

## Chapter X

# WAS PAUL A SELF PROMOTER?

Did he promote himself? Did he exalt himself above others? Did he have a high image of himself, thinking of himself more highly than he ought to think (Romans 12:3), and does it show in his letters? If he did exalt himself, we know that he would thereby find himself condemned by the word of the Lord, who said,

Whoever exalts himself will be humbled (Matthew 23:12).

Or, was he a humble man, meek and mild? It may, to many, seem not a little blasphemous – this continual questioning of the character of the great St. Paul! Nevertheless, we have gone so far already – we must press on.

## The Meek and Humble Man

Did he not, in every letter of his, point to his meek and humble character as an example to his disciples? Did he not denigrate himself repeatedly? Did he not extol the virtues of humility and lowliness and counsel his disciples to imitate these characteristics? Yes, he did:

I, Paul, myself entreat you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ -- I who am humble when face to face with you, but bold to you when I am away (II Corinthians 10:1)!

For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute. To the present hour we hunger and thirst; we are ill clad and buffeted and homeless, and we labor, working with our hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become, and are now, as the refuse of the world, the off scouring of all things (I Corinthians 4:9-13).

For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God (I Corinthians 15:9).

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law (Galatians 5:23).

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any incentive of love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves (Philippians 2:1-3).

Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and receive and heard and seen in me, do; and the God of peace will be with you (Philippians 4:8,9).

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But we were gentle among you, like a nurse taking care of her children; we worked night and day, that we might not burden any of you, while we preached to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our behavior to you believers; for you know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory (I Thessalonians 2:7-12).

For by the grace given to me I bid every one among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith which God has assigned to him . . . Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; never be conceited (Romans 12:3,16).

This is but a small sampling of the many texts we could draw from his undoubted works to witness to his personal humility and authentic character. But there is another way to interpret these words for undoubtedly they served Paul well through convincing his disciples that he was exactly what he represented himself to be. But if we interpret them as the words of a man **who could become all things to all men**, we open the door to the realization that such words do not necessarily display his real character.

## The Not So Meek and Humble Man

He was a master of using such sweet words when they served his purpose, but he was also capable of using harsh words and self justifying and self exalting expressions when they seemed appropriate, or when he was angry though not appropriate. When he was writing to and about his genuine friends, whose loyalty he had no reason to doubt, he was not under the compulsion of his baser instincts and so could relax and be sweet. However, if his anger was stirred, he tended to lose his composure and allow the real Paul to come to the surface. This did not show up often in his writings, so that we do not see so much of this and therefore what we do see of it does not make enough of an impression to disturb the positive impression imposed by the many words of kindness, gentleness, and humility.

He did sometimes write under the compulsion of his anger, notably in composing the opening lines of the Galatian letter, in which he literally exploded with sarcasm and harsh invective. Immediately after a brief introduction he launched not blessings, but curses:

But even if we or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed (Galatians 1:8,9).

Evidently the opponents of Paul, who had followed him to Galatia preaching a different gospel, had had much success and had altered the attitudes of the Galatian disciples toward Paul in a way he could not abide:

What had become of the satisfaction you felt? For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me. Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth? They make much of you, but for no good purpose; they want to shut you out, that you may make much of them. For a good purpose it is always good to be made much of, and not only when I am present with you. My little children, with whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you! I could wish to be present with you now and to change my tone, for I am perplexed about you. (Galatians 4:15-20).

Here we see nothing less than jealousy, the very jealousy of a suitor who has been informed that another man is replacing him in the affections of his beloved. It appears that wherever and whenever Paul's opponents appeared they generated this kind of anger and vituperative

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response. The same was true of the Corinthians, where his opponents had also had some success:

For if someone comes and preaches another Jesus than the one we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you submit to it readily enough. I think that I am not in the least inferior to these superlative apostles. Even if I am unskilled in speaking, I am not in knowledge; in every way we have made this plain to you in all things (II Corinthians 11:4-6).

And what I do I will continue to do, in order to undermine the claim of those who would like to claim that in their boasted mission they work on the same terms as we do. For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. For no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is not strange if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. (II Corinthians 11:12-15)

But whatever any one dares to boast of – I am speaking as a fool – I also dare to boast of that. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I. Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one – I am talking like a madman – with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death (II Corinthians 11:21b - 23).

I have been a fool! You forced me to it, for I ought to have been commended by you. For I am not at all inferior to these superlative apostles, even though I am nothing. The signs of a true apostle were performed among you in all patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works (II Corinthians 12:11,12).

He is not inferior to these superlative apostles. He is a better servant of Christ, one who has endured much more suffering in Christ's behalf. Paul has exhibited among them the signs of a true apostle, but these superlative apostles, who claim to work on the same terms as Paul and his associates, are false apostles, disguising themselves as apostles. It seems that, when he is cementing his association with his disciples and other converts, he takes a condescending attitude, like that of a father to his children, a favorite metaphor. With them and in the grips of their adulation he can be sweet and self denigrating. But when someone arrives as a competitor, one who claims to work on "the same terms as we do," Paul's hackles are up; he is suddenly the best there is and we see through the facade.

While forced to acknowledge his limited oratorical skills, he seeks to compensate by focusing on his great knowledge. He believes he knows more than others do, and this pride of knowledge has other scriptural commentary, even from Paul:

Knowledge puffs up. If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know (I Corinthians 8:1,2)!

Perhaps, in writing II Corinthians, he has forgotten what he wrote in the first letter. He knows what he is doing, and acknowledges it – "I am speaking like a madman" – but he does it anyway. "You forced me to it!"

## The Superlative Apostles

Who were the superlative apostles? They surely claimed to be apostles, which is the implication of Paul's acknowledgment that they claim to work "on the same terms as we do." Although he asserts at one point that they are false apostles, he nevertheless acknowledges that they are apostles, and superlative apostles at that. This is not altogether sarcasm, for if he did not

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recognize their apostleship in any case, he would not have called them any kind of apostles.

We cannot know their identity, since they are nowhere in the New Testament identified. But we can hazard an informed guess based on some of the things we know about them. We know they were Jews, as Paul acknowledges in saying, Are they Hebrews? So am I. They claimed to be apostles, and Paul does not exactly deny that they are such, even though he prefers to call them false apostles. But, whether true or false, they are yet apostles. They also preach a gospel, good news. Paul decrees that theirs is a different gospel, but it is still a gospel. And their gospel differs from Paul's in at least one very important point: they want all Paul's converts to become fully Jews by submitting to the law and circumcision. Finally, they appeared bearing letters of recommendation (II Corinthians 3:1).

Paul is careful not to identify the source of the letters, but who would be sending out Jewish apostles preaching the gospel and bearing letters of recommendation? We are speaking, then, of gospel preaching Jewish apostles who have followed after Paul and sought to correct what they consider the fallacious aspects of his gospel, and who come bearing letters of recommendation. I am going to suggest that Paul's opponents in all his churches, the opponents who are seeking to convince his converts that they must be circumcised and keep the law, and also that Paul is not a true apostle, are exactly what they profess and what Paul indirectly acknowledges them to be. They are Jews, they are apostles, or the representatives of the genuine apostles, who bear letters of recommendation issued by the apostles at Jerusalem under the leadership of James, the Lord's brother, and they are pursuing their calling to preach their gospel to the Gentiles.

I will even venture to suggest that their names can be selected from the following list: Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot (& the Cananaean), Judas the son of James, and Matthias. These, of course, are names applied to the Twelve whom Jesus named apostles, except for James the son of Zebedee who had been martyred, Judas Iscariot who betrayed Jesus and was replaced by Matthias, and Thomas, whom tradition credits with moving eastward with his ministry, all the way to India, and Peter and John who were foremost among the apostles. I may be in error in omitting their names from the list, for they surely disagreed with Paul on the same terms as his opponents in Corinth and Galatia. Especially John, for tradition parks him at Ephesus, on Paul's trail and in the midst of churches founded by Paul.

Of these "apostles," only Peter, James, Philip and John have any place in the proclamation of the gospel to the world as related in the New Testament. The gospels never mention the others except as included in collective terms 'apostles' and the "twelve." In the former they are mentioned only three times, once by Paul when he related the appearances of Jesus after his resurrection (I Corinthians 15:5), once by Luke (Acts 6:2), and once by John (Revelation 21:14). They are never singled out by name, as though they did nothing other than to appear in the group. Are we really to believe that these men, who shared the Great Commission to take the gospel to all nations, to the uttermost parts of the earth, never did anything except to act as a group in Jerusalem? Did they never go anywhere in response to their calling to go to the entire world?

I believe they went; they did go to the world and their work was effective for the Lord in many nations. But I also believe that the epistles of the New Testament canon were purged of all specific references to them by the later members of Paul's school of disciples, who came to dominate the movement after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 AD. Paul, in his letters, simply chose not to give a name to any of them, even though they were giving him a hard time.

Typical of his nameless references to them is, perhaps, his statement to the Galatians that, before "certain men" came from James (from Jerusalem), Peter (Cephus) ate with the Gentile converts at Antioch, but when they came, he drew back, fearing the circumcision party. These "certain men from James" may have been unnamed apostles who also shared the leadership of

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the circumcision party. Jesus' brother, James, had assumed their leadership. Since he was brother to the King and therefore a member of the royal family, they would have accepted the leadership of this Crown Prince in Jesus' absence, expecting the King himself to return at any time. In this expectation they were all in agreement with Paul. But they knew that Paul had not walked with them under the tutelage of the Lord, had not participated with them in their calling as apostles, and had not been with them when Jesus delivered their commission to preach the gospel to the ends of the earth. Therefore they did not believe he was an apostle, and their views were confirmed by the fact that Paul was not preaching the true gospel as they understood it. He preached a different gospel, and he did not share their calling. How could he be authentic? So we find Paul saying to the Corinthians,

If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you (1 Corinthians 9:2)!

### His Apostleship

Paul was a self promoter par excellence. He knew it would be of no use to claim to have been appointed to the Apostolate on the same terms as the others, because they knew better and would soon show him up as a fraud. It appears he decided to use this to his advantage by deliberately positing his apostleship on different terms from theirs.

The earthly Jesus appointed them, but he was appointed by the heavenly Christ, the sole person so appointed, therefore his appointment was superior to theirs. He was appointed last of all, and therefore his appointment was, again, superior to theirs. He was commissioned to go to all nations but, in his view, they only to the Jews even though the Great Commission sent them also to all nations. But Paul needed the aura of apostolic calling in common with theirs to strengthen his ministry among the gentiles, and he needed at least the appearance of their support. If it became known to those to whom he preached that the original apostles all rejected him as a false apostle, they would hardly have heeded him. So he presented himself as having the apostle's support. When it was impossible to avoid a public breach, he sought to minimize the rupture and always presented it as having an outcome favorable to his points of view, as in the case of his conflict with Peter at Antioch. (Galatians 2:11-21) And, with this one exception, he never named his opponents at such times so as not to be on record as being opposed by those whose credentials were beyond question.

If only we had copies of the many documents these men must have produced! How many mysteries would be resolved! But no such documents have survived, probably having been destroyed in the 70 AD catastrophe at Jerusalem, or perhaps they were suppressed and destroyed by the members of the Pauline School who came to dominate the Jesus Movement, or they were hidden away like the Dead Sea Scrolls so as never to have been found, or they were simply worn to shreds in the hands of early disciples.

The office of apostle of Christ, (one sent by Christ) is a high one, and only twelve persons (plus Matthias) were appointed to fill it by Jesus, as I have indicated above. But Paul, claiming to be an exception, then also accepts others of his friends as being apostles through their association with him. Only in Paul's letters and in the Acts, written by Luke who was Paul's protégé, is anyone other than the Twelve designated an apostle.

### More Than an Apostle

Paul postured not only as an apostle, the greatest of the apostles, but also as more than an apostle. In this he was not prone to subtle concealment of his posturing, but was most straightforward, apparently not realizing what he was doing, but nevertheless revealing the self-aggrandizing person he really was. That he could present himself as being the most lowly of apostles, then assert his superiority, betrays hypocrisy that was usually masterfully concealed. In

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every letter he was careful to affirm his apostolic calling and its divine origin, once emphatically denying that it came through men, but only through Christ by the will of God (Galatians 1: 11, 12). In all except the Thessalonian letters, the one to Philippi, and the personal letter to Philemon, he included this apostolic affirmation in the first line of the letters as I have stated above in the discussion of his office. I list these first lines here once more because they contribute to the conception of his self aggrandizement. Remember: Paul wrote all these lines; there is no one other than him on record as a witness to his high calling. The fact that now, after two millennia, untold millions around the world honor him as an apostle of the Lord only shows how effective a self promoter he really was!

He engaged in self-promotion at the beginning of most of his letters:

Paul, an apostle -- not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead -- and all the brethren who are with me, To the churches of Galatia: . . . (Galatians 1:1,2).

Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and our brother Sosthenes, To the church of God which is at Corinth . . . (I Corinthians 1:1,2).

Paul, and apostle to Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the church of God which is at Corinth: . . . (II Corinthians 1:1).

Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures . . . Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all nations . . . To all God's beloved in Rome: . . . (Romans 1:1-6).

The above are introductions to some of the undoubtedly authentic letters. In this group also belong I Thessalonians, Philippians, and Philemon, and Paul did not begin those letters thus, probably for reasons I have already suggested. The Philippian church was the only church that routinely provided financial aid in the course of his ministry. This fact shows that there was no challenge to his apostleship there and therefore no need to open his letters to this church with an assertion of his calling. I Thessalonians, probably the first written of all Paul's letters, was written prior to his having received so many challenges to his apostleship, and therefore before he realized the need, within himself, to assert his calling more positively. Nevertheless, to the Thessalonians he was careful to assert his calling in the body of the letter:

. . . but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please men, but to please God . . . nor did we seek glory from men, whether from you or from others, though we might have made demands as apostles of Christ (I Thessalonians 2:4-6).

It was in Corinth and Galatia that his apostleship received its most vigorous challenges; he not only began his letters to them by assertions of his high calling, but also returned to affirm it in the body of those letters. Note the following examples:

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God . . . (I Corinthians 2:12).

For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God which is with me (I Corinthians 15:9,10).

But it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has commissioned us; he has put

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his seal upon us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee (II Corinthians 1:21).

But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to (in) me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles . . . (Galatians 1:15,16).

He did the same to the Roman church, which had never seen him, although many of its members were known to Paul, having served with him elsewhere – persons such as Priscilla and Aquila.

But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder because of the grace given me by God to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:15,16).

The letters of which his authorship is challenged by some scholars – II Thessalonians, Colossians, Ephesians, and the pastorals, I Timothy, II Timothy and Titus, also carry this theme forward in a similar way, which is one reason to suppose them to be authentically Pauline. II Thessalonians begins with the same introduction as I Thessalonians, and if it was not copied from I Thessalonians, suggests that this is an authentic letter. On the other hand, II Thessalonians contains no assertions of divine sanctions of his ministry, which is a good reason for doubting its authenticity. Colossians and Ephesians are, however, no exceptions:

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ at Colossae: . . . (Colossians 1:1,2).

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are also faithful in Christ Jesus: . . . (Ephesians 1:1).

The pastorals are not exceptions either, as all begin with the apostolic assertion:

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by command of God our father and of Christ Jesus our hope, To Timothy, my true child in the faith (I Timothy 1:1,2).

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God according to the promise of the life which is in Christ Jesus, To Timothy, my beloved child: (II Timothy 1:1,2).

Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to further the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth which accords with godliness, in hope of eternal life which God, who never lies, promised ages ago and at the proper time manifested in his word through the preaching with which I have been entrusted by command of God our Savior, To Titus, my true child in a common faith (Titus 1:1-4).

It is unclear why Paul might have felt the need to affirm his calling and apostleship at the beginning of these personal letters. Both letters to Timothy also contain further affirmations in the body of the text. This could very well signify that Paul did not write them, but someone else who, aware of Paul's penchant for affirming his calling at every turn, included these affirmations as signs of authenticity.

As his ministry progressed, he not only asserted the superiority of his ministry on the grounds of having been the last called in a special vision of the heavenly Christ, but he also professed to have been the first called, having been designated an apostle before he was born. He did this by identifying himself with the prophecy of Isaiah 49, as I have demonstrated above, and it shows in his letters in several places, especially in Galatians 1:15:

But when he who had set me apart before I was born (from my mother's womb), and had called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to (in) me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with flesh and blood.

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Suppose, my reader, that you were fully assured that you, personally, were prophesied by the great prophets, Isaiah and Jeremiah, and that on you personally rested the responsibility for taking the light of God to the Gentiles, to all nations and to the end of the earth. Can you imagine what such a conviction would do to your head? Well, It did the same thing and more to Paul, convincing him of the divine status of his calling and causing him to compare himself with the greatest servants of God through the ages, and to feel that on his shoulders rested the sole task

of enlightening the nations. So we see in the following verses some of the manifestations of his delusion of grandeur:

1) He thought he was the very reincarnation of Christ: also, that he (and his followers) had the mind of Christ.

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; . . .  
(Galatians 2:20).

But we have the mind of Christ (I Corinthians 2:16).

If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit which dwells in you (Romans 8:11).

It first happened to Paul, this reincarnation of Christ in his body. The first evidence of what is justly called Paul's megalomania appears in his account of the Damascus Road experience. Hyam Maccoby, in *The Mythmaker: Paul and the Invention of Christianity*, has pointed to this. Maccoby asserts that Paul did not refer to this as his conversion, but as his revelation. He was not converting to a view of true religion previously shared by others such as Stephen, or the other apostles, but was having a new revelation, one superior to that given to Peter and the other apostles, as evident in his written words:

But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia; and again I returned to Damascus (Galatians 1:15-17).

One little word in the above quotation is highly significant, the "in" in the phrase, "in me." Paul is not saying that it pleased the Lord to reveal his Son *to* him, as some translations indicate. He was clearly stating his conviction that he, in his person, was a reincarnation of Jesus, who was thus revealed *in* him, that is, in his body of flesh. We should note that he often referred to himself as the slave of Christ, emphasizing an humbler status; yet he also thought of himself as Christ incarnate, which is truly an exalted position!

Furthermore, as Jesus suffered in the flesh for us, so Paul thought of himself as suffering in exactly the same way, even as making up what was lacking in the suffering of Jesus, as though that was not sufficient apart from Paul. We find this tidbit in Colossians 1:24:

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's affliction for the sake of his body, that is, the church . . .

He not only thought of himself as foretold by Isaiah, together with his ministry, but he found that, apart from his afflictions, the afflictions of Jesus were not sufficient to save his church. Any one of us making such a claim today would become a laughing stock in the church, at best. Or, we would be accused of blasphemy (see Vernard Eller, *War and Peace*, p.141). But Paul made it and is honored for it by those who have comprised the church through the centuries. How easy it is to overlook the warts of a hero of the faith, even to make them into badges of honor! But they



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are still warts.

We do not often think of the principle of reincarnation as applied to any phase of Christianity, but here it is! Paul is the channel through whom the Spirit flows out to every nation of the world, for not only is he a reincarnation of Christ, but those who believe in his gospel also share in this marvelous transformation. It would have been transmitted to them by the laying on of Paul's hands, just as the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles hands in Acts 8:17, and as he indicated in II Timothy:

Hence I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; for God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love and self-control (II Timothy 1:6,7).

A. N. Wilson (Paul, p.184) writes that, had Paul been living in a Hindu or Buddhist culture, he might well have regarded himself as an avatar. He not only had the mind of Christ but, in his own body, he bore the wounds of Jesus; he had, like Jesus, ascended into heaven and come down again. Not only so, but if we can believe that Paul was the writer of at least a part of the Colossian letter, his sufferings made up what was lacking in the afflictions of Christ for the sake of his body (Colossians 1:24).

2) He thought that he could be in a variety of places, in spirit; or at least he wished to convince others that he could so transport himself. Like the Spirit of Jesus, his spirit was capable of transmigration to other bodies and places. This shows up in I Corinthians when he was instructing the church how to deal with the man who was living with his father's wife:

For though absent in body, I am present in spirit, and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment in the name of the Lord Jesus on the man who has done such a thing. When you are assembled, and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus (I Corinthians 5:3-5).

Was he commanding the church to execute the man? What else could be meant by this deliverance to Satan for the destruction of the flesh? Only through death does one destroy the flesh. But no, he probably did not mean that they were to put this man to death, because there is no evidence that Paul claimed such authority elsewhere, though the scholars have labored long and hard in efforts to otherwise bring light to this obscure passage. Nevertheless it is consistent with Paul's image of himself and his authority as the exalted emissary of God. It is also consistent with the conduct of Paul's successors in the church hundreds of years later who gave themselves the authority, in the name of God, to put heretics to death. This included burning them at the stake. Thus they at once delivered them to Satan and destroyed the flesh!

3) He was so bold as to claim to be the father of his converts, a status reserved by Jesus for God alone:

For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many Fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel (I Corinthians 4:15).

I appeal to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I have become in my imprisonment (Philemon 10).

I have already pointed to I Corinthians 4:15 as an example of how Paul disobeyed commandments of Jesus. Here we point to it as an example of his frequent self-promotion. Jesus reserved this term, and the unique relationship it defines, for the Father in heaven. We have not two fathers, the heavenly and the earthly. Jesus was very precise in asserting this exclusive relationship by saying that *You have one Father who is in heaven* (Matthew 23:9). So in this case Paul is aspiring to an office that can be legitimately occupied only by God. One

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cannot exalt oneself more than this!

4) He saw himself as manifesting the perfection of Christ and therefore urged his disciples to imitate him; this, again, is a role reserved by Jesus for the Father. There are many passages where Paul does this, one being I Corinthians 4:16, immediately following v. 15 listed above, which continues as follows:

I urge you then, be imitators of me (Corinthians 4:16).

Then we have the following a few chapters later:

Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ (I Corinthians 11:1).

How he intends for this to be applied is suggested in other passages, such as the following:

What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, do; and the God of peace will be with you (Philippians 4:9).

Even Jesus did not call on his disciples to imitate him. When pointing out to them the proper model for imitation, he always designated the Father. He indicated this directly in the following passages:

You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect (Matthew 5:48).

Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful (Luke 6:36).

Jesus called on his disciples to follow him, but he always pointed to the Father as the standard for imitation, though he did not use the word, imitate (*mimeomai*). This comes out repeatedly in many ways in his teaching, as for example, in the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant.

There, a master of many servants called them before him to settle their accounts. One came who owed an astronomical amount and could never pay. He implored the master, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay you everything. Out of pity the master forgave him the debt. But then this same servant confronted another servant who owed him a little, and he could not pay. When his creditor refused to show mercy and had him put in prison, other servants reported what had happened to the master, who rescinded the forgiveness of the unmerciful servant and delivered him to the jailers. Obviously, the master, or lord, of those servants represented the Father in this parable, and the servants were expected to imitate the master in the dispensation of mercy. Jesus had this in mind in delivering the beatitudes, especially the one regarding mercy:

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy (Matthew 5:7).

As God is merciful, so must his children be merciful. It is fitting that children should imitate their parents; those who do, qualify to be called the children of their Father. That is why Jesus did not call on us to imitate him, but only the Father in heaven, for only he is our Father, and we become his children through imitating him in all things. Therefore we find Jesus instructing us to love our enemies and to pray for those who persecute us so that we may be the children of our Father who is in heaven. Paul never began to understand the exclusiveness of the Fatherhood of God, and as a result he made himself the father of his disciples and called on them to imitate him, not God. This constituted the maximum possible self-exaltation, for he could not make himself greater than God!

I recognize, of course, that Paul did not claim to be God in person, or to be numbered among the Gods. After healing a man who had been a cripple from birth at Lystra, the people sought to worship Paul and Barnabus as gods, but they restrained the people, saying:

We also are men of like nature with you (Acts 14:15).

## WAS PAUL A SELF-PROMOTER?

Nevertheless the evidence is strong that he considered himself above others as regards his relationship to God, and especially as regards his calling and commission as apostle – this least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle (I Corinthians 15:9), who nevertheless thinks that I am not the least inferior to these superlative apostles. (II Corinthians 11:5)

5) He considered that his words were the very words of God, just as professed by Jesus, and may therefore have seen himself likewise foretold in the prophecy of Deuteronomy 18, which truly applies only to Jesus, who spoke the words of God in the world, a prophet like unto Moses. He also issued commands in the name of Christ, calling them commands of the Lord, while himself disobeying commandments of Christ. To the Corinthians he could write:

If any one thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord. If any one does not recognize this, he is not recognized (I Corinthians 14:37,38).

And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers (I Thessalonians 2:13).

This conviction is consistent with his lack of interest in the utterances of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels. These words must have been available to Paul in the Jesus Tradition, and the apostles and other disciples who heard Jesus surely recalled his words and repeated them to everyone who showed interest. This, presumably, included Paul. Yet in his letters, and in the speeches recorded in the Acts by Luke, Paul makes few references to the utterances of Jesus. Even when he makes such references, it is not in order to quote them and emphasize their importance as having been spoken by Jesus, but in an off-hand fashion, more like allusions. When, in the Galatian letter, he emphatically denied having received any portion of his gospel from man or through man, this would seem to have included the man Jesus:

From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view (after the flesh); even though we once regarded Christ from a human point of view, we regard him thus no longer (II Corinthians 5:16).

Paul's conviction that he had received his gospel directly from the heavenly, risen Christ in trances or other ecstatic experiences, as 'apocalypses' or revelations, appears to have left him with no curiosity about the teaching of Jesus the man. His revelation came directly from heaven and must in any case be far superior to anything transmitted by a man of flesh. The words of Jesus were presumably, even at this early time, written down in some form; but Paul had an aversion to written words, preferring to go directly to the source; that is, to God in the Spirit:

Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our sufficiency is from God, who has qualified us to be ministers of a new covenant, not in a written code, but in the Spirit; for the written code kills, but the Spirit gives life (II Corinthians 3:5,6).

His position, then, was to seek the words that came from the prompting of the divine Spirit that was in him, and whatever came forth in that manner was nothing less than the Word of God. On this basis there was no need to investigate the teaching of Jesus. But of course the teaching of Jesus did constitute one body of testimony with which Paul had to deal, and he did so in such a manner as not to offend others who may have had a higher estimate of their worth than did he. A prime example of his use of the teaching of Jesus in this way is in the discussion concerning divorce and marriage in I Corinthians:

To the married I give charge, not I but the Lord, that the wife should not separate from her husband but if she does, let her remain single or else be reconciled to her husband) - and that the husband should not divorce his wife. To the rest I say, not the Lord, that if

## PAUL: THE STRANGER

any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her (I Corinthians 7:10-12).

He had found nothing in the Jesus tradition to guide him in the case of a mixed marriage, that is, one in which the brother has an unbelieving wife (as, indeed, there is nothing specific, nor need there be). So he presumed to make up his own command, and to be very clear in specifying that this was not of the Lord but was his alone. And we note that he places his command on par with that of the Lord, as though they carried equal authority, and he includes in this chapter the explanation:

Now concerning the unmarried, I have no command of the Lord, but I give my opinion as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy (I Corinthians 7:25).

Then he closes this series of marriage injunctions with the assertion:

And I think that I have the spirit of God (I Corinthians 7:40)!

## Conclusion

We must evaluate the character of Paul free from the shackles that the churchmen have clamped upon us. Then he comes through in his true colors. A truly meek and humble man would never boast of his lowliness as Paul often did; a truly meek and humble man would never boast of his superiority, as Paul sometimes did. What others cannot reveal about him because they were silenced long ago, he in his own words reveals about himself.