

*Paul and the  
Historical Jesus*

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## Introduction

St Paul was perhaps the most effective Christian evangelist the world has ever seen, and his letters, which we find in the New Testament, are usually regarded as the earliest Christian writings that we have (1 Thessalonians, for example, was written less than twenty years after Jesus' death, in about AD 49, and Galatians perhaps even earlier. The gospels were probably written a good few years later). You might expect, therefore, that Paul would be one of the most valuable and important witnesses that we have to the historical Jesus.<sup>1</sup> In fact, however, Paul is often seen as a hindrance rather than a help by modern Christians trying to explain the Christian faith.

Three things are often said about Paul and the gospel traditions, which Christians have found problematic.

### ***1 'Paul preached a different gospel from Jesus'***

Many hold that Paul's own religious faith and ideas were significantly different from those of Jesus. Jesus, so it is said, was simply a Galilean prophet or wise man, who called people to repentance and faith in God. But Paul introduced all sorts of dogma into the simple religion of Jesus, making Jesus out to be a divine figure and Son of God and replacing Jesus' emphasis on the kingdom or rule of God with much more abstruse ideas about being justified through Jesus' sacrificial death. It is also held that Paul exchanged Jesus' advanced social ideas (for example his positive world-affirming outlook, and his views on the equality of women and men) with much more conventional and negative views of the body, of sex, of women and of social justice. Paul may describe himself as a 'slave of Jesus Christ,' but he was actually influenced by all sorts of things other than Jesus, including religious ideas from the Greek culture of his time and his own mystical experiences. The result is a significantly different religion from that of Jesus, and, as A N Wilson<sup>2</sup> and many others before him have argued, Paul rather than Jesus is the founder of Christianity as we know it.

### ***2 'Some of the Gospel stories about Jesus were invented later by the church'***

It is often argued that Paul puts a big historical question mark against important gospel accounts of Jesus' life and in particular his birth and

1 Even if Paul did not meet Jesus himself, he was around Jerusalem very soon after the time of Jesus.

2 Paul: The Mind of the Apostle (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1997) p 258.

resurrection. Paul's failure even to mention the Christmas stories about Mary, Joseph and the baby Jesus is thought to confirm that those stories reflect a late development in Christian thinking about Jesus, rather than very early tradition. It is true that Paul confidently affirms the reality of Jesus' resurrection. But (a) he appears to be completely ignorant of the stories about the women finding the empty tomb, which are primary in all the gospels, and (b) he lists himself with the witnesses of the risen Jesus, thus making it clear in some people's view that he sees the resurrection appearances as visionary, like his own vision of the risen Christ on the Damascus Road. The conclusion reached from this evidence, for example recently by the German scholar Gerd Lüdemann, is that the idea of Jesus' resurrection arose first out of a visionary experience of one or more of the disciples and that the notion of an empty tomb came in later, when the Christians wished to defend themselves against the charge that the resurrection was a figment of their imagination (or hallucinations).<sup>3</sup>

### 3 *'The early Christians were not interested in the history of Jesus'*

More generally Paul's striking failure to refer much to the life of Jesus in his letters is thought to demonstrate that the earliest Christians were not very interested in the history of Jesus. They were interested in the presence of the risen Christ in their Christian communities and in the prospect of his return from heaven, but not much in his past (except for his symbolically significant death and resurrection). Thus Paul, who can refer so often to the Old Testament, has just a tiny handful of proven references to Jesus' life and teaching;<sup>4</sup> he has no unambiguous references to Jesus' miracles, his exorcisms, his parables, or to almost anything else. If this lack of interest is typical of the early Christians, then it has serious implications for anyone concerned about what actually happened in Jesus' life and ministry. It confirms the views of those critics who argue that there was no sustained attempt in the earliest days of the church to preserve the stories of Jesus—the gospels are more the testimony of faith than accounts of what happened. Paul's evidence thus puts in question not only important gospel traditions (such as Jesus' infancy and resurrection) but the *whole* of the tradition. The conclusion of this view is that the historian must treat the gospels with caution, if not scepticism.

To what extent are these three arguments about Paul and the historical Jesus true and persuasive?<sup>5</sup> To what extent are they a reflection of a 20th century

3 The Resurrection of Jesus (London: SCM, 1994).

4 Notably 1 Cor 7.10 on divorce, and 1 Cor 9.14 on the evangelist deserving payment.

5 If the third argument about Paul's lack of interest in the traditions of Jesus' ministry is true, then the force of the second argument about his failure to mention the infancy narratives is arguably diminished.

liberalism, which finds a dogma-free Jesus who challenged the *status quo* more appealing than a divine Jesus who was born of a virgin and who rose physically out of a tomb?<sup>6</sup> We will comment on each in turn.

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## *Is Paul's Theology Different from that of Jesus?*

### *Paul's Understanding of Jesus as Son of God*

There is no question that Paul had a very high view of Jesus as Son of God, and it is likely that a major contributory factor in his understanding was his Damascus Road experience of the risen Lord. But this experience, though decisive in the development of his own thinking, was not the origin of the idea of Jesus as Son of God. Indeed the idea goes back to Jesus himself. The decisive evidence in favour of this is the use of the Aramaic word 'Abba' in Mark's gospel and in Paul's letters to the Galatians and the Romans. Mark describes Jesus in Gethsemane crying in prayer 'Abba, Father, let this cup pass from me,' and Paul in Galatians 4.6, and Romans 8.15, describes Christians also as crying 'Abba.' It is easy for us to miss the oddness of Paul writing in Greek to Greek-speaking readers and describing the Christian cry as 'Abba' (in Aramaic). But the obvious explanation is that the cry goes back to Jesus, for whom Aramaic was almost certainly his first language, and that it became a specially treasured part of the Christian tradition.<sup>7</sup> Experts in first-century Judaism have noted how 'Abba' was the normal way for members of families to address their father, but not a normal way for Jews to address God. It seems that the usage was something distinctive of Jesus, and so it imprinted itself even in the traditions of the Greek-speaking church.<sup>8</sup>

As well as the 'Abba' cry of Jesus, Paul probably knew other sayings of

- 6 It is a commonplace that in the 'quest for the historical Jesus' scholars have come up with pictures of Jesus that look like mirror images of their own preferences! This should not cause us to despair of historical research, but should remind us that arguments may gain currency because of their subjective appeal rather than because of their objective cogency, as well as alert us to our own prejudices!
- 7 This explanation is suggested both by Mark's description of Jesus in Gethsemane, and also by Paul who sees the Christian cry as the work of the Spirit of Jesus in the believer: see Gal 4.6 on 'the Spirit of his Son...crying "Abba! Father!"'
- 8 To say that the idea of Jesus as Son of God goes back to Jesus' own self-understanding is not to say that Paul's understanding and Jesus' understanding were identical. Paul's understanding was surely coloured by his own experience on the Damascus Road, as well as by his convictions concerning the death and resurrection of Jesus. Nevertheless, Paul was clearly not the originator of this important idea.

Jesus where he speaks of himself as Son of God, as in Matthew 11.25–27 / Luke 10.21–22: ‘I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.’<sup>9</sup> Paul uses various of the same ideas and phrases in 1 Corinthians 1 and 2 when responding to Christians in Corinth who were boasting of their spiritual wisdom (‘hidden,’ ‘wisdom of the wise,’ ‘the understanding,’ ‘revealed,’ ‘babes,’ ‘God was pleased’).<sup>10</sup> The similarity of the ideas is unlikely to be coincidental.

Paul may well have known Jesus’ parable of the vineyard tenants (Matt 21.33–34 and parallels), in which Jesus describes the master sending his son to get the fruits of the vineyard, only to be killed by the tenants. Thus Paul can refer to God ‘sending his Son’ in the fullness of time, in order to die.<sup>11</sup> Paul may also have known the tradition of Jesus’ baptism. Certainly the way that he describes Christian baptism—as a watery ritual, which brings the believer into sonship and into an experience of the Holy Spirit—is strikingly reminiscent of the gospel accounts of Jesus’ baptism.

Some of these parallels prove rather little by themselves, and we must be careful of what someone has called ‘parallelomania,’ making a great deal out of parallels that may not actually be very significant.<sup>12</sup> But, even if some of the evidence is only in the category of what is ‘possible,’ we have in the use of ‘Abba’ one very strong piece of evidence that Paul got his understanding of Jesus as Son of God from the stories and sayings of Jesus.

### *Jesus as Lord*

Much more important for Paul than the idea of Jesus as Son of God was the idea of Jesus as ‘Lord.’ Once again the evidence shows that this was not an idea original to Paul. It is another Aramaic word that shows this, since at the end of 1 Corinthians Paul again drops into Aramaic without warning, when he writes ‘Maranatha’ (16.22). This is probably a prayer meaning ‘Our Lord, come,’ and the use of the Aramaic word suggests that we have a prayer that was important in the earliest Aramaic liturgical traditions of the church, as they eagerly awaited the Lord’s return. So again we have a significant way

9 Many scholars would trace these sayings back to the hypothetical ‘Q’ source supposedly used by Matthew and Luke. For bibliographical details on this and other points, see my full-length treatment of the Jesus-Paul question, *Paul: Follower of Jesus or Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).

10 1 Cor 2.7, 1.19, 2.10, 3.1, 1.21.

11 Gal 4.4, Rom 8.3.

12 For the term ‘parallelomania’ see S Sandmel in *Journal of Biblical Literature* 81 (1962) 1–13. On the question of method see further below.

of referring to Jesus that antedates Paul. 'Jesus is Lord' may well have been the earliest Christian confession, used in baptismal contexts<sup>13</sup> and used also in the Aramaic church before Paul's time.

Where did the church get this idea from? No doubt the resurrection persuaded them once and for all that Jesus was Lord (Acts 2.36), but the gospels point to the church getting the idea originally from Jesus himself. According to Matthew 22.41–45 Jesus asked his opponents one of his typically enigmatic and challenging questions, about Psalm 110.1, 'The Lord said to my Lord...'. The subtle thrust of Jesus' question is a claim on Jesus' part to be not only Son of David but also David's Lord.

### *The Death of the Lord*

The idea of Jesus' death as a saving sacrifice is, of course, of the greatest importance to Paul, and he might conceivably have developed the idea himself after his conversion experience. After all, how would you make sense of the death of God's Messiah, if you were a well-trained Jew like Paul and if you had had a Damascus Road experience? The death could hardly have been accident; it must have been in the purposes of God, and the logical explanation would surely be in terms of Old Testament sacrifice and Jewish martyr theology. Paul could have developed his theology of Jesus' atonement in that way, perhaps helped by the Greek mystery religions, with their dying and rising deities. But the evidence is that, once again, the root of Paul's understanding of the death of the Lord lies with Jesus himself.

The evidence in question is in 1 Corinthians 11.23–26, where Paul describes the Lord's supper, introducing it as follows: 'for I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread...' Three things at least are notable about this: (1) that Paul uses a form of words that was conventionally used for the transmission of tradition ('received...delivered'); (2) that Paul speaks of himself having received traditions and then passing them on to the Corinthians, and (3) that the traditions in question in this passage are familiar to us from the gospels. This evidence is significant in many ways, not least because it shows that Paul was familiar with what we know as the gospel stories of Jesus (or some of them) and that he taught them in the churches that he founded. But for our present purposes all we are particularly concerned to observe is that Paul received a tradition of the Lord's supper, which expressed a highly significant theology of the death of the Lord: the tradition spoke of Jesus' death being 'for you' ('my body for you...') and it included sacrificial ideas of 'new covenant' and 'blood' ('this cup is the new covenant in my blood'). Later in 1 Corinthians 15, where Paul

13 See 1 Cor 12.3, Rom 10.9.

again speaks of tradition being received and passed on, he also speaks of Christ ‘dying for our sins, according to the Scriptures’ (15.3). He does not specify the Scriptures concerned, but we may be sure that they included the Old Testament Scriptures about sacrifice and covenant (for example Exodus 24), and we may surmise with considerable confidence that they included also the Passover texts. Paul does not describe the Lord’s supper as a Passover meal, as do the synoptics, but the way that he says in 1 Corinthians 5.7, ‘Christ our Passover lamb has been sacrificed for us’ shows that he takes for granted this understanding of Jesus’ death.<sup>14</sup>

Paul, therefore, did not create the idea of Jesus’ atoning death, with or without the help of the mystery religions. He may have developed it in various ways, but it was a given for him—a given firmly rooted in the ministry of Jesus, in his final meal with his disciples in Jerusalem at Passover time just before his death.

Within the synoptic gospels the two most significant sayings of Jesus relating to his death are the last supper tradition that we have discussed, and the teaching of Jesus about servanthood, which climaxes in the saying of Jesus, ‘For the Son of man came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many’ (Mark 10.45). It is not possible to prove that Paul was familiar with this tradition of Jesus, but he does refer very powerfully to Jesus as the humble servant (for example in Philippians 2), and he also refers to his own imitation of Jesus in making himself the servant of all (1 Cor 9.19–23, 10.33–11.1). It is a reasonable guess that Paul has been influenced by the sayings of Jesus in question; in the case of the last supper traditions it is much more than a guess.<sup>15</sup>

### *The Ethics of Jesus and Paul*

If Paul is less creative in his views on the meaning of Jesus Christ’s life and death than has often been supposed, what about his ethics? Has he abandoned Jesus’ socially radical ideas for something less?

14 Compare also 1 Cor 10 for Exodus motifs in 1 Corinthians.

15 Despite this evidence, it might still be argued that Paul’s emphasis on justification through the death of the Lord differs significantly in tone from Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom of God. However, recent study has suggested that justification for Paul is to be understood as the coming of God’s end-time (‘eschatological’ as scholars put it) righteousness into the world (rather than just as a doctrine about individuals being put right with God), and so is not so different from Jesus’ teaching about the kingdom of God. It is true that Paul uses Jesus’ favourite phrase ‘the kingdom of God’ relatively rarely in his letters (though he does use it occasionally in ways that sound like Jesus, eg 1 Cor 4.20, 6.9,10). It is also true that the concepts of ‘righteousness’ and ‘justification’ have a much more prominent place in the letters of Paul (at least in Romans and Galatians) than in the teaching of Jesus. But these differences of terminology are easily explained by the difference of context between Jesus and Paul. Thus ‘kingdom of God’ was less useful in Paul’s Gentile context, and ‘justification/righteousness’ was a key issue in Paul’s debates with the so-called Judaizers.

## Divorce

The one point where Paul quite unmistakably picks up the ethics of Jesus is in 1 Corinthians 7, where he cites Jesus' teaching on divorce—as entirely authoritative. Jesus' teaching on divorce is most fully represented in the dialogue with the Pharisees in Mark 10/Matthew 19. In response to their question about circumstances in which divorce may be legitimate, Jesus tells the Pharisees that the Mosaic divorce law of Deuteronomy 24 was to regulate human messiness ('for your hardness of heart') and was not to be taken as divine approval of divorce. God's will, Jesus said, was expressed in the creation narrative of Genesis 2, where God made one woman for one man for life—they are one flesh, and 'what God has put together, let no-one separate.' Jesus goes on to comment that, if separation does occur, then there should be no remarriage, since this is tantamount to adultery. Jesus' teaching is more stringent than that represented in any of the Pharisaic schools, and is seen as shockingly demanding by his disciples, but it is of a piece with Jesus' ethical radicalism. He has announced the coming of the perfect kingdom or rule of God, and in this new situation the old compromises (for example Moses' regulations about divorce or oaths) are no longer appropriate. Now the standard is that of creation.

What does Paul do with this radical teaching of Jesus? The first thing to note is that he knows and cites this teaching. Paul's teaching is quite closely similar to what we find in Matthew/Mark (with first a general injunction not 'to separate' and then a supplementary comment saying that, if there is a separation, the partners should not remarry). The second thing to say is that Paul endorses that radical teaching. In Corinth there were Christians who were advocating an ascetic spirituality, urging those who were married to separate from each other and in particular for those whose partners were unconverted to divorce their partners. Paul, though regarding singleness as an excellent calling, will have none of this advocacy of divorce and total sexual abstinence, citing Jesus' prohibition of divorce as his decisive argument. Paul follows Jesus in referring to the 'one flesh' teaching from the creation story in 1 Corinthians 6.16.<sup>16</sup> Some scholars have thought that Paul (in the case of those married to non-Christians) and Matthew (in the case of those whose partners have been unfaithful) do soften the edge of Jesus' prohibition of divorce slightly; this is not certainly the case. And, even if they do contemplate some exceptions to the rule, they are both quite clear about the rule as such.

16 And also by inference in 7.3,4; compare Eph 5.21–33.

## Women in Ministry and the Question of Celibacy

If on the matter of divorce Paul seems to be in agreement with Jesus, what about his attitudes to sex in general and to women? Jesus was outstanding for the respect he paid to women—whether to Mary Magdalene, or the woman who anointed his feet, or the Samaritan woman at the well, or Martha’s sister Mary, whom Jesus congratulated for sitting at his feet as a listening disciple.<sup>17</sup> But what about Paul? He is often seen as taking a much less liberated line and as arguing strongly that women should take a subordinate position in the church.<sup>18</sup>

At the risk of vastly oversimplifying a contentious issue, we note first the importance of Paul’s statement of principle in Galatians 3.28: ‘There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.’<sup>19</sup> Paul here clearly asserts the total equality of all men and women in Christ in a way that is entirely in keeping with Jesus’ attitude. That is not to say that Paul would necessarily have assumed that men and women would have the same roles to play in the church (any more than in the family); it is to say that Paul would value women and their part within the body of Christ.

A second observation follows from that. It is clear that Paul greatly valued the ministry of women within the church, and thus he refers appreciatively to women colleagues, notably in Romans 16.

As for 1 Corinthians, one of the letters where Paul seems to have more negative things to say about women’s ministry (in chapters 11 and 14), it is worth asking why Paul says these things. The probable answer is that the women in Corinth were acting in an over-liberated manner, thus causing offence! In 1 Corinthians 11 the issue is women praying and prophesying in the church, and flouting convention by doing so with their heads uncovered. An entirely plausible hypothesis is that they did this under the influence of Paul’s own teaching—after all he had founded the church just two or three years previously and he had very likely taught then that there should be no distinction between male and female in the church. They were therefore claiming the right to pray and prophesy with head unveiled like the men.<sup>20</sup> If this is

17 We should not exaggerate Jesus’ revolutionary radicalism in this matter: as has often been pointed out, he did not appoint women to the twelve, whether for pragmatic or for other reasons; but still women feature in key roles in the story of Jesus, whether it is Mary, Jesus’ mother, or the women who visit the tomb.

18 Notably in 1 Cor 11.2–16; 14.33–36; 1 Tim 2.11–15. Some scholars try to rescue Paul from this accusation by denying Paul’s authorship of the pastoral epistles and even of 1 Cor 14.33–36; the blame is thus shifted to Paul’s unenlightened followers (also in Col 3.18; Eph 5.24). However, it is doubtful if Paul should be rescued in this way, and if he needs it!

19 There is a good case for seeing Galatians as Paul’s earliest letter; but, even if it is not, scholars have suggested that Gal 3.28 may be an early baptismal formula (see the context, 3.27).

correct, then we see that it was Paul's own continuation of Jesus' radicalism that partially at least gave rise to the problem. But does Paul backtrack on this in 1 Corinthians? No: he approves of the women praying and prophesying (and it is worth remembering how important a gift prophecy is for Paul, see 1 Cor 14). What he objects to is the upset that they have been causing and also what we might call their 'unisex' interpretation of equality in Christ. Paul believes in the equality of men and women, but also in the goodness of creation, including of gender differences; hence his emphasis on the story of Adam and Eve in 1 Corinthians 11.2–16.<sup>21</sup>

### *A Plausible Reconstruction*

One interesting possibility, noted by various scholars, is that it was spiritually liberated women in Corinth who were not only praying and preaching in an uninhibited way, but also advocating sexual abstinence as the way of true spirituality, thus giving rise to the discussion of 1 Corinthians 7 about sex and marriage. If the spiritual women believed, as some of the Corinthians seem to have done, that they were already in the kingdom of God, so much so that they were even speaking with 'the tongues of angels' (1 Cor 13.1), then they might quite logically have inferred that in this new order there should be no marrying and giving in marriage—had not Jesus said as much (Luke 20.35)? Had not Jesus congratulated Mary the spiritual disciple rather than Martha the domestic provider (Luke 10.38–41)? Had not Paul spoken of new creation having come with Jesus, and of there being no male and female—hence arguably no ongoing sexual life? Such a spirituality might also be reflected in other New Testament contexts, for example in 1 Timothy, where some were 'forbidding marriage' (4.3), and where some women were renouncing the bearing of children (which I take to be the background to 2.15, where Paul affirms that salvation and childbearing can go together!).

This reconstruction of what was going on in Corinth is speculative, but plausible. The evidence includes the priority given to women in some of the discussion in 1 Corinthians 7 (for example verse 10) and the possible echoes of the Mary/Martha story (in verses 32–35). Also, if it was 'spiritual' women who were advocating such sexual abstinence, that could help explain why some of the Corinthian men were going to prostitutes (1 Cor 6.12–20). Interestingly the Corinthian men may also have been justifying their actions by appealing to teaching of Paul ('all things are lawful') and of Jesus ('nothing going into a person from outside defiles a person'). What Jesus and Paul said particularly about food, the Corinthians applied to sex, claiming that there was no such thing as bodily defilement. Paul responds to them with a strong affirmation of

20 Compare 2 Cor 3.14–18 on some of the symbolism of uncovered heads.

21 Compare also 1 Tim 2.13,14.

the importance of the body. If this reconstruction is correct, then we find not a Paul reneging on the radicalism of Jesus, but Paul discussing its application to the Corinthian situation and following Jesus in affirming the goodness of God's created order—of the body (in response to prostitution), of marriage and sexual relationships (in response to an ascetic spirituality) and of gender differences (in response to a unisex spirituality).

Paul's ethics are thus not a retreat from Jesus, but a continuation of Jesus. This conclusion is confirmed by the way Paul echoes Jesus' ethical teaching in Romans 12–15 and elsewhere, the most conspicuous examples of this being in Romans 12.17–21 (for example 12.17, 'Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse'), where there are notable parallels with Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.<sup>22</sup>

### *Conclusion*

The view that Paul's theology is significantly different from that of Jesus must be rejected. At point after point Paul can be shown to be building on Jesus' teaching, not diverging from it.

<sup>22</sup> Matt 5.38–42; Luke 6.27,33.

## *Does Paul Contradict the Gospels' Story of Jesus?*

If there is much more continuity between the teaching of Jesus and that of Paul than is sometimes thought, what about the questions raised by Paul's evidence concerning the major events of Jesus' lifetime as narrated in the gospels, notably his birth and resurrection?

### *Paul and the Empty Tomb*

Arguments about Paul and Jesus' birth are largely arguments from silence, and so it will be best to start with the resurrection, about which Paul does have a considerable amount to say. Indeed Paul is a particularly important witness to the resurrection. 1 Corinthians 15.3–8 is the crucial text. Paul says: 'I passed on to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that he was buried and that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared [literally was seen] to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to over five hundred brothers at one time, of whom the majority remain until today, but some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Finally of all as to one born out of time he appeared to me.' The importance of this text is that:

- a) it is dated with confidence by scholars to AD 54/55 (if not earlier);
- b) in speaking of the resurrection as a tradition that he 'received' Paul indicates that it goes back to the time of his conversion in the 30s AD;
- c) the list of resurrection appearances may not be part of that earliest tradition, but it is still the earliest account which we have of Jesus' resurrection appearances;
- d) it confirms what we saw in 1 Corinthians 11 that Paul's missionary methods included the transmission of traditions of Jesus.

The importance of all this can hardly be exaggerated, but what are we to make of the two questions that are raised by 1 Corinthians for the gospel narratives of Jesus' resurrection?

- a) He appears to be completely ignorant of the stories about the women finding the empty tomb, which are primary in all the gospels.
- b) He lists himself with the witnesses of the risen Jesus, thus suggesting to many scholars that he sees the resurrection appearances as visionary (like his own).

A number of observations are relevant:

First, Paul's list of the appearances of the risen Jesus appears to be quite deliberately arranged. Thus we have

Cephas/Peter  
and the twelve

500 brothers, most of them still alive

James  
and all the apostles

It can hardly be accidental: (a) that the two individuals who feature are the two most highly respected leaders of the church, particularly in Jerusalem—Peter the chief apostle, and James the brother of Jesus who became leader of the Jerusalem church (they also, if Galatians and Acts are to be believed, happen to be the church leaders with whom Paul had particular dealings in Jerusalem); (b) that Peter is bracketed with the twelve and James with all the apostles. It looks very much from this as though we have here a list arranged to make a point, and that point is hardly a mystery when we see how Paul goes on in the next verses in 1 Corinthians 15—to refer to his own seeing of the risen Jesus, and to his own 'apostleship.' Paul seems to be making a point about his own apostleship being in continuity with that of the best recognized apostles. Peter has pride of place at the head of the list of witnesses; Paul, though the 'least' of the apostles, has pride of place at the end. The 500 brothers in the middle may not seem to make sense in the scheme. Maybe they are there just because they are so many—it was a startlingly important appearance—but perhaps also to make it clear that it was not just Peter, James, the twelve and the apostles who saw Jesus, but a host of others. If this analysis is anywhere near correct, then it is impossible to deduce much from Paul's failure to mention the women's part in the discovery of the risen Jesus.

Paul's list is schematic and probably selective, and, if Paul knew of women like Mary Magdalene seeing the risen Jesus, he has simply chosen to omit that story. This does not necessarily show anti-feminine prejudice, though the testimony of women would not have carried weight with everyone; it is simply that Paul mentions the two top men—and no one else by name.

Second, it is true that Paul does not mention the empty tomb, but that is hardly surprising, given the nature of Paul's argument. After all, the emptiness of the tomb did not in itself prove the resurrection—the body could have been stolen! However, it is entirely probable that Paul believed the tomb to have been empty. His specific reference to the burial of Jesus followed by a refer-

ence to his 'being raised' could hardly have meant anything else to someone like Paul from a Jewish background. Admittedly scholars have tried to argue otherwise, but it is very hard to see how Paul's discussion of the resurrection of the body, both in chapter 6.12–20 and here in chapter 15, could be taken to refer to the survival of the soul rather than to the transformation of the body.<sup>23</sup>

Third, as for Paul's listing of himself with the other witnesses to the resurrection, far from proving that Paul saw the resurrection appearances as visionary like his own, it more probably proves the opposite, namely that he saw his own 'apostolic' seeing of the Lord as a real seeing, not as a vision. The book of Acts suggests that Paul was physically blinded by his 'vision' of the Lord, and it is entirely plausible that Paul thought he had physically seen the Lord—like the other apostles. Indeed, had he understood his own 'seeing' as purely visionary, it is not clear how he could have confidently say 'last of all' about his own vision, since visions of Jesus did not apparently cease in the early church, whereas the resurrection appearances did.<sup>24</sup>

It turns out that the argument that Paul contradicts the gospel accounts of Jesus' resurrection is only an argument from silence, and an unconvincing one at that. The evidence in fact tends to tell in favour of the picture we find in the gospels. Paul confirms the emptiness of the tomb, the chronologically limited timespan when the risen Jesus was seen, and certain of the appearance stories listed in the gospels—notably Luke's account which refers both to Jesus appearing first to Peter on Easter day and to him then appearing to the twelve (Luke 24.33–36).

### *Paul and the Infancy of Jesus*

The situation with the birth of Jesus is less interesting, just because there is so little evidence to go on. But again the argument that Paul is ignorant of the story of Jesus' birth as described by Matthew and Luke is purely an argument from silence. And the silence may not be quite as total as is sometimes thought. The following observations are worth making:

- 1) Paul refers to Jesus as being 'born of a woman' (Gal 4.4,5), and speaks of God as the Father of Jesus, but nowhere mentions any human father of Jesus.
- 2) On the few occasions when Paul does speak of the birth and/or origins of Jesus, he expresses ideas that are prominent also in the accounts of Jesus'

<sup>23</sup> Compare Phil 3.21.

<sup>24</sup> See W Craig, 'The Bodily Resurrection of Jesus,' in *Gospel Perspectives 1*, RT France and D Wenham (eds), (Sheffield: JSOT, 1980) pp 47–74. Even if that argument is not decisive, much cannot be made of Paul's listing himself with the other witnesses of the risen Jesus, since Paul specifically notes that he was in a special category.

infancy in Matthew and Luke—thus he speaks of Jesus coming in the fullness of time (Gal 4.4),<sup>25</sup> of Jesus as descended from David (Rom 1.3),<sup>26</sup> and of Jesus as born under the law (Gal 4.4).<sup>27</sup>

- 3) When Paul refers to the birth and /or origins of Jesus, he avoids the usual word for ‘being born’ (Greek *gennaomai*), though he uses this of the birth of other people (for example Abraham’s children in Gal 4.21–31). When speaking of Jesus, he consistently uses the verb *ginomai*, which means broadly ‘become.’<sup>28</sup> It is quite possible that Paul deliberately avoids the word *gennaomai*, which in its active form refers to the male act of begetting a child (as in Matthew 1 of the ancestors of Jesus).<sup>29</sup>

These observations do not add up to proof that Paul knew the story of Jesus’ miraculous birth as described in the gospels, but they are certainly compatible with that view. The argument that Paul is a witness against the gospel story, though repeated very recently indeed by so distinguished a scholar as John Macquarrie, carries no weight at all.<sup>30</sup>

### Conclusion

The view that Paul puts a big question mark against important gospel stories is unpersuasive: he does not say a lot directly, except about the Lord’s death and resurrection, but what he does say supports rather than contradicts the gospel narratives.<sup>31</sup>

25 Compare Matt 1 and especially the hymns of Luke 1 and 2, for example the Magnificat, Benedictus and Nunc Dimittis.

26 Compare Matt 1.17,20,21; 2.5,6; Luke 1.32,69; 2.4,11.

27 Compare Jesus being presented in the temple in fulfilment of the law in Luke 2.22–24.

28 Rom 1.3; Gal 4.4; Phil 2.7.

29 C E B Cranfield, ‘Some Reflections on the Subject of the Virgin Birth’, in *Scottish Journal of Theology* 41 (1988) pp 177–98.

30 In the pre-Christmas edition of the *Church Times*, 19 December 1997.

31 Paul refers directly to hardly any of the events of Jesus’ pre-passion lifetime, but there are all sorts of hints which may point to his familiarity with the stories: we have mentioned the story of Jesus’ baptism; he may also have known the story of the transfiguration (note for example his references to the glory of God in the face of Jesus and to Christians being ‘transfigured’ in 2 Cor 3.18; 4.6), and the story of Jesus sending out the twelve with authority (there are many echoes of the mission discourse in 1 Cor 9, including 9.14, as mentioned before, and Paul refers to the ‘signs of an apostle’ in 2 Cor 12.12).

## *How Much Did the Jesus Tradition Matter to Paul?*

Finally we come to the general question of Paul's interest or lack of interest in the stories and sayings of Jesus. His failure to refer explicitly and directly to these traditions indicates to some scholars that Paul and no doubt others in the earliest church were not very interested in the history of Jesus. But that view underestimates the weight of indirect evidence of Paul's dependence on the traditions of Jesus. Some of this evidence has been noted already, and there is much more.

### *Further Evidence from Galatians and 1 and 2 Thessalonians*

For example, in Galatians 1 and 2 Paul writes to defend his apostleship in dialogue with people who were questioning it and comparing him unfavourably with the proper and original apostles like Peter. Paul insists that his apostolic ministry to the Gentiles is comparable to Peter's to the Jews (Gal 2.8). What is clear in his discussion is that he is familiar with the tradition of Peter's primacy among the apostles, and he very likely knows of a tradition that Peter was commissioned specially by Jesus (see Matt 16.16–20). There is no way of proving what commissioning story he knew, and yet it is intriguing how in describing his own apostolic call in Galatians 1.11–17 he uses language that has striking similarities to Matthew 16.16–20. In this gospel passage Peter, after his confession of Jesus as Christ and Son of God, is congratulated by Jesus on his insight: 'Blessed are you, Simon bar-Jona, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven...' Paul speaks of his own calling in somewhat similar terms, referring to God's gracious revelation of his 'Son,' to his experience of 'revelation' and to the non-involvement of 'flesh and blood.' The verbal and conceptual parallels by themselves would not prove anything, but the context of Paul comparing himself with Peter, and the fact that Paul presupposes the Lord's commissioning of Peter, encourage us to think that Paul is deliberately portraying his commissioning as parallel to that of Peter.

Paul's reference to Peter as apostle to the circumcised and elsewhere to Jesus as 'servant of the circumcised' (Rom 15.8) make it also quite feasible that Paul was familiar with the traditions recorded, again in Matthew's gospel, of Jesus sending the twelve on mission specifically to the Jews and of Jesus describing his own mission as 'to the lost sheep of the house of Israel' (Matt 10.5, 15.24). Paul, though proud of his calling as apostle to the Gentiles, is quite open about the saving work of God in Christ being 'first to the Jew, then to the Greek' (Rom 1.16).

Even more important evidence is in 1 Thessalonians 4 and 5, where Paul

speaks about the second coming of Christ in ways that are unmistakably reminiscent of the teachings of Jesus in, for example, Matthew 24 and 25. The clearest example of this is probably the reference to the day of the Lord coming 'like a thief in the night' (1 Thess 5.2), which has widely been recognized as an allusion to Jesus' parable about the Lord coming unexpectedly like a thief.<sup>32</sup> But there are many other possible links between Paul's teaching and that of Jesus in the synoptics. Paul's reference to Jesus coming with a trumpet call has a parallel in 'the trumpet shall sound' in Matthew 24.31 and his discussion of 'those who have fallen asleep' responding to a cry of command and rising 'to meet' the Lord may well be connected with Matthew's parable of the wise and foolish virgins (Matt 25.1–13). Paul's description of the Lord coming suddenly and inescapably on the complacent like labour pains on a pregnant woman may well be connected with Luke's ending of Jesus' 'eschatological discourse,' where Jesus warns of his unexpected coming and counsels prayer that 'you may be able to escape' (Luke 21.34–36).<sup>33</sup>

The parallels are considerable, though often not given much attention by scholars. But do the parallels prove that Paul was dependent on the teaching of Jesus? We noted before the dangers of 'parallelomania,' and of seeing significance where the similarity may simply be coincidence. Even if it is not coincidence, may it not be that the parallels noted reflect the fact that Paul and the synoptics are drawing on common Jewish traditions about the end-time, rather than Paul's dependence on Jesus? Or, if there is indeed a relationship between the synoptic teaching and Paul's, are we sure that Paul is dependent on Jesus, rather than Paul being an influence on the synoptic evangelists? These are important questions, and lead us to pause to comment briefly on what is an appropriate and sound method in addressing the issue.<sup>34</sup>

### *Method in Assessing Parallels Between Paul and Jesus—Some Detective Work!*

Essentially our task, when we seek to assess the parallels between Paul and Jesus, is to be a good detective—not credulous, but seeing whether the different pieces of evidence add up to a strong case. We must certainly be open to the possibilities of coincidence and/or common Jewish background (certainly the trumpet at the end-time could be so explained), and we must

32 A so-called 'Q' parable, found in Matt 24.42–44, Luke 12.39–40.

33 The list of possible connections between Paul's eschatological teaching and that of Jesus could be expanded, especially if we were to include in our purview 1 Thess 2.14–16 (with its intriguing similarity to Matt 23.33–36/ Luke 11.47–51, also Luke 21.23,24) and 2 Thess 2 (if this is rightly seen as Pauline), where the description of the coming of the man of lawlessness is very similar to the synoptic gospels' description of the desolating sacrilege (Matt 24, Mark 13, Luke 21).

34 This has been most helpfully and fully discussed by Michael Thompson in his *Clothed with Christ* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1991).

consider whether Paul influenced the synoptic evangelists. However, if the parallels of wording are particularly striking, then this makes coincidence less likely; if the parallels are substantial and not just verbal, then this too diminishes the likelihood of coincidence. If there is no particularly obvious Jewish background (as with the thief in the night image), then this makes a connection between the New Testament traditions more likely. If there are specific indications in Paul's teaching that he is referring back to an earlier tradition, then this supports the view that the direction of dependence is from Jesus to Paul and not *vice versa*.

A good example of such an indication is in 1 Corinthians 7.10, where Paul specifically says that the teaching he is presenting on divorce is from 'the Lord'; when that attribution goes along with evidence from the gospels ascribing just such teaching to Jesus, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that Paul is dependent on Jesus. There are not many such clear cut indications,<sup>35</sup> but in the teaching about the end-time of 1 Thessalonians 4 Paul can refer to a 'word of the Lord' on the fate of Christians who have died (4.15). This is plausibly seen as an indication that Paul is drawing on a tradition here, and, despite the doubts of some scholars,<sup>36</sup> the probability is that this 'word' is some of Jesus' teaching about the end-time (including perhaps the parable of the virgins), which is so strikingly similar to Paul's own teaching.

Assessing the probability of dependence will involve a careful weighing of the evidence in each case. Sometimes the verdict may be 'unlikely,' sometimes 'possible,' sometimes 'probable.' But, although each case must be weighed, there is also an important cumulative ingredient in the whole argument. One particular parallel may by itself be very uncertain evidence for Paul's dependence on Jesus-traditions, but in the context of other less ambiguous evidence the balance of probability may begin to tip in favour of dependence. Thus in 1 Thessalonians 4 and 5 the 'thief' is strong evidence for Paul's dependence on Jesus, (a) because of the testimony of Matthew and Luke (or 'Q') to the tradition originating from Jesus, (b) because the idea has no Jewish background, and (c) because no one other than Jesus within the Christian movement is likely to have compared Jesus to a thief (not even Paul!). If the 'thief' is Jesus' word, then this lends weight to the hypothesis that 'the word of the Lord' of 4.15 is indeed Jesus-tradition, and also suggests that others of the possible echoes of Jesus in the context deserve to be upgraded from 'possible' to 'probable.'

The cumulative argument is not only important within the specific context of the teaching on the end-time in 1 and 2 Thessalonians; it has much wider relevance. There is a small, but very significant, quantity of what we might

<sup>35</sup> 1 Cor 9.14; 11.23 are others.

<sup>36</sup> Some have surmised that Paul is drawing on a Christian prophecy.

call 'hard' evidence for Paul's familiarity with and use of Jesus-traditions. The hardest evidence is in 1 Corinthians (with the divorce saying, the reference to the labourer being worthy of his hire, the last supper traditions, the resurrection traditions), but then there is also good evidence in 1 Thessalonians, as we have seen; Romans is not far behind, notably with the ethical teaching of chapters 12–15; and there is less sure evidence from Galatians. All of this put together adds up significantly, and other 'possible' evidence in those letters and elsewhere in Paul's writings comes to look 'probable'; for example, it seems likely that Paul's comment about being 'persuaded and convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself' in Romans 14.14 is an allusion to the saying of Jesus in Mark 7.15 about nothing from outside defiling a person. Paul agrees with Mark's interpretation of that saying as 'cleansing all food,' but not with the Corinthians' interpretation of the same saying as justifying immorality.

### *Why is Paul Not More Overt in Referring to Jesus?*

Although in this booklet we have only been able to mention briefly some of the evidence for Paul's familiarity with the Jesus tradition, it should have become clear that there is a strong case for thinking that Paul was familiar with, and influenced by, a great many traditions about Jesus. I have argued that case much more fully in my full-length treatment of the subject *Paul: Follower of Jesus or Founder of Christianity?*

But, if that case is to stand, we must say something more about Paul's failure to refer directly to the stories and sayings of Jesus. It is all very well detecting echoes of Jesus all over Paul's letters, but why are there only echoes and not more direct references? Does not this after all show that Paul is not very interested in the historical Jesus, even if he has been influenced by traditions about him? If the story of Jesus before his passion was really of interest and importance to Paul, would we not expect to see and hear more of it?

This is a serious objection to the position we have been proposing (and has been made by reviewers of my book). A number of points are relevant in response to the objection.

*First*, the sheer quantity of echoes and allusions to the stories and sayings of Jesus that we have identified makes it clear that traditions of Jesus were extremely influential in the earliest days of the church. Even if they are not owned as Jesus-traditions explicitly by Paul they have permeated his teaching to an extent that indicates their importance in the early church.

*Second*, the failure of Paul explicitly to identify the Jesus-traditions he uses as coming from Jesus could possibly be because he did not know that they were such, but is more probably because they were extremely well-known, indeed foundational to Paul and to his readers. If they were well-known and foundational, two consequences might follow: (1) Paul might sometimes echo

Jesus intentionally and expect his readers to pick up the echo without him drawing their attention to it; (2) he might sometimes echo Jesus just because Jesus' teaching had become built into his own thinking, without intending to make any point that it originated from Jesus.

*Third*, there is very important evidence showing that Paul did pass on traditions of Jesus to his converts, notably in 1 Corinthians 11 and 15, where Paul reminds the Corinthians of how he had taught them about the last supper and resurrection. Here is hard evidence that Paul did pass on stories such as we find in the gospels.<sup>37</sup>

*Fourth*, what is particularly important to note about those passages from 1 Corinthians is that Paul highlights those Jesus-traditions because the Corinthians had particular problems—with the Lord's supper and over the resurrection of the dead. That is a very significant observation for a consideration of Paul's 'silence' regarding things to do with Jesus, because, had the Corinthians not had those particular problems, Paul would not have written about them, and we would have had no inkling whatever that Paul knew anything about the Lord's supper (no inkling indeed that Paul's church had eucharistic meals), and no inkling that Paul knew anything specific about the resurrection appearances. Rather similarly, had the Corinthians not had problems in the area of sex, we would have had no evidence that Paul knew the teaching of Jesus on divorce.

The importance of this evidence can hardly be exaggerated in response to those who make much of Paul's silence about other things in Jesus' ministry. The point may be put this way. If we had all the Pauline letters except 1 Corinthians, we would have no clear evidence of Paul's knowledge of the Lord's supper, the resurrection appearances and of Jesus' teaching on divorce. We might well conclude from his silence that he was ignorant of them, or uninterested in them. But we would be very wrong indeed. So we should not conclude from his silence about other things that he was ignorant or uninterested, and indeed we should take the hint provided by all the indirect evidence that there is and conclude the opposite, namely that a wide range of Jesus traditions were taught by Paul to his churches.

*Fifth*, although the case for interpreting Paul's 'silence' in this way is strong, it is also true, as we have suggested, that for Paul writing after the death and resurrection of Jesus those events were of primary importance to him, putting other things about Jesus into the shade. Paul's teaching does have a different focus and emphasis from that of Jesus himself, because he is writing after those events, and after the coming of the Holy Spirit, and in the context of a missionary church working among Gentiles. This new context gives his

37 The traditions in question concern the passion not Jesus' pre-passion ministry. But there is no reason whatever to suppose that the story of Jesus effectively started for Paul 'on the night when he was betrayed'.

teaching a different focus from the pre-passion teaching of Jesus, but it does not mean that the pre-passion teaching and ministry of Jesus have ceased to have importance for him. The evidence is that Paul and his churches are familiar with the whole story of Jesus, that they discussed and debated it, and that it was indeed part of the foundation that was regularly laid by Paul when establishing churches.

### *The Gospel that Paul Preached*

This surely makes sense—that the preaching and teaching of the Christian gospel in Paul’s and other churches regularly included a narrating of the story of Jesus. Scholars sometimes seem to suppose that the preaching of Jesus comprised only the sort of pithy statements that we find in verses like 1 Corinthians 15.3,4 ‘Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, he was buried, he was raised the third day.’ But these verses are patently only summary statements, and it is totally improbable that either preachers or their hearers will have been satisfied with such 30-second explanations of the truth that is in Jesus! People will have wanted to know what happened before the night that Jesus was betrayed (as well as to know more of what was being referred to in the phrase ‘according to the Scriptures’).

What will they have been told? The most concrete evidence we have of how the story of Jesus was narrated in the early church is in the gospels themselves. The question is: did such gospel narratives go back to the time of Paul? We cannot prove that, but two things can be said. First, the traditions that we find in the gospels must have been being passed on in some form in the time of Paul. Second, Paul specifically refers to having passed on gospel-like traditions of Jesus. Some critics tell us that in the earliest period of the church’s life the stories and sayings of Jesus were passed on piecemeal within the general teaching of the church about Christian living, not specifically as traditions of Jesus that were to be preserved. But the evidence of Paul tells against this view: he does not use the stories and sayings of Jesus incidentally in his letters in such a way that a future evangelist would later be able to make a gospel out of them, but he does refer to passing on stories of Jesus.

The conclusion that Paul’s churches will have been taught many of our gospel stories makes sense in view of what we have said about the quantity of echoes and allusions. Furthermore, although you could hardly even begin to write a gospel on the basis of what Paul says about Jesus, it is interesting to see how, given a prior knowledge of the gospels, we can recognize fragments of the story they tell at various points: we have noted Galatians 4.4 ‘God sent forth his Son born of a woman born under the law’ and its similarity to the infancy stories of Luke in particular. Romans 1.3,4 is also particularly interesting. Paul here speaks of ‘the gospel of God’—and then he goes on to describe that gospel as follows:

'The gospel of God

- 1) which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures,
- 2) the gospel concerning his Son,
  - a) who was descended from David according to the flesh
  - b) was declared Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord,
- 3) through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name.'

The interesting thing about this description of the gospel from our point of view is how very similar it is in form to our written gospels, notably to that of Matthew. Matthew starts (1) with the Old Testament (with the genealogy of Jesus). He then proceeds (2) with the story of Jesus from his birth to his resurrection, and ends (3) with the commissioning of the disciples to go to all the nations.

We have seen how Paul was familiar with many parts of the story of Jesus as attested in the gospels, and, although some scholars may hardly dare to imagine this, it is entirely conceivable that Paul knew not just individual traditions of Jesus, but an extended account of Jesus' life and teaching, which we would recognize as similar in form to our gospels.

This possibility must become a probability if Luke the companion of Paul was the author of Luke's gospel. The evidence for this is good. Not only is the early church clear that he was, but the internal evidence in the book of Acts points in this direction, particularly the 'we' passages of the book of Acts (20.6ff). Although scholars have tried to offer other explanations of this use of the first person, easily the most likely explanation is that the author of Acts (and hence of Luke's gospel) is indicating his presence with Paul at these points in the narrative.<sup>38</sup>

If the author of Luke's gospel was the companion of Paul, then the importance of the stories and sayings of Jesus for some of those who worked with Paul is quite clear, and we may guess with some confidence that Paul (Luke's hero in Acts) and Luke would have had a common interest in those traditions. It is probably no accident that at a number of points Paul seems to represent Luke's form of the gospel tradition rather than that found in Matthew and Mark (for example in the account of the Lord's supper).

38 The remarkable topographical accuracy of these sections of Acts strengthens the case for Lukan authorship (and is in no way nullified by the supposed divergence between the Paul of Acts and the Paul of the Pauline letters).

### *Conclusions on Paul and the Historical Jesus*

If even most of the argument I have presented is well-founded, then Paul turns out not to be at odds with the historical Jesus, not to undermine the gospel stories, not to show the unimportance of the historical Jesus. In fact, Paul turns out to be a most important witness to the historical Jesus. He attests very many of the gospel traditions, albeit obliquely most of the time, and he shows that the story of Jesus was foundational (not irrelevant) to the earliest church, and carefully transmitted.<sup>39</sup>

What is the importance of these conclusions? They are clearly important for the reader and interpreter of Paul's letters, since, if those letters presuppose the stories and sayings of Jesus, they need to be read in that light. They are building on what we find in the gospels, even if the gospels were not actually in written form at this time. They are also very important for the historian wanting to know about Jesus and the early Christian movement, since Paul testifies to Jesus (directly or indirectly), and also shows us how the stories and sayings were used, debated and interpreted in the earliest days of the church. Finally, they are important for the Christian wishing to commend Jesus to others and facing difficult questions about Paul. Paul turns out to be a strong ally, a help not a hindrance, because he turns out to be a faithful follower and apostle of Jesus Christ, whose writings lend strong and very early support to the story of Jesus that we know from the gospels.<sup>40</sup>

### *Further reading*

V P Furnish, *Jesus according to Paul* (Cambridge: CUP, 1993), a simple introduction to the subject, seeing a less close connection between Jesus and Paul than I see.

A J M Wedderburn (ed), *Paul and Jesus* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1989), a collection of scholarly essays from different points of view.

M Thompson, *Clothed with Christ* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1991), an important and detailed discussion of Romans 12–15 and of the question of method, taking a similar position to my *Paul: Follower of Jesus or Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).

39 He also throws interesting light on the 'synoptic problem' (the question of the relationship between Matthew, Mark and Luke), because he attests not only Lukan traditions (Luke's form of the last supper, the story of Mary and Martha, etc), but also so-called 'Q' traditions (like the thief in the night), and also traditions only found in Matthew (the commissioning of Peter, the limitation of Jesus' mission to the Jews, the parable of the wise and foolish virgins, etc). Paul may even attest distinctive traditions of the fourth gospel: for example, when in Gal 6.2 Paul urges the Galatian Christians to 'bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ,' it is very possible that he has in mind Jesus' so-called 'new commandment' to his disciples that they should 'love one another,' to which the fourth gospel alone refers (13.34; 15.12,17). The potential importance of this conclusion can hardly be underestimated: if Paul, writing in the 40s and 50s, attests what scholars have called Markan, Q, M, L and Johannine traditions, then this is an excitingly significant factor to take into account in assessing the history of gospel traditions.

40 It is not an unfortunate accident that so much of the New Testament relates to the life and writings of Paul—rather the opposite!