being weeded out and sometimes going dormant until a more hospitable season. Later anti-Paulinism derives from a surprisingly ancient stock, the seeds of which can be found as early as the first century. This chapter will survey the diverse forms this hardy perennial takes in the earliest surviving evidence: the NT. On the surface and lurking just underneath, the NT itself reveals a remarkable amount of material indicating that Paul was not universally admired. His teachings, his manner of life, and his personality are all called into question implicitly or explicitly in a wide range of texts. From the outset, Paul evokes strong reactions from everyone he encounters.

The Acts of the Apostles

The author of the Acts of the Apostles is writing some time later than the figure he portrays as one of the heroes of his narrative.¹ Although his historical

1. Acts has been dated as early as the mid-60s and as late as ca. 130; see Fitzmyer, *Acts of the Apostles*, 51–55.

reliability has been called into question, much of his testimony accords with the testimony of Paul's own letters and parallels many of the criticisms made in later centuries. The apostle Paul becomes a problem, it seems, even before he becomes the apostle Paul. Christians surely viewed him with fear and trembling, if not hatred and disgust, when he was persecuting them, though no contemporaneous record of this opinion survives.² One suspects that trepidation about this former persecutor may have lingered among Christians, if only for a short while (Acts 9:21, 26). No sooner does he join the Christians than he is targeted for harassment, receiving death threats from Jews and Hellenists alike (9:23, 29; 13:50; 14:2, 19). His general attitude toward the law of Moses and, in particular, his liberal stance on the necessity of circumcision is what irks his Jewish critics most.³ (To his likely surprise and chagrin, in Acts 16:3 Timothy learns that Paul's position on the latter is not hard and fast.) He is a pest and a rabble-rouser, apt to disturb the peace in ways that cause trouble for the Jews (24:5). Hints that Paul does not always get along well with others may also be detected (15:39). Many gentiles have a more favorable impression of Paul, but much more typical is the response of the Roman procurator Festus: "You are out of your mind" (26:24). The Greek philosophers with whom he debates in Athens scoff at the same thing, that is, his bizarre insistence on the resurrection of Jesus (17:18–20, 32; cf. 24:20–21; 25:18–19). Demetrius and his fellow silversmiths in Ephesus have more philistine complaints: Paul's preaching has turned so many people away from idol worship that the silversmiths' profit margin has shrunk (19:23–27).

The Pauline Letters

The letters complement this picture on several points. They may even provide the names of some of Paul's earliest critics.⁴ Repeated references to the

2. All references to his infamous past appear in the Pauline literature or in Acts (Acts 7:58; 8:3; 9:1–5, 13–14; 22:4–5; 26:9–11; 1 Cor. 15:9; Gal. 1:13, 23; Phil. 3:6; 1 Tim. 1:12–15). In a collection of legends from late antiquity, Paul appears at the head of the party that arrests Jesus before his crucifixion; see Piovanelli, "Exploring the Ethiopic *Book of the Cock*."

3. Acts 15:1–2, 5; 18:12–13; 21:27–28; 25:7–8. Jewish resistance is elsewhere attributed to jealousy of Paul's missionary success (13:45; 17:5). Medieval readers tend to exaggerate Jewish opposition to Paul, as Seesengood notes (*Paul*, 140–41), but it is hardly the case that they invent it out of whole cloth.

4. Hymenaeus and Alexander (1 Tim. 1:20), and possibly Phygelus and Hermogenes (2 Tim. 1:15). Alexander in 1 Timothy may be the same person as Alexander the coppersmith who does Paul "great harm" and "strongly opposed [his] message" in 2 Tim. 4:14–15. Hymenaeus is mentioned again, with Philetus, in 2 Tim. 2:17–18 as espousing a problematic understanding of the resurrection. Even scholars who regard the Pastoral Epistles as inauthentic

opposition he encounters, whether violent or not, and the defensive tone he frequently adopts suggest that Paul was a polarizing figure from an early period.⁵ In adopting the slogan “Christ crucified,” Paul is fully aware that his central message will meet with disapproval from virtually every conceivable direction (1 Cor. 1:23). It is “a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles.” Information from the letters can be divided into two categories: evidence of (1) personal attacks on Paul’s character, missionary *modus operandi*, or personality; and evidence of (2) theological or ideological criticism of his teaching.⁶

1. Nowhere is the *ad hominem* nature of first-century anti-Paulinism more evident than in 2 Corinthians. That Paul and his Corinthian correspondents have a fraught relationship is clear from numerous comments (2:1–3; 7:5). With access to only one side of the conversation, it is still possible to learn a great deal about the negative impression Paul created among many of his contemporaries. He could come across as indecisive and lacking in gravitas (1:17; 11:16; cf. 1 Cor. 2:2–5). Given his remarks in 2 Cor. 10:1, it appears that he cuts a much less imposing figure in person than in his letters. “His letters are weighty and strong,” they say, “but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible” (10:10). He mentions his lack of training as a public speaker, a shortcoming that may have been accentuated through comparison with other teachers who arrived in Corinth during his absence (11:5–6). The Corinthians, perhaps underwhelmed by his lackluster rhetorical performance, want proof that Christ is speaking in Paul (13:3; cf. 1 Cor. 7:40). For this reason, his boasting is perplexing and perturbing to some members of the community (2 Cor. 10:8). Paul’s response—more boasting (1:12; 10:15; 11:10, 16–18, 21, 30; 12:1, 5–6, 9)—may not have endeared him to everyone in Corinth.⁷

Also apparent are questions about Paul’s integrity and the legitimacy of his ministry. Itinerant preachers customarily presented letters of recommendation upon arriving at a new locale, and Paul addresses murmurs about his failure to conform to this practice (2 Cor. 3:1; cf. Acts 28:21). He rejects the insinuation that he has somehow overstepped his authority in his dealings with the Corinthians (2 Cor. 10:14). His insistence in 1:12 that he always has spoken with frankness and sincerity and his explicit remarks in 12:16 indicate that

often concede that these names may belong to real opponents of Paul during his lifetime, if only added for the sake of biographical verisimilitude; see Dibelius and Conzelmann, *Pastoral Epistles*, 127.

5. E.g., 1 Cor. 4:4–5; 16:9; 2 Cor. 4:8–11; 6:4–5; 11:23–25; 12:10; Gal. 6:17.

6. It is important to keep in mind that not all of Paul’s erstwhile “opponents”—those whom he attacks in his letters—would have necessarily seen themselves as such. On the methodological issues involved, see Sumney, “Studying Paul’s Opponents.”

7. On Paul’s boasting in its ancient context, see Forbes, “Comparison, Self-Praise, and Irony.”

someone has accused him of duplicity.⁸ Intimations that Paul was accused of being dishonest or disingenuous are likewise found in his declarations that he is telling the truth and not lying (Rom. 9:1; 2 Cor. 11:31; Gal. 1:20; 1 Tim. 2:7). These criticisms may have originated with a small group of opponents in Corinth or with the opponents to whom he refers, perhaps sarcastically, as “super-apostles” (*hyperlian apostoloi*: 2 Cor. 11:5; 12:11).⁹ The vehemence of Paul’s rejoinders, however, bespeaks a fear on his part that they are gaining traction in the larger congregation.

Perhaps the strangest element for many readers to encounter is the suspicion of Paul’s refusal to accept financial support from his converts, a policy he adopts in his dealings with the Thessalonians as well (2 Cor. 11:7–8; 12:13; cf. 1 Thess. 2:9; 2 Thess. 3:7–9). This criticism is related to the collection he is taking up for the poor in Jerusalem, which is drawing blame (2 Cor. 8:20–21). When he brings the matter up in 2 Cor. 12:16, the picture comes into clearer focus in a way that resonates with many modern readers: they may believe that the “collection” is a scam designed to line his pockets. To those who are maligning him, he emphatically replies, “We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have taken advantage of no one” (2 Cor. 7:2).

Many of these themes are already found in Paul’s earlier correspondence with the Corinthians. He acknowledges that he is held in disrepute and that, by the world’s standards, he looks like a fool (1 Cor. 4:9–10). Furthermore, his decision not to ask for financial support, defended at length in 1 Cor. 9, raised the eyebrows of many Corinthians. Ancient city dwellers looked askance at wandering teachers, who might support themselves in various ways, each of which carried its own special stigma.¹⁰ One might beg like the Cynics, whose lifestyle nauseated the average Greek citizen. Sophists had better personal hygiene, but their custom of taking a fee for their lectures gave them a bad reputation similar to that often borne by lawyers today. Having the support of a wealthy patron provided more stability but ran the risk of damaging one’s reputation for frankness and sincerity, since lapdogs are careful not to bite the hand that feeds them. Members of the upper classes, finally, might have turned up their noses at his policy of earning his living by manual labor (Acts 18:3; 2 Cor. 11:27; 1 Thess. 2:9; 2 Thess. 3:8).¹¹ Some of the Corinthians may have

8. Paul highlights his frankness to deflect criticism here, but this frankness could create problems at other times (Gal. 4:16).

9. Many attempts have been made to identify and describe the views of Paul’s opponents in 2 Corinthians. For a survey, see C. K. Barrett, “Paul’s Opponents in II Corinthians.”

10. See Stambaugh and Balch, *New Testament in Its Social Environment*, 144–45.

11. On whether Paul himself was proud or ashamed of his labor, see Still, “Did Paul Loathe Manual Labor?”

turned Paul's otherwise laudable practice against him, seeing it as evidence of a bad conscience over his claims to be an apostle.¹² At the very least, the well-known phenomenon of people valuing something in accordance with how much they have paid for it may be at work, to Paul's detriment.

2. Theological or ideological criticism of Paul is implicit in other letters. In 2 Thess. 2:1–3, for example, there is the suggestion that someone is contradicting Paul's teachings on the second coming of Christ. This may be the result of an innocent misunderstanding of Paul's remarks in 1 Thessalonians or a more deliberate act of deception, in which someone has forged a letter in Paul's name. Many scholars regard 2 Thessalonians as pseudonymous in large part because of perceived inconsistencies between 1 and 2 Thessalonians on the question of the second coming. If the eschatological scenarios laid out in the two letters are in fact incompatible and the author of 2 Thessalonians is writing to "correct" Paul, then the pseudonymous author is himself a critic of Pauline teaching, albeit a critic anxious to be seen as faithful to the apostle's legacy.¹³

Due to the rhetorical character of 2 Thessalonians and the other letters, it can be difficult to be absolutely certain that Paul is dealing with actual and not merely hypothetical disagreements with his teachings. In Romans, Paul regularly employs the diatribe, a discursive style widespread in Greco-Roman philosophical schools where the aim is to persuade an audience by anticipating any objections to the speaker's position on a given subject. It simulates the back-and-forth exchange between opponents in a debate, with the speaker voicing ("some might say . . .") and then responding to the questions and faulty conclusions of an imaginary interlocutor.

The tone Paul adopts, however, indicates that his letter to Rome is no mere classroom exercise. Romans suggests that Paul and his teachings have been called into question on various grounds: because he downplays the status of Israel as God's chosen people and the value of circumcision as the sign of the covenant (Rom. 3:1–2); because his reading of Scripture allows unfaithful Israelites to "nullify the faithfulness of God" (3:3); because he implies, inadvertently, that God is unjust in showing wrath toward sinners (3:5); because his theology limits the God of Israel to the level of a tribal deity (3:29); and because he seeks to overturn the law or impugn its integrity by making it responsible for sin (3:31; 7:7, 13). Without naming names, Paul says in 3:8

12. Conzelmann, *I Corinthians*, 154.

13. Arguments for and against the Pauline authorship of 2 Thessalonians are summarized by Malherbe, *Letters to the Thessalonians*, 349–74. On the assumption that the two letters are irreconcilable on this point, it is perhaps difficult to take 2 Thess. 2:1–3 as nothing more than a friendly amendment since it implies that Paul was wrong on a matter of great import.

that “some people” are slandering him by attributing to him an ends-justify-the-means theology of salvation (“Let us do evil so that good may come”). This last comment is related to the criticism of his teaching on divine grace that he rebuts in 6:1–2, 15: “Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound?”¹⁴ Here, as elsewhere, Paul’s staunch reply is “By no means!” He similarly rejects the notion that he is either insinuating on the one hand that God’s choosing of Jacob over Esau is unjust (9:14) or, on the other hand, that God has once and for all repudiated his people Israel in making salvation available to gentiles (11:1, 11). The palpable angst he expresses in 9:1–5 illustrates how badly these criticisms stung him.

If in Romans one hears a wounded outcry from a man accused of indifference to or outright apostasy from Israel, in Galatians the tone is considerably more combative. Opposing teachers with “a different gospel” starkly at odds with Paul’s preaching provoke him to declare in Gal. 1:9, “If anyone proclaims to you a gospel contrary to what you received, let that one be accursed!” Based on Paul’s vigorous response, it appears that they were arguing for the necessity of circumcision—for gentile as well as for Jewish believers—for membership in the people of God (5:10–12; 6:12–13, 15). “False brothers” (2:4) from Jerusalem have infiltrated the community and are maligning the particular brand of “freedom” that constitutes the core of the gospel Paul has shared with the Galatians. These are Christians from a Jewish background who share Paul’s belief in Jesus as the Messiah but disagree with the Pauline corollary, namely, that gentiles are not obliged to observe “works of the law” such as circumcision, kashrut laws, and special Jewish feasts.¹⁵ In this context, then, in Gal. 1:10 (“Am I now seeking human approval, or God’s approval? Or am I trying to please people?”) Paul is not reacting to personal jibes to the effect that he is a mealy-mouthed flatterer. His remonstrance cuts to the heart of the matter prompting him to write in the first place. To wit, Paul flatly rejects the notion that, in relativizing the importance of circumcision, he is watering down the pure gospel in order to appeal to gentiles.¹⁶

Judging by the defense he mounts in Galatians, 2 Corinthians (11:22; 12:12), and Philippians (3:4–6), Paul routinely faced skepticism about his Jewishness, his relationship to the Jerusalem church, and by extension his apostolic

14. See Canales, “Paul’s Accusers.”

15. The identity and views of those opposed to Paul’s ministry in Galatia are the subject of a vast secondary literature; cf. Jewett, “Agitators and the Galatian Congregation”; Ellis, “Paul and His Opponents”; and W. Russell, “Who Were Paul’s Opponents in Galatia?”

16. Dunn, *Epistle to the Galatians*, 49–50. Less certain is the suggestion made by Hans Dieter Betz (*Galatians*, 55n108) that Paul may be denying charges that he used “magic and religious quackery” akin to sorcery in an attempt to “persuade God” by means of spells or bribery.

credentials.¹⁷ In targeting his status as an apostle, the “super-apostles” of 2 Corinthians were directly or indirectly raising the question of his fidelity to Jesus. He worries that his followers are too quick to embrace “another Jesus” than the one he has proclaimed to them and feels compelled to remind them that he too is a “minister of Christ” (2 Cor. 11:4, 23). Doubts about Paul’s bona fides on this point lead them to “desire proof that Christ is speaking” in him (13:3).

Such concerns are present also in 1 Corinthians, where they have yet to reach the crisis stage seen later in his correspondence.¹⁸ The most graphic yet enigmatic allusion occurs in 1 Cor. 15:8, where Paul compares himself to a miscarriage or an aborted fetus (*ektrōma*, “one untimely born”). Some scholars speculate that he was called a monster due to some physical deformity or mocked as a dwarf or a midget for being short of stature.¹⁹ Others agree that the expression is a nod to negative attitudes toward Paul but see it as proceeding from something more than pettiness or mean-spirited joking. Calling Paul an “abortion” may have originated as a term of abuse to parody his claim to be called from the womb, like one of the prophets, such as Isaiah or Jeremiah (Isa. 49:1, 5; Jer. 1:5).²⁰ Since an aborted fetus is cast aside as unwanted, it may be more straightforward to see reflected in Paul’s choice of words a sense that he has been singled out as lacking the same authority as the other apostles.²¹

The following verse supports this last interpretation. When Paul continues, “For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle,” any critic present for the reading of Paul’s letter to the congregation would be sorely tempted to interject a loud “Amen!” Luther, Calvin, and many other commentators infer from 1 Cor. 15:9 that Paul had been criticized on these grounds. On what basis might Paul’s contemporaries have doubted his qualifications? The answer lies in the definition of the office of apostle that was current in Corinth, if not in every locale where Paul ministered. An apostle is an envoy.

17. Gerd Lüdemann (*Opposition to Paul*, 35–115) attempts to reconstruct this view of Paul as it appears during his lifetime.

18. See, e.g., the discussion of his policy of self-support, where in response to his own rhetorical question (1 Cor. 9:1: “Am I not an apostle?”) he states, “If I am not an apostle to others, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord” (9:2).

19. Robertson and Plummer, *First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, 339; for Paul as a dwarf, see Boman, “Paulus abortivus,” 50. Markus Schaefer suggests that the use of the term is a way of referring to Paul’s stubbornness, though the way the abortion simile would communicate this meaning is far from clear (“Paulus, ‘Fehlgeburt’ oder ‘unvernünftiges Kind’?,” 216–17).

20. Nickelsburg, “μ,” 202–5.

21. Matthew W. Mitchell (“Reexamining the ‘Aborted Apostle,’” 483–84) is unsure whether the language originates with Paul or with his critics.

God or Christ sends a representative to reveal a message or accomplish a task, and the one sent is an apostle. Apostleship comes to acquire a special meaning at an early stage, referring to those who had once been disciples of Jesus and witnesses to the resurrection (Matt. 10:1–2; 28:16–20; Mark 3:14; Acts 1:21–26).²² Luke testifies to this understanding when he has Peter say, “So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these must become a witness with us to his resurrection” (Acts 1:21–22). All “apostles” in this sense were Jesus’s “disciples,” but not all disciples qualified as apostles. It is surprising to find this in Acts, since the author is so obviously sympathetic to Paul, and yet this job description would seem to exclude Paul from the apostolate. Elsewhere Paul appears to minimize the importance of having walked with the Lord even as he stresses the continuity of his message with that of the Twelve (1 Cor. 15:3–4; cf. 2 Cor. 5:16). By laying claim to the title, Paul thus found himself embroiled in an acrimonious debate about the nature of apostleship.

Controversies about apostleship mark a point of intersection between personal and theological critiques of Paul in the first century. Message and messenger are not quite inseparable, but the one undeniably complements the other. Credible witnesses willing and able to proclaim the good news of Jesus’s life, death, and resurrection are important because of the early Christian conviction that the events denoted by the phrase “the gospel” did not occur in some misty realm of myth, long ago and far away. And no matter how worthy the messenger, apostleship becomes null and void without a valid message to proclaim. Criticism of one therefore assumes or implies criticism of the other. This facet of Pauline opposition fits comfortably within its Jewish and Greco-Roman context, in which it was standard practice to disparage the teachings of a rival philosophical school by disparaging the character of its teachers. One could argue in the opposite direction as well, suggesting that debased morals would result from false teachings. Since Paul uses this strategy, it would not be surprising if his opponents had returned the favor.²³

22. The NT does not present a uniform concept of apostleship, and it is not clear how early “the apostles” became a term reserved for the Twelve. On the uses of the term in the NT, see C. K. Barrett, “Apostles”; Schnackenburg, “Apostles”; and Agnew, “Origin of the NT Apostle-Concept.”

23. Karris, “Polemic of the Pastoral Epistles.” In Philippians, Paul turns this trope on its head: far from allowing his opponents to shame him and embarrass his followers for having a teacher who spends so much time in jail, Paul says that his incarceration “has really served to advance the gospel” (Phil. 1:12 RSV).

Other Canonical Texts

Outside Acts and the Pauline writings there is little evidence of animus toward Paul in the pages of the NT. The author of 2 Peter (3:15–16) states that Paul’s letters are on occasion “hard to understand,” leading “the ignorant and unstable [to] twist [them] to their own destruction.” Nothing in this remark necessarily means that these readers are intending to slander Paul.²⁴ With “friends” who so badly mangle his teachings, the author of 2 Peter might ask, who needs enemies?

It may be that the most significant of Paul’s early critics are those who never mention him by name. When the author of the Letter of James declares that “a man is justified by works and not by faith alone” because “faith apart from works is dead” (2:24, 26 RSV), many scholars argue that he is taking aim at radical or distorted forms of Paulinism or even at Paul himself, who writes that “a man is justified by faith apart from works of law” (Rom. 3:28 RSV). Some believe that James (or someone writing in his name) misunderstands Paul’s position, while others believe that James understands him all too well but rejects the revolutionary implications of his argument. Still others hold that they are not addressing each other at all but, rather, are independently adding their voices to a debate taking place within first-century Judaism. Since the Reformation, few subjects have occupied NT scholars as much as this question.²⁵

Although he does not speculate about any personal animus toward Paul on the part of James, Martin Luther lays down the basic lines of this approach when he declares James to be “in direct opposition to St. Paul and all the rest of the Bible” in ascribing justification to works.²⁶ This interpretation sees James as representing the position that Paul regularly attempts to counter in his letters, namely, that his emphasis on grace is a recipe for moral laxity. Whether James belongs to the chorus singing this tune is uncertain, but it was obviously in the air. This line of attack will appear in the following century in what is often labeled Jewish Christianity and in later centuries as well.²⁷

Other scholars interpret the putative anti-Paulinism of James 2 differently. K. J. Coker, for example, believes that it has less to do with a theological faith/works binary than with the politics of identity, with James criticizing Paul for

24. It is possible that these readers are willfully misunderstanding Paul with a view to casting aspersions on his teachings about the second coming and divine judgment. If so, Paul makes their task easier by the occasional obscurity of his prose.

25. The body of secondary literature devoted to the issue is immense; see Penner, “Epistle of James,” 288–92; M. M. Mitchell, “Letter of James”; and Allison, “James 2:14–26.”

26. Luther’s comments appear in the preface to James in his 1522 German translation of the NT; see Dillenberger, *Martin Luther*, 35.

27. Lüdemann, *Opposition to Paul*, 35–115.

not taking seriously the brutal effects of empire on the oppressed.²⁸ Martin Hengel looks beyond this key passage and detects indirect polemic aimed at Paul's theology and personal behavior in several other passages.²⁹ The worldliness that is condemned in James (1:27; 4:4, 13) is ostensibly associated with urbane travelers immersed in commercial pursuits but is in reality pointed at Paul and his grand missionary strategy anchored in the major metropolitan areas of the Roman world, which made him beholden to well-to-do friends and acquaintances and compromised his dedication to helping the needy. Paul's pride in his missionary successes is likewise behind the condemnation of boasting in James 4:16. In defending himself, Paul often swears oaths "with God as [his] witness," in violation of the prohibition against swearing that James (5:12) draws from the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:34–37). According to this reading, James (5:13–16) goes so far as to taunt Paul for the "thorn in the flesh" that remained with him even after Paul prayed three times for relief. This suffering—the result of unconfessed sin—could have been ended if only Paul had been willing to submit himself to the authority of the elders (including James?) for prayer and anointing. James's closing admonition (5:19–20) to bring back the sinner who wanders from the truth is thus no general exhortation but a pointed reference to the apostle whose deficient understanding of faith and its relation to works is rejected earlier in the letter. Hengel concedes that his hypothesis is elaborate and surmises that James carried out his polemical purpose so subtly that its true import could be grasped only by the parties directly affected by the first-century dispute between these rival teachers, at least until Hengel himself connected the dots. Unlike many other writers, neither Hengel nor Coker appears to be projecting a personal hostility toward Paul onto James, though Coker's reliance on postcolonial theory suggests that his reconstruction of the hypothetical argument between James and Paul—which "provides fertile ground for the church and the academy to re-conceptualize the effects of colonialism on the biblical authors as well as modern readers"—may be unduly influenced by twentieth-century categories and concerns.³⁰

While James is the primary focus of scholars who find critics of Paul among the canonical authors, the Letter of Jude and the Gospel of Matthew have

28. Coker, "Nativism in James 2:14–26." According to Coker, "Paul represents everything that James stands against" in that he espouses a "hybrid" model of resistance characterized by blurring the boundaries between colonizer and colonized (46). James argues for a purer form of piety set in opposition to surrounding cultural norms and rejects Pauline "hybridity" as a form of assimilation and compromise.

29. Hengel, "Jakobusbrief."

30. Coker, "Nativism in James 2:14–26," 48.

attracted attention as well. Jude inveighs against “ungodly persons who pervert the grace of our God into licentiousness” (v. 4 RSV). Gerhard Sellin sees this as an allusion to Paul and his excessive emphasis on grace that encourages a libertine approach to morality.³¹ The author of Jude identifies himself as the brother of James—no coincidence, according to some scholars, given the common concerns about the undesirable implications of Paul’s antinomianism expressed in their letters. Matthew has been called to testify against Paul along similar lines. Jesus states in the Sermon on the Mount that he has not come “to abolish the law or the prophets” but to fulfill them (Matt. 5:17), a declaration that S. G. F. Brandon and others interpret as a veiled criticism of Paul’s law-free gospel.³² When Matthew has Jesus conclude that whoever breaks one of the least of the commandments “will be called least in the kingdom of heaven” (5:19), in this view, he is taking a jab at Paul’s self-identification as “the least of the apostles” (1 Cor. 15:9; cf. Eph. 3:8). The elevation of Peter in Matt. 16:17–19 is similarly seen as serving an anti-Pauline function, standing in the same tradition as Paul’s antagonists in Galatia who urge gentiles to observe Torah in its entirety.

That James is a critic of Paul is more plausible than the notion that Matthew and Jude have him in mind. Already in his own letters Paul confronts egregious misunderstandings of the nature of divine grace (Rom. 3:8; 6:15; Gal. 5:13)—an indication that he and the author of Jude may be on the same side of this debate in early Christianity. The case for Matthew’s anti-Paulinism may likewise be too clever by half, especially when Brandon supports it with the peculiar theory that the unnamed “enemy” in the parable of the tares (Matt. 13:24–30) is none other than Paul.³³ Speculative theories about the compatibility of various canonical texts are uncommon, naturally, until a collection of texts is recognized as canonical, a process that commences as early as the middle of the second century. When questions about Paul and his relationship to other strands of early Christianity are taken up in earnest during and after the Reformation, historical judgments and theological concerns often run in parallel lines.

31. Sellin, “Häretiker des Judasbriefes.” Bart Ehrman sees Jude’s criticism of the opponents’ denigration of angels in v. 8 as corroborating evidence that the author has Paul in mind (*Forgery and Counterforgery*, 302–5).

32. Brandon, *Fall of Jerusalem*, 231–37; Sim, “Matthew’s Anti-Paulinism.” Sim also sees anti-Pauline polemic in the ending of Matthew’s Gospel (“Matthew, Paul and the Origin and Nature of the Gentile Mission”).

33. For a critical assessment of Brandon’s reading, see W. D. Davies, *Setting of the Sermon on the Mount*, 317–41.

It is uncertain whether Paul was as significant during his lifetime as he came to be in later centuries. That he made enemies is beyond dispute, even if scholars at times project the theological debates of later eras onto the texts under consideration. The list of complaints lodged against him—that he is domineering, dishonest, and too quick to set aside the requirements of Torah—will sound familiar to modern observers, who are not unique in linking their theological criticisms with personal attacks. Fair or not, however, at least Paul's earliest critics were his contemporaries and not engaged in amateur psychoanalysis across cultures and at a remove of nearly two thousand years.

No one in this period faults Paul for founding a new religion contrary to the wishes of the master he claims to serve. Judaism and the messianic sect that will become Christianity do not arrive at a definitive parting of the ways during his lifetime, which no doubt helps to explain the different emphases in first-century evaluations of the apostle and those of the present day. To the extent that Paul is compelled to defend his status as an apostle, however, it would appear that concerns about his continuity with Jesus are present in a nascent form. These concerns come into sharper relief as soon as the second century.