

Paul. Günther Bornkamm. New York: Harper and Row, 1971.

Preface:

"I have tried not only to give some account of his (Paul's) life and thought but also to let the reader share in the process of questioning and discovery."

Chronological Table:

Crucifixion of Jesus	Ca. 30
Paul's date of birth	Unknown (probably about the beginning of the century)
Conversion and call	Ca. 32
Apostolic assembly	48 (49?)
Paul in Corinth	18 months; Winter of 49/50 until summer of 51
Paul in Ephesus	About 2½ years; probably 52 to 55
Last stay in Macedonia and Achaia	Probably Winter of 55/56
Journey to Jerusalem and arrest	Spring of 56
Taken prisoner to Rome	Probably 58
Two years imprisonment in Rome	Probably 58-60
Martyrdom under Nero	Probably 60

The only certain date (cf. Acts 18.12): Spring of 51 to Spring of 52 = proconsulate of L. Junius Fallo.

Introduction:

A brighter light shines on Paul than on any other figure in primitive Christianity.

Sources: his own letters / Acts

Cautions:

- Paul was not writing history;
- Luke was not writing history in the modern sense;
- There are discrepancies between Paul and Acts.

"When the one source is silent, it will not do uncritically to listen to the other."

Choice of epistolary genre was due to the fact that Paul was a man engaged in missionary work, not a writer.

They are real letters, written on and for a particular occasion, for specific reasons, for particular people.

Writing lent depth, conviction, and organization to his thoughts.

Letters bear the unmistakable stamp of a particular man better than any other documents.

“The apostle’s task and his responsibility and passionate concern for the gospel and the churches entrusted to him give them their hallmark, and not any personal friendship with particular individuals.”

The author’s person and work are an indissoluble unity: the letter is a tool used by a man who is himself a tool in the hand of his master.

The letters convey two contrary impressions:

1. They bring us very close to Paul;
2. They make us feel strangely remote from him.

Constant and radical interrelationship between Paul’s life history – what he experienced in his own person and the response to his words and work – and his gospel and theology.

PART ONE: LIFE AND WORK

ONE: Paul’s Descent and Environment before Conversion

From a strict Jewish Diaspora family.

Tarsus: flourishing trade and commerce; renowned as a center of Greek culture.

Jewish name = Saul / Roman name = Paul

4,500,000 Jews in the Roman Empire at the time of Augustine (7%).

They had favorable legal status.

Many, Paul included, possessed Roman citizenship.

Diaspora Judaism was highly missionary.

Greek influence on Diaspora Judaism:

- Cf. Wisdom literature, Philo, *et al.*
- LXX.
- Use of Greek in worship and prayer.
- Greek influence on Diaspora theology.

Paul learned a considerable number of the elements of Greek culture.

- Stoic ideas and concepts: e.g., freedom, nature, reason, conscience, sobriety, virtue, and duty.
- Use of diatribe discourse.

Paul attached himself to the Pharisees, the most orthodox school of thought.

- A passionate devotee of the Law.
- He was very possible a Jewish missionary to the Gentiles.

TWO: Paul’s Persecution of the Church and His Conversion and Call

Paul probably persecuted the Church at Damascus, not so much because of their adherence to Jesus, as because of their Hellenistic conflict with the orthodox Jewish view of the Law and their calling into question the chosen people's hallowed traditions, the temple worship, and their exclusive claim to salvation.

Paul's conversion epitomizes his gospel of the revelation of God's righteousness which treats all men as lost, but now, for the first time, through the gospel, brings them under divine grace.

Gal; 1.15-16 implies that he made that single experience of the way to Damascus the source of all that he was going to preach, and the basis on which he sought to authenticate his mission (Phil 3).

What he says about himself personally only exemplifies and illustrates God's new action in Christ on behalf of and in transformation of the whole world, the action proclaimed in the gospel.

In Gal 1 and 2 there are two issues:

1. The correctness of his gospel without the Law for the Gentiles;
2. His freedom to proclaim it, with (relative) aloofness from the original apostles.

'Revelation' (Gal 1.15-16) does not mean vision, but rather (taken from apocalyptic literature) it means an objective world changing event through which God in his sovereign action has inaugurated a new aeon.

Paul's conversion and mission are entirely dictated by the subject matter of his preaching and theology, and not by any arbitrary claim to reception of special revelation.

Preparation for Paul's conversion: the question of the significance of Jesus' mission and death both for himself and for the world was probably suggested by the faith and witness of Jesus' followers.

- It was a sudden change;
- It was a free and sovereign act of God.

There are three accounts in Acts (2 Pauline speeches, and 1 Lucan narrative) and various accounts in the letters.

Common elements:

- Paul was man of impassioned zeal for the Jewish faith, not a penitent sinner;
- With sovereign authority, the exalted Lord made the persecutor into his witness.

Differences:

- Luke's accounts are silent on Paul's call to be an apostle;
- Acts makes his missionary work in the Gentile world begin in Jerusalem.
- Luke knows nothing of what Paul himself says was the decisive element in his conversion.
- Paul speaks only with reserve about his conversion; for him, the one thing of importance was the gospel he was given, not his own person.
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THREE: First Missionary Activity

For more than 15 years after his call, Paul worked as a missionary far away from Jerusalem before going up for the apostolic assembly.

The only source for this period is Gal 1.16-24.

- First he went to Arabia (2½ – 3 years) to preach;
- Visited Peter in Jerusalem;
- Preaching in Syria and Cilicia;
- Barnabas brings him to Antioch.

FOUR: The Apostolic Assembly in Jerusalem

- Ca. 48 A.D. / cf. Gal 2 and Acts 15.
- Luke's account is drawn on the basis of his own later idealized view of the church and its history.

Occasion of the assembly: strictly orthodox Jewish Christians from Jerusalem forced their way into the Church at Antioch and demanded that the Gentile Christians be circumcised; this gave rise to a dispute, and in order to clarify the question, it was resolved to send Paul and Barnabas to consult with the original apostles in Jerusalem.

- The OT and requirement of circumcision are the confessional questions involved: at stake is the unity of the people of God and of its history, and, as a result, the question of salvation in general.
- The Antiochenes' stand effectively freed the gospel from limitations imposed by Judaism, primarily for their own mission field, but also in some sense for the Jewish Christian one too, since the Jewish view of salvation as being exclusively Law, saving history, and chosen people, was henceforward broken down.
- Concordat (Gal 2.9): "We to the Gentiles, they to the Jews" – the Gentile mission should go ahead unimpeded, each side abstaining from rivalry and competition in the other's sphere.

The purpose of the collection was to signal the unity of the church.

The 'apostolic decree' of Acts 15.23-29 reflects the practice which Luke found in the churches of his own day.

Church Unity: the danger that the mother church would harden into a sect of Judaism and the Hellenistic Christianity would dissolve into a welter of non-historical mystery cults had been averted.

FIVE: The First Journey to Cyprus and Asia Minor, and the conflict at Antioch

The account of Acts (cf. 13.14) for this journey is not reliable as to dating and events.

The dispute with Peter in Antioch concerning dietary regulations was, for Paul, a battle for truth and freedom.

Paul attached fundamental importance to the issue of Law and Gospel, and what he had to undergo at Antioch was unquestionably a bitter disappointment.

It could well be at this point that Barnabas deserted Paul.

This breach with Peter and Barnabas was not final (cf. 1 Cor 9.6).

SIX: The World-Wide Scope of the Pauline Mission

Paul travelled through the middle of Asia Minor to Troas, Macedonia, and Greece, founding Churches in Galatia, Philippi, Thessalonica, and Corinth.

During this journey, Rome was present in his mind as a far-off objective.

He was forced to abandon his goal of going to Rome because of both outward circumstances (e.g., persecution) and because of the practical and spiritual troubles of his new churches.

World-wide horizons: the great goal of carrying the gospel to the ends of the earth kept him always on the move and gave him no rest.

For Paul, the lordship of Christ extends to all men.

His letters reveal an unmistakable tension between the wide sweep of his missionary plans and care for his churches.

The OT significance of Jerusalem is given a new interpretation and is transposed into a different historical setting.

Paul transfers the mythological motif of Christ's victory over the cosmic powers into the realm of history.

SEVEN: The First Churches in Greece – Philippi, Thessalonica, and Athens

1 Thes was written shortly after the origin of the Thessalonican church.

Written from Corinth (ca. 50-51).

Paul's concern in the letter was to keep the church true to its beginning.

The letter's dominant themes are thankful remembrance of the church's amazing reception of the apostle's gospel and the influence exercised by its faith now that this had increased and stood the test of persecution.

The Areopagus speech of Acts 17 is basically a Lucan construction.

EIGHT: Corinth

Paul spent 18 months here until leaving in the summer of 51 for Ephesus.

1 Cor was written in Ephesus (spring of 54): with the Corinthian letters more than any others we must bear in mind the situations and problems with which they deal.

Apollos had been sent from Ephesus to look after the Corinthian church.

Corinth was a wealthy modern commercial city, and its wealth exposed it to great dangers.

Factions had arisen.

'Enthusiasts' had suddenly appeared who paraded their freedom to the point of licentiousness.

Paul answered their pseudo-theological arguments by taking the theme of responsibility for the others before God and the world as his line of approach.

Paul's response to this situation was a first letter (cf. 1 Cor 5.9) which is no longer extant, then 1 Cor, then dispatching Timothy to Corinth.

More problems arose when some itinerant 'Christian' preachers appeared in Corinth.

In 2 Cor Paul boasts in those weaknesses for which these preachers had mocked him.

The sending of 2 Cor and Titus brought the Church to repentance.

2 Cor is fragments of at least three letters:

1. At the beginning of the difficulties;
2. After the first letter and an anguished visit to Corinth had been without effect;
3. After the successful mission of Titus.

NINE: Ephesus

From Ephesus, Paul wrote to the Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, and Philemon.

Romans 16 is very possibly part of a lost letter to Ephesus.

Paul certainly began his preaching here in the synagogue; but opposition from the Jews forced him to move.

Ephesus was probably the scene of many of Paul's sufferings and perils enumerated in 2 Cor 11.

A great deal of missionary and pastoral activity ensued at this time.

In the letter to the Galatians, Paul attacks the legalism of the Judaizers; ergo, justification forms the central topic.

Philippians, a collection of several successive letters, must have been written shortly after Galatians.

He was imprisoned at the time.

The ingenuousness of the letter to Philemon affords a unique glimpse of Paul's warmth of heart, his ability to identify himself to the full with others, his skill as a pastor, yes, and his sense of humor, which did not desert him even in prison.

2 Cor 1.8ff show that he had despaired of life and had only God to thank for his deliverance.

It was either during his stay in Ephesus or in the months immediately following it that he wrote all the letters which may be described as the classics of his gospel and theology.

Paul had the support in Asia Minor of a number of fellow workers.

TEN: Romans as Paul's Testament

The letter to Rome is generally composed of lengthy informative expositions of leading themes in the Pauline gospel without a firm reference to the Roman Church itself.

Written from Corinth during the winter of 55/56.

Before journeying to Rome Paul goes to Jerusalem to deliver the collection; he wants to enter the new state of his mission in the west with the full agreement of the mother church.

What Paul had previously said in other letters is now not only set down systematically, but also oriented to the world-wide horizons of his gospel and mission, and gives, for the first time, his mature and considered thought.

Paul's opponent in the polemic is the Jewish understanding of salvation.

Romans not only tells us the questions and experiences which made Paul a Christian, the servant of Christ, and the apostle to the Gentiles; it also shows how he worked at his ideas and their effects upon himself.

ELEVEN: Paul's Final Journey to Jerusalem, Imprisonment, and Death

The account in Acts of the journey to Jerusalem is doubtful; but the account of events in Jerusalem up to the time of Paul's arrest are trustworthy.

In Acts, from scene to scene the picture of the Jews as Paul's mortal enemies becomes more and more pronounced and furious; in contrast, the representatives of the Roman government play the part of protectors.

The picture of Paul was intended to let the empire have an impression of the greatness of the Christian religion and its peaceful inclinations, and to make Rome resolve on the same prudent and fair attitude toward the church as had already been shown by many representatives of its government in the course of their dealings with Paul.

PART TWO: GOSPEL AND THEOLOGY

ONE: Paul and the Gospel of the Primitive Church

For primitive Christian faith Jesus' person, significance, and bearing on present and future are set within the horizons of those dealings of God with the world and man which made all the difference for time and eternity.

The difference between Jesus' own preaching and the gospel of the post-Easter Church consists in the fact that which Jesus in his own words and actions proclaimed the dawning of the Kingdom of God, for the post-Easter gospel through Jesus' death, resurrection and exaltation, the turning point of the ages, the establishment of salvation, and God's advent and lordship have become actual fact.

The gospel of the primitive Church was bound to change and make Jesus himself its subject matter, because faith had to be kept with God's work, act, and dealings with men in him.

From an early date the kerygma took firm shape in fixed and well-defined traditions.

Paul's gospel and theology are exposition and development of the primitive Christian kerygma.

For Paul, 'preaching' meant announcing and bringing to people what God did for the world in Christ to deliver and save it, and proclaiming who were called to lay hold on faith.

Paul proclaimed that what Jewish and primitive Christian apocalyptic looked for in the near or remote future is already present reality in the gospel.

Paul expounds and develops the Christian gospel of justification by faith alone.

The subject matter of Paul's theology is dominated by the encounter between God, man, and the world.

TWO: Lost - Man and the World

The Law

For Paul, the Law was the basis of, and the limitation put upon, the unredeemed existence of all men.

The only knowledge imparted by the Law is knowledge of sin.

Man in the World

'Body' designates man as the one who never belongs to himself, but always has a master set over him.

'Body' expresses man in all his potentialities.

Ergo, as concerns man's actual existence in this world, this means that his potentialities are forfeited and lost, and that all he can look for is release.

'Sis' is hostility to God and it always has man in its power.

Sarx designates man's being and attitude as opposed and in contradiction to God and God's Spirit.

Man's falling victim to himself and to the powers that destroy ends up in death.

THREE: The Saving Event

The Righteousness of God

The distinctive feature of Paul's gospel is that God's righteousness is conveyed to believers.

Grace

Paul's idea conveys the grace of God who has made his righteousness available to all in Christ and gives believers part in it in order to rescue them from the damage which they suffered while apart from Christ.

Faith

The nature of faith is given in the object to which faith is directed. Never is it found apart from that in which it has faith; never is it itself a subject of consideration. 'Faith' always means 'faith in' or 'faith that....'.

Abraham (cf. Gn 15.6) was pronounced righteous on the basis of his faith.

Abandonment of self is a prescriptive element in surrender to God in faith – abandonment of an understanding of oneself which runs, presumptuous and despairing alike, in the blood of the old man, and acceptance of a new one made available through the grace of God.

Saving Event and Saving History

Making faith an individual matter allows salvation to be universal and gives it its basis.

The leitmotiv of Christ's conception of 'saving history' is identical with the one which governs his doctrine of justification.

Life in Faith

Justification does not relate to actual sins committed in the past but to release from sin as a power which makes men its slaves.

For Paul, life in faith implies life at peace with God:

- The believer's experience of the world is not now a matter of direct contact, but is mediated by God's love in Christ (cf. Rm 8.28).
- Believers no longer to into battle against sin as its slaves and subjects, but as those who have been set at liberty by God and in that liberty bound to him.
- Life in faith signifies freedom from the Law.
- Gal 5.6 ('faith works through love') describes the all-embracing importance of faith as entirely determinative of man's whole existence.

Luther: "Works based on faith are done through love, but man is not justified by love."

- Life in faith includes freedom from death.
- Three-fold time dimension: Faith/hope/love:
 1. Our past is no longer guilt for which we are responsible, but the act of God who sacrifices his Son for us all.
 2. The present has ceased to be bondage to the law which links us with the past and announcing God's future wrathful judgment, but the present is the certainty that God is on our side and that Christ intercedes for us at his right hand.
 3. As regards the future, it means that "nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

In Christ

"In Christ" can have the full meaning of the new basic and all-comprehending reality into which believers are transferred once they have been delivered from the power of corruption.

FOUR: Present Salvation

The Word

The gospel makes the saving event actual, present, and itself forms a part of it.

Proclamation is the holding out of hope for the future.

Paul preached 'the word of the cross.'

Foolishness to that worldly wisdom which would measure God by its own standards.

In the cross, believers prepared to live on the sole basis of God's grace and thus find deliverance.

Authentic existence can only mean indebtedness.

Boasting in the Lord means ceasing to boast of oneself.

The Apostles' Ministry and Suffering

Paul emphasized his own commission as apostle, not only to justify his ministry and conduct, but for the very truth of the gospel.

In Paul, in a particular sense, person and work go hand-in-hand.

Paul presented Christ by means of his own fortunes and sufferings, as well as by his preaching, to exemplify what being a Christian meant: dying and rising with Christ.