

Paul says we no longer know Jesus as human...

Paul the first Christian writer is thought to have said that faith in Jesus was about faith and not about any historical facts. In fact, the Church had a Jesus of faith as opposed to one of history. If Paul did say that then it is quite likely there never was a Jesus.

Lots of writings in the New Testament are not really written by who they pretend to be. Christians say that is fine for disciples could write for their teacher in his name even if he were dead! If you truly believe authorship was so loose in the New Testament that Paul could die and then his disciples could get the right to write epistles in his name, then perhaps the speech attributed to the risen Jesus could be the same? Maybe he never said one word. And why stop there? This brings us to the question: is the Jesus story a faith story a sort of myth?

2 CORINTHIANS 5:16

“The love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again. Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more, Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Corinthians 5:14-17, King James Version).

When writing to the Christians of Corinth, Paul says that we who knew Christ according to the flesh know him that way no more (2 Corinthians 5:16). Christians have always argued at this point that Paul meant only that he has a different opinion and evaluation of Jesus now since Jesus ceased to be an ordinary man and became the risen saviour (page 81, Jesus, Qumran and the Vatican). That interpretation is impossible because Paul shows no knowledge of Jesus as a man and never met Jesus as a man. He doesn't teach about Jesus's life as a man. On the contrary he says many things that indicate that the gospel portrait of Jesus is fiction. He often contradicts the gospel view of Jesus.

In 2 Corinthians 8 he says the Corinthians are to remember that Jesus was rich but for their sake he became poor to make them rich out of his poverty. He added that this didn't mean that to give relief to the starving and the poor they had to make things difficult for themselves but to use their surplus! So Jesus then was clearly a totally rich man who gave it all up. This denies the gospels which have a Jesus who was born in a stable, had poor parents, had to wander about homeless and often hungry and whose invectives against the rich were harsh in the extreme. Paul means that Jesus was literally rich. There is no room for the idea that he only meant that Jesus had the supernatural power to take whatever he wanted and was rich in that sense but didn't use it. God or the Son of God incarnate then should have the power to enjoy all the gold in the world for its theirs and their magic can get it for them. Jesus then was only acting poor but wasn't poor at all if he was one of these. He was like a multi-trillionaire who doesn't use his money but lives in a box with the homeless. Such a man wouldn't be poor. In Paul's description of Jesus as rich and then poor we see that he denied that Jesus was God or had the magical power to turn stones into bread or even bread into money. He denied the gospel Jesus who claimed supernatural powers. So Jesus was literally rich but gave it all away. This isn't in the gospels at all and he contradicts them so they are false.

So Paul did deny that we should be interested in Jesus' pre-resurrection life or indeed that the Church was interested when he made his declaration that we know Christ no more according to the flesh. The life of Christ as a man and the life of Christians as human beings is to be forgotten. What is to be remembered is what they are now, transformed and holy beings full of God's life and presence. You may ask that if Paul asked them to remember a rich Jesus who became poor for them then how can I say he had no interest in the life of Jesus? He may have been told this by Jesus in an apparition. A Paul whose only interest in the life of Jesus is what he is told in apparitions is no different from one that ignores the Jesus of history for he is still ignoring him. Such a Paul makes it no less of a fact that he doesn't want anybody worrying about the history of Jesus. He wouldn't even let people get married for the coming of Christ was thought to be imminent so investigating Jesus would have been discouraged as a distraction. He only let people marry if they couldn't do without sex (1 Corinthians 7). Again, if one shouldn't marry except as a last resort to avoid fornication but prepare for the return of Jesus instead this doesn't fit the gospels. In this view, people marry just to make sure they won't be fornicating when the Lord comes back so its not about love or closeness and making babies and a happy home.

The gospel Jesus spoke of marriage a few times and warned that it was for life and said he came to restore its true meaning which had been lost among the Jews. Jesus said that a man must leave his parents and cleave to his wife so that they become one not two. Jesus then didn't agree with Paul's cold advice on marrying to avoid fornication. Jesus had the idea of sex and also closeness between husband and wife in mind. Jesus saw marriage as hard and long work for the husband and

wife. Paul and Jesus mostly agreed that marriage was for life but Jesus would hold that marriage would be a preparation for the second coming for it's a good work and not a distraction. For if you cannot prepare for the second coming by good works you are not preparing at all. The way Paul speaks of marriage indicates that he doesn't regard it as a part of the purification and preparation for the second coming. The Bible therefore denies the Catholic doctrine that marriage is a sacrament.

Paul by implication is showing that the Church never heard of a Jesus giving such teachings. The teachings of Jesus about marriage made the apostles say that it was better not to marry at all when he was that strict. The gospels even invented the more insalubrious teachings of Jesus.

Back to our verse where Paul says we know nobody by the flesh any more and though we knew Jesus by the flesh we know him that way no more. Then why did Paul say we for the Corinthians knew nothing of the earthly Jesus who never even left Palestine and who focused on ministering to Jews?

Who is "we"?

We is the people Paul had just said Jesus died for and he said that we know them according to the flesh or the ordinary secular way no more either. Just like Jesus they have been made into new holy creatures and nothing is the same anymore. He does not mean people who would have known Jesus or about what he was like as a man at all. What he means is every person who was saved by Jesus in past centuries or the present or the future so Jesus could have lived twenty centuries previous. Therefore Paul cannot mean: "We knew Jesus personally as a man but he is more than that to us now." So whatever we think about Paul's statement, he is not saying Jesus lived in the first century. Many of his converts would have been born since Jesus died. The Corinthians did not know Jesus personally when he was on earth so Paul is not saying here that anybody did know him personally.

So Paul said we used to see Jesus as an ordinary man but not any more. You could say the same of Victor Hugo though he died long before your time. For the early Church, the important thing was the risen Jesus. The earthly Jesus was to be ignored. Interest in him is refusing to keep the correct focus.

1 CORINTHIANS 13

If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

The meaning is you have to do good to others the hard mundane way. That is love. Miracle short-cuts and knowing even that God knows means nothing without love. If a story about Jesus that matches the gospel where he talks nasty to people, won't do anything good for them and cheats by doing miracles for them was appearing then Paul is trying to quash it. The gospel version of Jesus is condemned.

CONCLUSION

There is no evidence against the belief that for Paul, Jesus was not a person who could be verified through history. He was a Jesus of faith. There is evidence that Jesus was a Jesus of faith for Paul.