

PAUL SEEMS TO HAVE CREATED THE CHRISTIAN FAITH ALL BY HIMSELF

Paul the first Christian writer seems to take up the whole New Testament directly and indirectly. The gospel Jesus keeps saying his teaching will be preserved through the apostles. He says their doctrine will be his. Paul identifies his word with Jesus' too but makes no historically concrete assertion about Jesus. We do not even know from him when the crucifixion happened.

Paul received his entire gospel from a revelation not from men (Galatians 1:12,17). If Paul could have learned things about Jesus' life the human and mundane way there would have been no visions to teach him though one to convert him would have been required to make an apostle of him. People prefer hard facts to visionary evidence so Paul could not have chosen magical evidence in preference to mundane evidence. He would have used both assuming material evidence existed for the more proof the better. He warned about false visions so he needed some standard to test his visions by so he must have been stuck when he had to have visions to give himself a religious education. The Bible makes it clear that the twelve apostles were the foundation of the Church. Paul was an apostle but could be by no means equal to the other apostles but it seems he did take it that he was equal (2 Corinthians 11). Those who say he broke with them say that he claimed he was. Others say the apostles he said he was equal to were heretical super-apostles. But when Paul did not check his gospel alongside the authority of the twelve and learn from them and state that his vision gave him no authority apart from their approval and consent it seems he was a rebel and a heretic. The apostles would not have wanted him harping on about his visions but to stress the revelations they received as a whole and perhaps for him to see his own as being only an additional witness to their role as divinely appointed witnesses. Paul's message would have been very different had the apostles taught what the gospels and the Church say about a historical Jesus. So, like Paul, the apostles must have been entirely dependent on visions. It is interesting that the gospels are more focused on the life of Jesus as a man and have very little to say on his life as a risen man which is extraordinary and shows the apostles did not have a lot of visions.

Cephas, James and John were three of the apostles of Jesus. Cephas and John allegedly saw the risen Jesus after his death by crucifixion and were appointed by him to spread the good news that the saviour Jesus was alive.

When Paul went to meet them he stated that Cephas (Peter), James and John seemed to be the leaders but added that it made no difference to him what they seemed to be for God has no favourites (Galatians 2). The trio then extended the hand of fellowship to Paul when they saw the grace that was in him and his couple of associates and decided that Paul indeed had a call to preach the gospel.

So just because they thought there was grace in him they accepted Paul! In other words, they were claiming to be so righteous that the inspiration of the Holy Spirit was open to them. So it really boiled down to them thinking they had grace in them,

Paul pompously agrees that they were right which was why he was saying all this. They were obviously sceptical of Paul when they needed to have the meeting and then when he talked to them and it was a private meeting we are told they were convinced. They were not hard to convince which shows that they were anything but reliable witnesses to the resurrection themselves. The conversation was not very long when Paul didn't even know if they were the leaders for sure or not. He was not even interested enough to find out which shows that he was hell-bent on going his own way and following his visions and to hell with everybody else. Not the attitude an honest man would be likely to have! (Jesus would not encourage him by appearing to him!) He had no respect for leadership. And he admits he thought they could be the leaders but says he does not care what they were for God has no favourites. But God choosing leaders and people claiming to be leaders does not mean they are his favourites. Paul is rancorously accusing them of claiming to be God's favourites and he attacks them for that. When Paul asks us to accept him and uses their testimony to him as evidence that we should and then accuses them of being big-headed nitwits who are taking advantage of religion to look down on other people we have every right to be suspicious of Paul himself too. The two-faced beggar even shook hands with them in religious fellowship just for appearances. The men who knew Jesus would have the right in some ways to be superior to Paul if they knew Jesus. His contempt for them shows that he does not care about the historical Jesus or that they knew no historical Jesus and only had visions like himself. The latter is the most likely possibility for nobody could call himself a prophet and ignore the lessons to be learned from the life of Jesus especially one like Paul who had time to go on solitary retreats and even resumed his tent-making as if he had nothing important left to do.

When Paul disrespected Cephas and John as leaders he refused to regard them as reliable witnesses to the resurrection appearances of Jesus. He refused to regard them as leaders in the field. He would not have treated them so nastily had he believed they lived with Jesus. He needed them. He could not afford to affront them. The way he treated them suggests that

he believed that his own authority was enough for like theirs it was only based on visions anyway.

Small wonder Paul wrote that he wanted to be known for knowing nothing but Jesus and him crucified (1 Corinthians 2:2) in the context of talking about being smart. He said that it was not facts he could present that convinced people but the power of the Holy Spirit showing that there were no facts for the Holy Spirit could make good use of factual knowledge and would have an easier and greater influence on people. The crucified Jesus was more important than the resurrected one because the crucifixion implied the resurrection and it was the crucifixion that took away sins. So Jesus dying for us is more important than him rising for us. The main purpose of the resurrection then was for Jesus to come and tell us what his death had done, so in that sense Jesus rose for our justification. So the resurrection was the only way Jesus could prove to us that his death saved us, his holiness, his teaching, his miracles prove nothing. They would if they happened or if we knew they happened so Paul is indicating that we know nothing and nothing can be known about Jesus' life. Jesus must have been a person nobody heard of until he started appearing as a resurrected man or he lived centuries before. To say you want to know nothing but the crucified Jesus and to claim God approves would be to say that nothing else said about Jesus has divine authority. So virgin births and miracle healings are all out.

Paul said that he didn't rely on his own powers to teach this message and came among them to teach it in fear and great trembling. Why would the crucified Jesus story scare him so much? – possibly because it showed that God could ask something awful of you like he did Jesus. It certainly indicates that the Church used fear to get converts and to keep them.

It is safe to say that Paul seems to have given everybody else an incentive to stand for the gospel and without him there would be no Christianity.

