

Chapter IX

WAS PAUL A LIAR?

If I tell you something for the truth and I am not simply mistaken, it is either a lie or the truth. If it is the truth, and you accuse me of lying, I have no need to deny, for the truth will, sooner or later, speak for itself; I can say nothing for it because you have already decided that I am a liar. A denial will only demean the truth, which will, as I said, speak for itself.

A Witness Needed!

If it is a lie, and you accuse me of lying, I will be forced to respond with a denial because a lie cannot and will not speak for itself. The things that motivated me to lie will motivate me to deny my lie. Then, feeling the weakness of my position, I look for something more! What more can I do? I must call forth a witness, so that you have not only my testimony, but also that of another. The scripture plainly states that everything is established at the mouth of two or three witnesses. You may have me pegged for a liar, but perhaps you will believe someone else. But on whom can I call on such short notice? To be effective, I must have a witness now! Not only so, but my witness must be a person of undisputed veracity, for it will not do to call on a reputed liar. Whose testimony would you accept immediately without question? Who? Who? Who?

Ah! There is only one person right for my task . . . God in heaven! His veracity is beyond question and He carries the extra advantage of never having been known to testify. He would surely condemn me for a liar if He were to testify but, since he never has, I am safe in calling upon him and the very mention of his name may be persuasive.

The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, he who is blessed forever, knows that I do not lie. At Damascus, the governor under King Aretas guarded the city of Damascus in order to seize me, but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped his hands (II Corinthians. 11:31-33).

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 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. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas, and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother. **In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie!** (Galatians 1:15-20)

For this I was appointed a preacher and apostle **(I am telling the truth, I am not lying)**, a teacher of the gentiles in faith and truth (I Timothy 2:7).

I am speaking the truth in Christ, I am not lying; my conscience bears witness in the Holy Spirit that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen by race (Romans 9:1-3).

I count four times here, in the New Testament epistles, that Paul denied that he was lying: to the

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Corinthians, the Galatians, Timothy, and the Romans. Once, to the Romans, he called the Holy Spirit to witness for him. Twice, to the Corinthians and to the Galatians, he called God to witness for him. Three times, to the Corinthians, Galatians, and to Timothy, the denials were issued concerning his assertions of his calling and apostleship.

Was Paul an Apostle?

He wrote a large part of both the II Corinthian and Galatian letters to counter the work of opponents in the ministry who had been to these churches in his absence and had challenged his gospel, his doctrine, and his apostleship. It is clear that to both churches (or groups of churches) Paul has been accused of lying – of misrepresenting his calling and apostleship and of mispreaching the gospel. This has struck him particularly hard in the challenge to his apostleship, which is the focus of the first three denials listed above. It is natural that it would be so, for everything he preached and taught he presented as authorized on the grounds of apostleship – that is, of his direct appointment to the Apostolate by the risen Christ, as he surely related many times to his converts in all the churches. For those who opposed him, the strategy for attacking Paul was to attack his apostleship. If they could weaken or destroy his claim to be an apostle, they would destroy his influence and perhaps rescue his churches from error.

To be an apostle of Jesus Christ, it was necessary that one be appointed directly by Jesus Christ. The original twelve apostles received their appointment directly from him. The word apostle derives from a Greek verb that means “to send.” It follows that, to be an apostle of Christ, Christ must have sent one. It is clear from Acts when the eleven obtained a replacement for Judas, they understood that to qualify as an apostle one must have been in the company of the disciples during all “the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning at the baptism of John until the day he was taken up from us” (Acts 2:15f). This one qualification excludes those who were strangers to the fellowship. They found two candidates so qualified, Matthias and Joseph, but they would not themselves proceed to decide between them. If the one selected was to be a true apostle of Christ, Christ must select him. Therefore they prayed, saying, “Lord, who knowest the hearts of all men, show which one of these two thou hast chosen to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside.” They then cast lots, and the lot fell on Matthias, who was enrolled with the eleven.

One of these qualifications Paul could never meet, for he had never been in the company of the disciples during the ministry of Jesus. He was a stranger to them. Nevertheless, if he could convince the disciples that the risen Christ had appeared to him and appointed him, then it would be clear to them that this qualification had been suspended in Paul's case. In his view this made his appointment superior to theirs because his gospel and appointment came from the risen Christ rather than from the earthly Jesus! Thus we have the story of his amazing conversion, or revelation, on the road to Damascus. He returned to Jerusalem, according to Acts, and found that they were all afraid of him except Barnabus, who sought to allay fears and who was himself quite taken in by Paul. The Twelve were not persuaded and Paul, after a time, took his leave and returned to his home city, Tarsus in Cilicia.

Twelve years later, it was again Barnabus who brought him to Antioch and from thence his fruitful ministry began. Paul was never accepted by the Twelve and he resolved to go his own way, yet claiming the same – nay, superior credentials. But he needed the favor of Jerusalem and the Twelve to strengthen his ministry and so he presented himself as having their favor and approval wherever he went. There were notorious differences that he could not ignore, but he always presented them as having a resolution favorable to himself and his ministry. When his presentation was not fully persuasive to his disciples, he had a simple response: his gospel was the only true gospel. If Paul himself, or an angel from heaven, preached any other gospel, let him be accursed (Galatians 1:8)! His gospel came directly from Christ, and to establish that origin, he presented his experience at Damascus and afterward in such a way as to convince others that he never conferred with flesh and blood after his “revelation” but began immediately to preach the

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gospel the risen Christ had communicated to him. Thus he asserted that he did not go to Jerusalem after his conversion, but first went away into Arabia, then returned to Damascus, then after three years went to Jerusalem for fifteen days where he saw only Peter and James. But, he said, "They added nothing to me!"

Paul lied. Clearly, his opponents had been working vigorously in his absence, both at Corinth and in Galatia. They were denying the validity of his apostleship, seeking to correct his work there by preaching "another gospel", and accusing him of lying about his trip to Jerusalem following his revelation in Damascus, which explains his compulsion to deny being a liar in his letters to these groups of disciples.

But why would he issue a similar denial to Timothy, also in relation to his calling and apostleship? We cannot know with certainty, but the answer that appears obvious comes to us when we realize that Timothy had been sent by Paul on at least one mission to Corinth, perhaps two (I Corinthians. 4:17, 16:10), and was there for a period while Paul was absent. Therefore young Timothy may have come under the influence of Paul's opponents while they were working at Corinth; he would have heard their charges of lying and may have shown signs of being influenced by them. Very likely it was through Timothy that Paul learned of his opponents' accusations. Therefore Paul, for whom denial is now a habit, issues another denial to his young protégé.

So Paul swore by heaven (called on God and the Holy Spirit to witness for him), and vigorously denied that he was a liar. The very fact that he was caught in the difficult situation of being compelled to repeatedly issue denials is strong evidence that the charges against him were true. I do not mean that accusation implies guilt -- but that repetitive denials of accusations imply or suggest guilt. His motivation is most certainly that which I have indicated above. The most damning thing about all this is that if there had been other witnesses on whom Paul could have called, brothers of good repute who could substantiate his claim, he certainly would have done so. The point of his denials would have been the point at which they were introduced. Why didn't he do this?

Because there were no such witnesses on whom he could call to verify his account of his itinerary following the Damascus revelation, certifying that he waited three years thereafter prior to going up to Jerusalem to see the apostles. Everyone on whom he might have called knew otherwise: that he returned to Jerusalem immediately, where he conferred with flesh and blood (Galatians 1:16), as Luke twice indicates in Acts (9:26, 22:17). The Jerusalem apostles could have confirmed the truth; some, probably all, of them were there, including Peter and James. They would have known whether he returned immediately. What of Ananias of Damascus, and the disciples he reported to have made there (Acts 9:25) during the three years he said he delayed returning to Jerusalem? No, everyone who might have testified for him knew the truth of the matter and so he did not dare cite them. No, there was only one, his silent witness.

The Testimony of II Peter

Paul lied. Have you, my reader, adequately considered this simple fact, which I have already set forth: We have almost no information about Paul except that which issues from Paul? There is no one in all the New Testament or in extrabiblical literature of the time on whom he called for corroboration. We have the voice of Luke in Acts, but Paul was his mentor, who supplied him with much of the information related there. Outside of Acts and Paul's own epistles, there is only one brief mention of him in II Peter 3:15:

So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, speaking of this as he does in all his letters. There are some things in them hard to understand which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures.

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I don't agree, but many think the Petrine epistles were written by Pauline disciples, who included this accolade to Paul. What I suspect is that Paul or one of his disciples inserted it into a genuine letter from Peter or one of Peter's disciples. The signs of an insertion are clearly exposed, for such insertions often continue the writing with some repetition of the context immediately preceding it. As an example, I Corinthians 13, almost certainly an insertion, begins after 12:31:

"But earnestly desire the higher gifts."

Then Chapter 14 continues:

" Make love your aim, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy."

In the present case, II Peter 3:15 comes after v. 14, which begins:

"Therefore, beloved . . .,"

and v. 17 continues,

"You therefore, beloved . . ."

The indication is clear: this opinion originated in Paul or his supporters and is a clever attempt to call on the great Apostle Peter to witness for him. Indeed it goes further, by classifying Paul's letters as scripture!

The Testimony of the Contradictions

Then there are the contradictions. Whenever anyone misrepresents himself and lies about the details of an important event that occurred many years earlier, it does not surprise us if the different accounts of the event that were later written down contain contradictions. One's compulsion to misrepresent the truth to others will simultaneously confuse the details in one's own mind, so that he is himself uncertain, and therefore inconsistent, in relating the event on different occasions and to different people. This would explain the presence of many contradictions in the five different accounts of Paul's Damascus experience and related events that are contained in the New Testament, three in The Acts, one in II Corinthians, and one in the Galatian letter. One contradiction from The Acts is seen in the following quotations:

The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. (Acts 9:7)

Now those who were with me saw the light, but did not hear the voice of the one who was speaking to me. (Acts 22:9)

So, did they hear the voice, or did they not hear the voice? Did they see the light, or did they see no one?

Second and third contradictions follow hard on the heels of this one:

When many days had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him, but their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night to kill him; but his disciples took him by night and let him down over the wall, lowering him in a basket. (Acts 9:23-25)

At Damascus, the governor under King Aretas guarded the city of Damascus in order to seize me, but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped his hands. (II Corinthians 11: 32,33)

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So, was it the Jews of Damascus from whom Paul fled, or was it from the governor under King Aretas? Further, did they lower him over the wall, or through a window in the wall?

Then comes the contradiction most directly relevant to his lie concerning his going up to Jerusalem from Damascus after his revelation:

And his disciples took him by night and let him down over the wall, lowering him in a basket. And when he had come to Jerusalem he attempted to join the disciples but they are all afraid of him for they did not believe he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus. So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. And he spoke and disputed against the Hellenists; but they were seeking to kill him. And when the brethren knew it, they brought him down to Caesarea and set him off to Tarsus. (Acts 9:25-30)

And (Ananias) . . . said, The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Just One and to hear a voice from his mouth; and you will be a witness for him to all men of what you have seen and heard. And now, why do you wait? Rise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on his name. When I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple I fell into a trance and saw him saying to me, 'Make haste and get quickly out of Jerusalem, because they will not accept your testimony about me. And I said, 'Lord, they themselves know that in very synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believed in thee. And when the blood of Stephen thy witness was shed, I also was standing by and approving, and keeping the garments of those who killed him.' And he said to me, 'Depart; for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.' (Acts 22:14-21)

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 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. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas, and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother. (In what I am writing to you, before God I do not lie!) Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia; and I still was not known by sight to the churches of Christ in Judea; they only heard it said, "He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." (Galatians 1:15-23)

Clearly there are several problems when we seek to reconcile these accounts of the same period in Paul's life. If we confine ourselves to the two accounts from Acts, we would conclude without question that he went immediately to Jerusalem after escaping from Damascus – which the Galatian letter emphatically rebuts. In addition, there is a problem within the two stories from Acts concerning how he came to leave Jerusalem. We are told in the first that the Hellenists (Hellenistic Jews) were seeking to kill him, and when the brethren discovered this they carted him off to Tarsus (Cilicia). In the second, we are told that Paul, in the Temple and in a trance, saw the Lord saying to him that he should get quickly out of Jerusalem, as they would not receive his testimony there. In the third and last account listed, that of Paul in the Galatian letter, he simply departed into the regions of Syria and Cilicia, there being no mention of threats to his person. Assuming that he simply chose to omit this part of the story in recounting it for the Galatian church, we yet have the contradiction in the details of the other two, as to how he came to know of his danger and to escape from Jerusalem.

Yet again we have this: although Luke tells us that Barnabas took Paul to the apostles, Paul asserts to the Galatians that he saw none of the apostles except Cephas and James, the Lord's brother. Are we really to believe that Barnabas introduced Paul to the apostles after which he went in and out among them preaching, and yet saw none of them except Cephas (Peter) and

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James? We have every reason to believe that many of the apostles were at Jerusalem during this period, for Luke tells us that, due to the persecution that arose over Stephen, they (the disciples) were all scattered throughout the region of Judea and Samaria **except the apostles** (Acts 8:1).

And finally, we have two other questions aroused by the previous accounts. First, If Paul had to escape from Damascus either to save his life or to avoid arrest, and then spent a time in Arabia, why would he have returned to Damascus where his life would again have been endangered? This puzzle suggests that there was no foray into Arabia, and no return to Damascus. Once Luke picks up his journeying in Acts, he certainly never returned! He has him saying, in his defense before King Agrippa:

Wherefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those at Damascus, then at Jerusalem and throughout all the country of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God and perform deeds worthy of their repentance (Acts 26:19,20).

We would never guess, from this, that there was a foray into Arabia and then a return to Damascus, encompassing a period of three years! And he was not known by sight to the churches of Judea? (Gal. 1:22)

Secondly, who was it in Jerusalem who would not receive his testimony about the Lord, as the Lord informed him in his trance? His instruction was to make haste and get quickly out of Jerusalem. This strongly implies that he was in imminent danger of being killed. We assume that it was the unbelieving Jews, who are presented throughout Paul's letters as antagonistic to Paul in many places. But Luke, in The Acts, only identifies one group that was reluctant to believe Paul and accept his testimony following Barnabus' intervention: the Hellenists. These were Jews who had been reared outside of Palestine, among the Jews of the Dispersion and who, for whatever reason, like Paul, had returned to the ancestral home. They were Greek speaking Jews as distinguished from the native grown variety that spoke Aramaic, hence their designation as Hellenists. On this definition Paul was also a Hellenist. They were members of the fellowship of disciples in Jerusalem, Jewish believers in Jesus as the messiah, and the same party we were introduced to earlier in Acts in the story of the Hellenists who complained against the "Hebrews" because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution of food. This occasioned, you recall, the selection of the first deacons, seven in number, that included Stephen the martyr and Philip the Evangelist. All seven had Greek names, which may not be significant since Palestinian Jews also bore Greek names; (David Smith, p.21) however, that only Greek names were listed suggests that they were significant in this case involving Hellenists.

Now, why would Paul be disputing against his Hellenist brethren in the fellowship of disciples at Jerusalem, and why would they, of all people, purpose to kill him? The Hellenists with whom Paul disputed may, of course, have been the Hellenists among the Jews who had not believed in Jesus. Since they had much in common with Paul, including non Palestinian places of origin and a common language, they would have been natural targets for his evangelistic efforts. But then, why did Luke not clarify this question by specifying that these Hellenists were unconverted to Jesus, since they bear the same designation of those he earlier included among the disciples? It is conceivable that Luke was simply a sloppy historian, and that these were non-believers among the Jews. The internal contradictions in the Acts could be attributed to this sloppiness, but they are so obvious as to defy that explanation. It is more probable that, because Luke was a very careful historian, he recorded it exactly as he heard it, leaving it to us to decide who was sloppy – Luke or those, including Paul, on whom he relied for his data.

The most probable explanation for these contradictions is to accept the proposition that Paul was a liar. This is a proposition I have already affirmed. Then it was quite proper that the disciples of all kinds, including the Hebrews and the Hellenists under the leadership of the Twelve in Jerusalem, would not receive his testimony about the Lord, as his vision states. He responded by

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taking the precise same attitude as toward the Jews in Corinth: From now on, I go to the Gentiles (Acts 18:6). No one sought to kill him, but they rejected his testimony in no uncertain terms and he responded like a piqued child: I'm taking my toys and going home – that is, to the Gentiles. Later, unwilling to acknowledge that the Twelve rejected his gospel, he explained his hasty departure from Jerusalem to Luke as motivated by the hostility of the Hellenists. But if anyone were seeking to kill him, it would have been the agents of the High Priest, whom he had so recently betrayed at Damascus.

I realize that one can concoct a variety of explanations for some, but not all, of these contradictions. If we believe

- (1) that Luke wrote The Acts many years after the death of Paul, which is debatable, and
- (2) that Paul's letters and written records may not have been available to him, not having yet been canonized, and
- (3) that Luke's memory of what he heard Paul say during the many times Paul told of his Damascus experience in Luke's hearing may have been faulty, and
- (4) that Luke had available to him living survivors of the times who could recall exactly what happened at Jerusalem after Paul's "revelation",

the following explanation begins to emerge: Paul adhered mostly to the truth in relating details in Luke's hearing because he anticipated that Luke, his frequent companion on his travels, would sooner or later accompany him to Jerusalem where he would hear the truth from the apostles. Luke readily accepted Paul's apostleship and its source in the risen Lord, and there was no need to lie to him. Yet the details of what Paul told from time to time varied, simply because he had been careful to alter them to suit certain occasions, and this contributed to Luke's uncertain memory. When Luke sought clarification from those who, from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word . . . (Luke 1:2), he received the truth. That is what he recorded, both in his gospel and in The Acts, except for those words that he was certain of having heard directly from Paul. Even though these contradict the eyewitnesses, Luke recorded them as he had heard them, not willing to believe his beloved mentor had spoken falsely.

Paul lied. Other contradiction from Paul's letters, when placed together find him actually denying that he is a servant of Christ! In Galatians 1:10, we find him writing:

Am I seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still pleasing men, I should not be a servant of Christ.

This is a good statement, thoroughly consistent with the doctrine of Jesus, which places the desires of men over against those of God. I have pointed to this in Book I. Therefore, those who seek to please men cannot be the servants of Christ. But Paul had something more to say on this subject, from I Corinthians 10:32, 33:

Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please all men in everything I do.

Did he, or did he not, try to please men? His own testimony proves that he was not a servant of Christ! This is the kind of contradiction we would expect to find in letters written to different people on different subjects at widely different times, by an ordinary human being. But not by a man who maintained that Christ was in him and that his words were inspired by the Holy Spirit. Here is another example of a similar contradiction. From Romans 11:32 we have this firm statement:

For God has consigned all men to disobedience, that he may have mercy upon all.

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But just two chapters prior to this statement, in the same context, he has this statement from Rom. 9:18:

So then he has mercy upon whomever he wills, and he hardens the heart of whomever he wills.

So, does God work to the end that all men might receive his mercy, or does he arbitrarily harden the hearts of some men? Again, this is the kind of contradiction we expect an ordinary human being, me for example, to express. But for a man who, inspired by the Holy Spirit, speaks for God? I think not!

His Many Denials

All these allegations raise disturbing questions, not only about Paul's character but also about his inspiration. Did the Holy Spirit inspire his written words as all Christendom believes? Did the Holy Spirit inspire all these contradictions? Did the Holy Spirit inspire his many denials of lying?

I don't ask you to decide on these questions now; there is more to come that will be relevant. If this were all, then I would not feel so free to write these things about a man who has claimed the admiration and devotion of untold millions for two thousand years. But there should have been others who could witness for him – Ananias of Damascus, his Damascus disciples, the men who were traveling to Damascus with him. He told others about these people, but he never called them forth. The Jerusalem apostles would have confirmed that he did not return to Jerusalem to see them for three years – where were they? So far as we can tell, they have not yet spoken a word in his behalf. Instead, he calls on the only witnesses he knows who will not contradict him – God and the Holy Spirit. But when he did that, he became disobedient to his Lord, as I described earlier.

Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God . . . Let what you say be simply yes or no; anything more than this comes from evil (Matthew 5:34-37).

Therefore I conclude that his denials, his swearing by heaven, all came from evil, and to conclude otherwise would be to ignore the words of my Lord. Set beside that, the accusation of lying is a small thing!

I understand that Paul's denials do not constitute proof that he was lying. Many have denied in an 'off the cuff' manner when accused of lying, even though they were truthful. Children react this way when they accuse one another, and they frequently call on some higher authority to witness for them: "If you don't believe me, ask my dad." They, being children, don't think of the implications of denial, although they would understand them if they paused to reflect before responding. They may even establish a habit of denial that persists into adulthood and there continue to deny through force of habit. Perhaps we have all done it. But we are not dealing here with children or with flippant responses in face-to-face encounters. Paul was writing letters under circumstances that should have provided opportunity for reflection. I visualize him in the home of some disciple, or in prison late at night after all others have retired, sitting before the dim light of a flickering oil lamp and carefully measuring his words.

Those who believe that the Holy Spirit inspired every word the "great apostle" wrote as though spoken directly by the Lord now have a dilemma to resolve. Is the Holy Spirit really so childish and immature? I think not.

His Most Unfavorable Witness

Paul lied. But now I must tell you that Paul did have a witness as to his integrity, and it was not a favorable witness. This was Paul himself:

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For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews; to those under the law I became as one under the law – though not being myself under the law – that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law – not being without law toward God but under the law of Christ – that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings. (I Corinthians. 9:19-25).

What a marvelous expression of total commitment to winning souls! I once found this to be one of the most inspiring and motivating passages in the Bible. It made me just want to go out and win souls – to do anything or be anything to accomplish results.

But look closer – he openly acknowledged a practice that is utterly dishonest. To the Jews, he presented himself as a Jew. But to those outside the law, the Greeks and others, he presented himself as outside the law – as a Greek if we go by his Greek name. He became all things to all men! Whatever the occasion demands, that he is. Its begins more and more to appear as though the Ebionites may have been correct in their statements about Paul – that he was a Greek and never a Pharisee Jew. By his own firm statement, he was a human chameleon!

What was His Origin?

To present himself as a Greek to the Greeks, he must have told them he was a Greek. To present himself as a Jew to the Jews, he must have told them he was a Jew. He lied in this way many, many times. Whatever the occasion demanded, it got. He literally became "all things to all men." For once, he told the truth! We can clearly perceive here that the man had a serious defect in his character, for he thought that by being dishonest, by lying, he could win men to Christ to whom lies are an abomination. Paul has often been called a man full of contradictions, and now we know why they say it. Yes, he really believed that he did it all for the sake of the gospel. Paul was highly dedicated to the preaching of his gospel; there can be no doubt about that, for he mightily invested all his resources in the endeavor to reach the ends of the earth before the Lord's return. It appears that his commitment was so thorough and complete that he considered lying a small thing if only he could advance the gospel thereby. Woe to me if I preach not the gospel! (I Corinthians 9:16)

We commonly praise a person's integrity by asserting that he or she is always the same. Not a hypocritical bone in that body! What you see is what you get! But here we have a man who is a hard alternative to this constancy. He one day is a Jew, the next a Gentile by his own assertion – and he is so uncomprehending of his own perfidy as not even to realize that this, which he regards with the pride of boasting, is and ought to be his shame! Our Lord had some plain words for this kind of play-acting:

But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market places and calling to their playmates, "We piped to you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn." For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, "He has a demon"; the Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, "Behold, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners." (Matthew 11:16-19)

Paul was like those children, only more successful; when he recognized dancers, he piped with joy, and they danced. When he recognized mourners, he wailed with them, and they mourned together! He was a master politician, truly successful in becoming all things to all men. He would not get away with this today, however, for worldwide communication capabilities of the electronic media would soon show him up for what he was: as I said above, a human chameleon.

There is biblical evidence that Paul was a Greek, as stated by the Ebionites. It isn't strong, but

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it's there, as though he sometimes made a slip that revealed his Greek origin contrary to his bold assertions of being a Pharisee Jew in his early career, an Hebrew of the Hebrews, of the tribe of Benjamin, as to the law, blameless.

The first evidence that he lied about his origins grows out of the fact that, in First Century Judaism, no one had accurate knowledge of his descent from Benjamin. Knowledge of the tribal origins of individual families had long since been lost. None could trace their lineage, with the exception of the priestly tribe of Levi and Aaron, which was maintained as required to sustain the priesthood. All others were presumed to be of the tribe of Judah, or simply, Jews. So, when Paul claimed to be a Benjamite, Jews would have known the claim was bogus. But it would have sounded good to members of his Gentile churches who could know no better. Probably Paul relied on his Jewish name, Saul, as indicating descent from King Saul from whom David wrested power and who was a Benjamite.

Other evidence includes the statement made to the Galatians,

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us – for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who hangs on a tree.” – that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. (Galatians 3:13,14).

It is clear that Paul, by use of the first person plural in the last line of this quotation, is classifying himself with the Gentiles, who receive the promise of the Spirit. Was this simply a slip, and inadvertent error, or has he revealed his true nationality? In either case, inadvertent error or inadvertent truth, he is revealing that his word is not inspired by the Spirit, who would surely not permit him to make such an association were it not true – but if it is true, Paul lied. We repeatedly come across those passages where, if we set out to make excuses for Paul to cover either his carelessness or dishonesty, we expose the true nature of his inspiration.