

Should the Apostle Paul Be Defrocked?

By Patricia Backora

I've read more than one online article which contends that Paul and Christ not only contradict each other in certain key doctrines, but Paul was a false apostle whose epistles ought to be rejected as heresy.

In this article I'll examine just a few of the arguments made for firing Paul from his apostleship. This article is by no means an exhaustive defense of Paul and his gospel, and I'm sure other readers could contribute their own conclusions drawn from their own personal study. What is covered here are a few seemingly contradictory statements of Paul and Jesus.

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH VS. KEEPING THE LAW OF MOSES

Jesus says to people born under the Law, **THOSE OF THE JEWISH NATION**, in Matt.5:17: Think not that I am come to destroy the Law, or the prophets: I AM NOT COME TO DESTROY, BUT TO FULFILL (satisfy the Law's requirements).
VERSE 18: For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, **TILL ALL BE FULFILLED**.

Those who teach that righteousness can be achieved by personal efforts to keep the Law focus only on the first part of these two verses. Some think that Jesus is saying that so long as heaven and earth are in existence, the Law of Moses will be forever binding upon ALL God's people, even spiritually regenerated Christians of the Church Age. But Jesus plainly states in the first verse that He had come to fulfill the Law. In the second verse, the word "till" is the key. Jesus tells those under the Law of Moses that this particular Law would continue to be in force, just as surely as heaven and earth would continue to exist, UNTIL that Law was fulfilled. The clear implication is that once the requirements of the Law had been met in Christ, it would pass away.

Paul teaches that the righteousness of the Law is FULFILLED in those who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit (Rom.8:1).
James teaches that the royal law is fulfilled by keeping this commandment: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself (James 2:8). If you show Christian kindness to the least of Jesus' brethren, you do it also unto Him (Matt.25:40). In that practical way you also manifest love toward God (Mark 12:30). John points out that if you don't love your brother whom you CAN see, how can you claim to love God whom you can't see (I John 4:20)?

CAN RIGHTEOUSNESS BE ACHIEVED BY TRYING TO KEEP THE LAW OF MOSES?

Suppose you have two little kids who are told by their mother that just two weeks remain till Christmas. If they hit each other before Christmas morning, they will fail the test of obedience and get no presents. If they hit each other before Christmas Day is over, Mommy will call Santa to come take their new toys back to the North Pole.

Through sheer will power the two kids (barely) refrain from slugging it out. It isn't love that motivates them to "be good", it's fear of what they stand to lose by being naughty: Christmas gifts. Yet in their hearts they wish they could hit each other and get away with it. There is tension in the air, but the two kids gnash their teeth and

try to tolerate each other till after Christmas is safely over. Once they are no longer required to show "peace on earth, goodwill toward men", the two kids can slug it out again...at least until Mommy catches them and gets the fly swatter out.

How many people can, through sheer effort of will power, score one hundred per cent on a sinless perfection test until they are safely inside the Pearly Gates? Only Jesus ever managed that! It is sheer folly to try to earn your way into heaven through self-effort. Even if human love, not fear of hell, motivated you to be outwardly good, it still wouldn't be good enough in the sight of God, because God looks on the heart (I Sam.16:7). Not only do many people have a misconception about how good human nature is, their concept of how holy God is falls infinitely short of reality.

Still, there is hope. Through the disobedience of one guy, Adam, many became sinners. But through the obedience of one, many became righteous (Rom. 5:19). Is Paul preaching wrong doctrine here?

In Psalms 32:1: David says: Blessed is the man whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.*** Until Christ made final atonement for our sins, the sins of the Old Testament saints were temporarily covered through animal sacrifices and hidden from God's sight, much the same way a cat's mess is covered over in a litter box until the day it's taken outside the house to the garbage can.

Christ came to earth to offer once and for all His own precious blood as a sacrifice to completely wash away sins (Heb.10:1-14). Our sins have been as far removed from God's sight as east is from west (Psalms 103:12). Christ has perfected forever those who are sanctified. Notice, it is the work of Christ that perfects His people, not fleshly self-effort on the part of believers. Incidentally, the authorship of the book of Hebrews is debatable. If Paul were the one who wrote it, it's an odd thing that he doesn't include his usual introductory salutation at the beginning of the epistle to the Hebrews.

Psalms 32:2: Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.***How could David write that such a blessed condition is possible for flesh-and-blood mankind? Is David claiming that sinless perfection is achievable in this life, or is David looking forward in time to the Cross, and hoping for justification through faith?

Psalms 14:2: The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God.

VERSE 3: They are ALL gone aside, they are all together become filthy: and there is NONE that doeth good, no, NOT ONE. (Parallel verses in Psalms 53:2-3).

Jesus speaks of righteous Abel in Matt.23:35. In Romans 3:10 Paul says, in agreement with those passages in Psalms: There is none, righteous, no not one. So who is right, Jesus or Paul? They BOTH are! Like all the rest of humanity (except for Jesus) Abel was a sinner who needed a Savior. The lamb Abel sacrificed back in Genesis was done as an act which proved Abel's faith in the future coming of Christ, His redeemer. BY FAITH Abel offered a "more excellent sacrifice than Cain" and obtained the witness that he was righteous (Heb.11:4). Paul teaches that even the heathen who believe in Jesus are justified by faith (Rom.5:1; Gal.3:8). Does this doctrine conflict with what other New Testament writers teach? Peter says in Acts

15:9 that God purified the hearts of believing Gentiles by faith. Jesus saved the dying thief on the cross who looked unto Him in faith (Luke 29:39-43).

Paul teaches that Christians are not under the Law of Moses (Rom.6:14; Gal.5:18). Does this contradict the teaching of other apostles? In Chapter 15 of the books of Acts, which many scholars believe was written by Luke, a big council is held in Jerusalem to settle the question of whether Gentiles coming into the Church needed to be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses. The apostles, who included Peter and James, state that they never required the Gentiles to keep the Law of Moses. They felt like it would be tempting God to force the Gentiles to take upon themselves a burden which neither they, nor their fathers, were able to bear (verse 10). The apostles conclude that it seemed good to them, and to the Holy Spirit, to lay upon Gentile converts only these few requirements: to abstain from these four things: consumption of blood, strangled animals, food offered to idols, and fornication (Acts 15:22-29). The apostles had confidence that the Holy Spirit would guide the converts into all truth as they walked in Christ's love (John 15:9-10;16:13).

Many still contend we must keep the Law of Moses or risk losing our salvation. But do these Law keepers eat ham sandwiches? If so, they're in violation of Leviticus 11:7 which forbids pork consumption. Do these Law keepers cease all work on Saturday (Lev.23:3)? Do they wear beards and sidelocks (Lev.19:27)? According to that particular regulation of the Law of Moses, a military hair cut would be a sin! When was the last time any churchgoing keeper of the Law sewed tassels on all his garments (Numbers 15:38)? Is the Law keeper prepared to marry his brother's widow if he dies without any children (Deut.25:5-6)?

A total of 613 regulations comprise the whole Law of Moses, not just the Ten Commandments. In order to follow the Law of Moses you must keep ALL of it, not just those parts that seem to be a good idea, or which fit in well with our modern culture (Deut.17:19). You are not allowed to pick and choose which points of the Law you want to keep and which parts you want to disregard as being outdated.

Who did God give the Law of Moses to in the first place?

Leviticus 27:34: These are the commandments which the Lord commanded Moses FOR THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL in Mount Sinai.

ONE CHIEF SHEPHERD WORKING THROUGH MANY UNDERSHEPHERDS

Christ teaches there will be one Shepherd (John 10:16) and one Master, or Teacher (Matt.23:7-8). Paul implies that many might be called to teach in the church (Romans 12:7; Eph.4:11). Is there a contradiction here?

The job of a shepherd is to feed his sheep so they will stay healthy and grow to maturity. In John 21:15-17 Jesus commissions Peter to "feed my lambs" and "feed my sheep". Peter was to serve Christ as one of his undershepherds. Christ's pastoral ministry would operate through Peter as a functioning member of His Body (I Cor.12:27-31). So long as Peter walked in the Spirit, Jesus would guide Peter's performance of apostle and undershepherd. The "one shepherd" teaching of Jesus is only violated if the undershepherd acts independently of the leading of the Spirit of Christ. An ambitious religious figure might set himself up as a rival authority to Jesus and lead sheep away from Christ, the Shepherd of their souls (I Pet.2:25).

Peter himself teaches a plurality of elders who shepherd God's sheep. In I Peter 5:1-4 Peter instructs the elders of the Church how to feed the flock of God, so as to receive a crown from Christ, the Chief Shepherd. When you listen to your pastor share the Word, do you discern the Spirit of the Good Shepherd speaking through that individual to meet the need in your own heart?

Sometimes COMPLEMENTARY teachings are quoted as being contradictory. In Mark 11:25-26 Jesus states that if we forgive others, we will be forgiven by God. If we refuse to forgive, we won't be forgiven by God. Jesus meant that the very same mercy we desire for ourselves we must also desire for others. One critic of Paul thinks that since God will forgive us if we forgive others, it follows that forgiving others is the purchase price of our eternal salvation. The writer says Paul is wrong in teaching that we are justified (made right) with God through faith in the blood of Jesus (Rom.3:25). All we need to do to merit God's forgiveness is to forgive others.

Scripture plainly teaches that without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins (Heb.9:22). This is in agreement with Leviticus 17:11, which states that it is the blood that makes atonement for sin. Peter teaches that we are redeemed from sin through the precious blood of Christ (I Pet.1:18-19). John teaches that Christ washed us from our sins in His own blood (Rev.1:5). Jesus Himself says He came to shed His blood for the remission of sins and to give His life as a ransom for many (Matt.20:28;26:28). So why is it wrong for Paul to also teach this fundamental doctrine of the Church of Jesus Christ? Bloodless churchianity has sent more souls to hell than you can imagine, just like Cain's bloodless sacrifice did him no good (Gen.4:3-5). Even sinners are capable of loving (and even forgiving) those who are precious to them (Matt.5:46). Sinners do not get forgiven by God just because they forgive friends who didn't invite them to the big poker game. Only the blood of the Lamb justifies sinners and makes it possible for them to go to heaven.

The fact that a few unscrupulous ministers abuse their callings or the spiritual gifts to lord it over others or to make money has brought the gifts and office ministries of I Corinthians Chapter 12 into disrepute. So Paul's teaching about tongues, prophecy, healing, apostles and prophets gets attacked as being a heresy.

The churches of institutional Christendom have stripped the functioning part of the Body of Christ down to a bare bones skeleton. The teacher is tolerated, but only within the traditional framework of jobs such as a Sunday School teacher or Bible School professor, and only so long as signs don't follow that ministry and "offend visitors". Pastors and evangelists are okay. In fact, most of the burden of the "spiritual ministry" of today's unscriptural spectator church is shifted squarely onto the shoulders of these two overworked ministries as they are paid for doing what "the laity" "aren't ordained" to do. The two lonely pillars of the cold, dead churches, the pastor and the evangelist, must "be faithful" to denominational doctrine. Instead of taking their orders directly from Christ and His Word, these greatly weakened ministries are held accountable to some church board and they dare not hear from God for themselves. Missionaries know they might be cut off from support "back home" if they submit to God rather than man (Acts 5:29).

As God wills, Christ's nine spiritual gifts (see I Cor. 12:7-11) flow through His Body through the power of the Holy Ghost to build up that part of His church willing to accept them. The danger lies in forgetting that the function comes from the unction of the Spirit to meet the need of Christ's church. It is then that some might wear those gifts as a status symbol to lord it over others, and proudly gloat: "I'm a

prophet, I'm an apostle, I'm a great teacher, etc." Boasting and abuse gives those ministries a bad name. So the baby gets thrown out with the bathwater.

Now I'm going to diverge a little from my main topic to highlight some possible reasons there could be prejudice against what Paul teaches about ministries in the Body of Christ.

The titles of apostle and prophet have been misused to exert tyranny over the rest of the Body of Christ. If an overbearing religious bully wants to keep others under his thumb, it helps to call himself "Apostle" so-and-so and threaten those who question his spiritual abuse with divine punishment for crossing him and "getting out from under his covering."

One particular family ministry I know of started out very humble, seeking only to raise money for Bibles and relief supplies for persecuted Christians. These people only claimed to be preachers, or obedient servants of Christ. Eventually "Edgar", the son, broke off from his dad's ministry and founded his own operation. While the father was content with ministering to small gatherings, Edgar's ministry was done on a much grander scale. Little by little it grew into a multi-million-dollar organization. Vast crowds flocked to Edgar's meetings. But Edgar's dad remained the same sensible, humble man he'd always been. If success were measured by money and numbers, Edgar's dad would have been a failure who lived in the shadow of his mighty son. But thank God He views things differently. This humble preacher and his sweet wife made every effort to get to know some of their supporters. Once a month they would even invite those of us who lived in the area to gather at their office for lunch and fellowship around the Word.

Eventually Edgar's dad, the founder of the ministry, died. Edgar's teachings went totally off the rails and some of his methods were unorthodox, to say the least. Edgar went from signing himself as "Reverend" Edgar to "Prophet" Edgar. While using a title can increase profits for prophets, some titles are way out of order. I don't believe in a preachers putting "reverend" in front of their name. "Reverend" appears only once in Scripture, in Psalms 111:9. It is taken from the Hebrew word "yare" which means dreadful or terrible, implying worshipful fear. Should we hold any imperfect man or woman in worshipful awe, as being mighty in power? At least two religious figures in this world bear the title "His Holiness". That is fundamentally wrong. Only God is due such honor. When the Roman centurion Cornelius prostrated himself to do homage to the Apostle Peter, Peter picked Cornelius up and said: Stand up. I myself also am a man (Acts 10:25-26). So I doubt Peter would have called himself "reverend".

God's ability and willingness to work miracles to meet His people's needs is rejected as false doctrine because of religious racketeers who turn miracles into a circus sideshow. "Prophet Edgar" claimed that special water from exclusive watering holes would supposedly make you well...but only if you enclosed your most sacrificial offering. The same went for the special red handkerchiefs Edgar sent, signed by many other miracle seekers who had identical hand-writing. The prayer cloth simply wouldn't work without money. And: the bigger the sacrifice, the bigger the blessing. Could this be one reason why so many reject the idea that God requires sacrifice to be made to forgive sin, and by extension, they reject the idea that Jesus' sacrifice of His precious blood is necessary in order for God to forgive sin? The IDEA of sacrifice has been abused repeatedly by televangelists to suck extra money out of God's

people. So some go to the other extreme and reject ALL sacrifice as being bad doctrine, including the sacrifice of Christ!

That's just what the devil wants. No sacrifice, no salvation. He wants people to try to cross a dangerous bridge constructed of rotting timbers, their own righteousness. But all the righteousness fallen man can produce is just as rotten in God's sight as filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6). Every person who rejects Christ's sacrifice for sin and tries to get to heaven on his own merits falls from his flimsy bridge into the pits of hell. Being very religious and keeping a long list of do's and don't's appeals to personal pride. Little kids might say: "Lookie, mommy, I did it all BY myself." But we can't get to heaven "all by myself". We are carried there through the sheer mercy of God, which He is only able to demonstrate toward us because Christ satisfied the claims of divine justice through the sacrifice of Himself on Calvary. Because of the blood of Jesus shed for our sins, God's perfect justice does not conflict with His desire to reconcile with us. Christ has satisfied the claims of the Law on our behalf. Paul says in Romans 10:4: Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.

One woman preacher I read is strongly into the Old Law. She desperately wants to believe Paul is a fake. I wonder if the reason might be the commonly held misconception that Paul was a misogynist (woman-hater). People get that notion because of Paul's injunction in I Cor. 14:34: Let your women keep silence in the churches. It is not permitted unto them to speak. But strangely enough, three chapters earlier, Paul okays women praying and prophesying in the church (I Cor. 11:5). I Cor. 14:35 gives us a possible clue as to what Paul meant about "keeping silence". The ladies might have been making a lot of noise asking their husbands questions about doctrine (or even arguing with them). Or, they might have been buzzing with other women about a lot of gossip, interrupting the worshipful atmosphere of the gathering. Paul couldn't have meant that women were prohibited from speaking prayers or prophecies. In fact, both Aquila and Priscilla, his wife, taught Paul doctrine (Acts 18:26). Priscilla did it under the headship of her husband and she did not usurp authority over Aquila, but the word "they" indicates that she did help instruct Paul.

There could be other possible deep-down motives for people wanting to believe that Paul was a fake apostle, but what alternative do they have to the Gospel of grace through faith taught by Paul? Apart from the grace of God, we are all hopeless creatures. We are like the poor offender who appears before the judge to pay a fine empty-handed. Our only hope is to throw ourselves on God's mercy and receive God in Christ as our Savior, rather than someday standing before Him as a dreadful judge Who will send all unrepentant souls to hell (Mark 9:43-48; II Tim. 4:1; II Pet. 3:7)

God has reconciled us to Himself through the sinless offering of His own precious Son. In mercy He has redeemed us while personally paying the penalty of our sin. One of the most beautiful Scriptures which illustrate the harmony between different aspects of God's nature has to be Psalms 85:10: Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.

One of the most solid proofs of Paul's apostleship is Christ's own words in Acts 9:15-16: But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he (Paul) is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: For I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.

Peter endorses Paul's ministry in II Pet.3:15-16: And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation: even as OUR BELOVED BROTHER PAUL also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest (twist) , AS THEY DO ALSO THE OTHER SCRIPTURES, unto their own destruction.

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