

## *16 Long Tradition of JWO and Minimization of Paul*

---

### *Introduction*

The oldest tradition in the church relied upon Jesus' Words Only (JWO) as the test of orthodoxy. In the period of 125 A.D. to 325 A.D., after the twelve apostles were gone, the church faced the crisis of Marcion (144 A.D.). He claimed only Paul had the true gospel. Marcion insisted the teachings of the twelve, particularly in the gospel of Matthew and John, did not reflect the true gospel. Marcion thus forced the early church to speak out on the issue of Paul's authority compared to the words of Christ from the twelve. Tertullian was the early church's spokesperson on Marcion. In *Against Marcion* (207 A.D.), Tertullian clarified that Paul was inferior to the twelve. Tertullian insisted Paul cannot be permitted to contradict Jesus' words in the Gospels of Matthew and John. (Tertullian put Luke's and Mark's gospels a notch below the apostolic gospels of Matthew and John.) Tertullian also said Paul's claim to being an apostle was unsupported by any corroborating witness. Tertullian's cautions about Paul were an important basis upon which the early church defeated Marcionism.

---

### *Early Church Believed in Jesus' Words Only*

First, the Jesus' Words Only (JWO) perspective was the initial view of the church. JWO as a standard for orthodoxy was used long before any official canon was proposed in the late 300s. Daniel Lieuwen, a researcher-writer from the

Orthodox church tradition, explains in his work *The Emergence of the New Testament Canon* (1995): “Initially, only the life and sayings of Christ were considered of equal authority with the Old Testament scriptures.”<sup>1</sup>

Lieuwen gives several proof texts. For example, Hegessipus in the first half of the second century said canon was only “the Law, the Prophets, and the Lord”; to this alone “a right faith must conform.”<sup>2</sup>

The early church leaders (*e.g.*, Tertullian) simultaneously were saying that Paul’s message was deemed inferior to those *Gospel* accounts of Jesus’ life and teachings. Thus, orthodoxy focused on the words of Jesus from the Gospels. Jesus’ words were the test of orthodoxy. The early church, through Tertullian in 207 A.D., said Paul’s teachings were below these gospel accounts. In particular, Paul’s words were inferior to the gospels of Matthew and John. If there was any conflict between these gospel accounts and Paul’s teachings, Tertullian said we were to prefer Matthew and John over Paul. Thus, JWO has the longest support in Christendom. It also is the most common-sense position to take on determining what is orthodox. If Paul cannot be reconciled to the words of Christ, we do not bend Jesus’ words to fit Paul. Rather, all of Jesus’ teachings must be given precedence regardless of the impact on Pauline doctrine. Jesus must not be marginalized to fit Paul.

We shall explore the history behind JWO and its rationale in the next two sections.

---

1. This work is reprinted at <http://www.orthodox.net/faq/canon.htm>.

2. Hans von Campenhausen, *The Formation of the Christian Canon* (J. A. Baker, trans.) (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972) at 167.

*The Earliest Canon of the Ebionites  
Excludes Paul*

The first canon list was prepared by *The Poor*, otherwise known as the Ebionites. (See *Appendix B: How the Canon Was Formed* at page ix *et seq.*)

As explained in Appendix B, sometime around 64 A.D., the Ebionites developed a canon that only included Matthew in its Hebrew original. They specifically excluded Paul's writings. As to Paul, the Ebionites made a blatant claim that Paul's words were heretically contrary to those of the Lord Jesus. Thus, Paul must be excluded, they said. We can infer their simple canon list was created around 64 A.D. because (a) Paul's writings existed and were circulating at that point and (b) the Ebionites do not comment positively or negatively on the inclusion of Mark, Luke or John's Gospel (or any other epistle, for that matter). These works date from 65 A.D. onward. Presumably these writings did not exist when the Ebionites declared the Hebrew Matthew was canon, and Paul was to be excluded.

Incidentally, the existence of this Hebrew version of Matthew comes as a surprise to some Christians. However, its existence is confirmed by numerous ancient sources, including Jerome who made a complete translation of the Hebrew Matthew which later was lost. (Jerome was the translator of the Latin Vulgate released 405 A.D.) The same ancient sources say a Hebrew version of Matthew was later translated into Greek, and it is this translation which ended up in our New Testament.<sup>3</sup>

In sum, the Ebionites insisted that this Hebrew Matthew was *the* canon at that time. All of Paul's writings had to be excluded as uninspired, the Ebionites claimed. (For more details, see *Appendix B: How the Canon Was Formed*. For more on the Ebionites' view of Paul, see page 306.)

Thus, the Ebionites were the first to insist Jesus' words alone were canon. They excluded Paul. In fact, the Ebionites were the first to propose a *canon*.

*Tertullian (207 A.D.) Says Paul Is Inferior*

In the period after the apostles from 125 to 325 A.D., Paul's views on salvation were held in very low esteem by the orthodox leaders of Christianity. It is true we can find Paul is cited as an authority by the early leaders, such as Tertullian, Origen, etc. We even can find some leaders such as Polycarp were effusive, calling Paul "glorious." Yet, they never *expressly* say Paul is a prophet. They never say Paul has specific prophecies that would put him on par with Jeremiah, Isaiah, Ezekiel or Jesus. Nor do they ever teach Paul's faith-alone (*i.e.*, without works) doctrine is the valid test for salvation. The early church (125-325 A.D.) always found a way to fit Paul into what Jesus says, as recorded by the twelve.

In fact, Tertullian, a well-respected Christian lawyer and apologist for the faith, wrote in 207 A.D. *Against Marcion*. This work was to attack the rising influence of Marcion. The Marcionites, beginning about 144 A.D., claimed that only Paul had the true gospel. Marcion claimed the books of Matthew, Mark, and John contradicted Paul's gospel. Marcion only accepted a shortened version of Luke's gospel as valid. As a result of Marcionism, the issue of Paul's *level* of authority had to be resolved by the apostolic churches. The apostolic church had to answer whether Marcion's emphasis on Paul was valid. (See *Appendix B: How the Canon Was Formed* at page ix *et seq.*)

- 
3. Professor George Howard recently re-published a medieval text that has the earmarks of this Hebrew original Matthew. It was preserved ironically by a Jewish critic of Christianity as an appendix to his rebuttal work to Christianity. It reads virtually identical to our current version. Yet, its variances repair some textual errors in our Greek New Testament (*e.g.*, Jesus' ascribes the 30 pieces of silver in the Hebrew Matthew to Zechariah, but our Greek NT version ascribes this erroneously to the prophet Jeremiah). Thus, this Hebrew Matthew must be closer to the original Matthew. For more information, see the *Hebrew Matthew* at [www.jesuswordsonly.com](http://www.jesuswordsonly.com). See also, Nehemiah Gordon, *Hebrew Yeshua versus the Greek Jesus* (Jerusalem: 2006).

In response, Tertullian in 207 A.D. made several points in *Against Marcion* that clearly reduce Paul to a completely marginal figure.

First, as discussed below, Tertullian proves that Paul is inferior to the twelve apostles. Paul had to submit to their authority in Acts chapter 15. Second, Tertullian said there is no evidence other than Paul's own word that Jesus made Paul an apostle. Luke's account in Acts omits any evidence for this key claim of Paul that he was an apostle of Jesus Christ.

Lastly, one by one, Tertullian tears apart Marcion's doctrines of total depravity, predestination, salvation by faith alone, and eternal security. On this second cluster of issues, Tertullian never identifies what verses in Paul that Marcion is citing. However, we all know what they were. We can hear in Tertullian's paraphrase of Marcion's ideas the ring of Paul's doctrines. Tertullian is silent on where these specific ideas of Marcion derive, but they are all too familiar to us.

But first, let's provide a little more background on Marcion and the rival church system he founded. Here was the first *splinter* group within Christianity.

### **Background on Marcionism**

In 144 A.D., one particular ex-bishop of the church named Marcion proclaimed three core teachings:

- Salvation-by-faith alone. "The Good [God of the NT] redeems those who *believe* in Him but He does not judge those who are *disobedient* to him." (Marcion, *Antitheses* #19.)(See page 49.)
- The Law was not given by God the Father and could be disregarded; and
- Jesus did not come in sinful human flesh but only appeared to have a body of human flesh.

Marcion relied upon Paul exclusively for doctrine. He rejected any of the Gospels written by the twelve apostles. Marcion claimed they were written solely for Jews. In a sense, he was simultaneously *Dispensational* and *Sola Scrip-*

*tura*. His claim that Paul alone had the correct gospel dispensation allowed Marcion to shuffle aside any of the apostles' writings as unimportant if they did not match Paul's gospel. (Appendix B: *How the Canon was Formed* at page ix.)

We have seen previously that Paul indeed taught:

- Salvation by faith alone. (Romans 4:4; Ephesians 2:8-9.) Even unrepentant disobedient Christians (committing incest) are saved. (1 Cor. 5:5, discussed at page 149.)
- The Law of Moses was given to Moses by angels who are “not gods” and no obedience to the Law was therefore necessary. (Galatians 3:17; 3:19-29, Gal. 4:8-9, discussed at “Denigration of the Law as Given by the Angels” on page 83.)
- Jesus only appeared to come in sinful human flesh (Romans 8:3) and Jesus only appeared to be a man (Philippians 2:7). (For discussion, see page 336 *et seq.*)

Yet, despite Paul teaching the three core teachings of Marcion, Marcion was rejected universally by the post-apostolic church leaders.

Marcion was a serious threat to the survival of Christianity. Marcion had created a church system, with many churches. Marcionite churches had bishops and teachers. Marcion's church was in almost every land and community. Some believe in certain cities there were more Marcionites than orthodox Christians. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* in “Marcion” reflects this understanding:

The Marcionite sect, highly ascetic and celibate, grew rapidly ***until it was second in strength only to the original church***; it had churches and an episcopal hierarchy and practiced the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist... Marcion rejected the Old Testament and almost all of the New Testament... basing his teachings on ten of the Epistles of St. Paul and on an altered version of the Gospel of Luke... Marcionism flourished in the West until about the 4th century....

Thus, Tertullian was the voice of orthodoxy. He was the most prominent voice in the cause against Marcion. Tertullian's words must have been crucial to defeat Marcionism.

What was the main point of Tertullian's attack on Marcion? As we shall see, Tertullian primarily attacks Marcion for his undue reliance on Paul. Paul's apostleship is dubious, Tertullian explains. Likewise, Tertullian believed Paul was not an authority on par with the twelve apostles. If Paul contradicts the twelve, Paul's words are not to be followed. When Tertullian wants to isolate those contradictions, Tertullian is circumspect. Tertullian finds flaws in Pauline doctrines without citing Paul as the source of Marcion's wrong ideas. However, we can recognize Paul's words in Marcion's mouth.

Another major vulnerability of Marcion exploited by Tertullian was Marcion's *theological* explanation why the Law did not have to be followed. Marcion must have realized that Paul's claim that the Law was given by angels was unsound Biblically. So Marcion devised what he regarded as a better reason to prove the Law of Moses was invalid. What was this?

Marcion had a very elaborate and well-defended view why the Law was invalid, set forth in his *Antitheses*.<sup>4</sup> Marcion claimed that the God of the 'Old Testament' could not be the God of the New. Jesus is God, and the Father is God, but both are kindly and loving. Marcion sought to prove the creator God of the Old is a different type of God: mean, willing to do evil, sometimes unsure of His aims, repenting of plans or actions, etc.

Marcion's exposition raises 'Old Testament' verses that have perplexed many theologians to this day. Yet, Marcion's solution exposed him to the charge of polytheism. He claimed one member of the Godhead had a distinct and different nature from the other two.

---

4. You can find this work—patched together from various sources—at <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Ithaca/3827/antithesis.html>.

Tertullian had a field day with this claim of Marcion. The Marcionites were vigorously persecuted as heretics, but not simply for this polytheistic flaw. Tertullian in *Against Marcion* relied on much more than this. Tertullian's primary defense of Christ was based on lifting up Jesus' words in the Gospels above Paul, thereby defeating the core doctrines of Marcion.

Based on Tertullian's work, the apostolic churches defeated Marcionism. The Marcionites early Paul-only-ism almost swallowed the church. Yet, the early church bravely fought back and survived. Marcionism took almost three hundred years to be defeated within Christianity.

In fact, Marcionism—despite being crippled by the 300s—had a strong fascination for centuries thereafter. Paul-only-ism lived on within the fringe of Christianity. This was because the Marcionite churches had entered Armenia early on. They re-emerged as a force in Armenia in the eighth century. Their Christian opponents labelled them Paulicians because of their adherence to Paul. Eventually they spread to Bulgaria and Turkey. The Paulicians claimed: (a) only Paul's gospel is the true gospel; (b) salvation is by faith alone; (c) the gospels Matthew, Mark and John had to be eliminated as canon; and (d) there is to be selective receipt of Luke's gospel account. This was unmistakably similar to the core doctrines of Marcion. In 844, the Paulicians took control of a state in Turkey and became a military power. In 871, they were defeated by Emperor Basil I of Byzantium. The Eastern Orthodox treated the Paulicians as heretics. Yet, the Paulicians survived into the twelfth century.<sup>5</sup>

---

5. See "Paulicians," *Catholic Encyclopedia*. It mentions they "[1]rejected the Old Testament...[2][T]o believe in him [Jesus] saves men from judgment...[3] Their Bible was a fragmentary New Testament." In N. G. Garsoïan, *The Paulician Heresy* (1968), it mentions "The sect especially valued the Gospel of Luke and the Pauline Epistles."

Thus, Marcionism remained a persistent force within Christianity from 144 A.D. to the 1200s. Yet, in all this time, they were always viewed universally as heretics.

What cannot be ignored is that in Marcionism, we have the first representatives of what today would otherwise pass as an evangelical Protestant sect. Even Marcion's view of the 'God of the Old' versus the 'God of the New' appears today in the repackaged form of *dispensational theology*. The virtue of modern dispensationalism is that it does not expose the advocate to an accusation of polytheism. Instead, it only exposes the advocate to the charge that God changes His nature in time.

Thus, Marcion forced the early church to weigh modern Pauline theology. Yet, the post-apostolic church of 125 A.D. to 325 A.D. clearly rejected Marcion and his Pauline theology.

---

*Tertullian Demonstrates Paul is Inferior to the Other Apostles*

In Book 4, chapter 2 of Tertullian's *Against Marcion* (ca. 207 A.D.), Tertullian clearly says Paul's authority is *inferior* to that of the twelve apostles. Tertullian explains Paul's gospel is only valid so long as it is consistent with Jesus and the twelve.

First, Tertullian starts out by emphasizing the priority of the gospels written by the actual twelve apostles, namely the gospels of Matthew and John. Those of Luke and Mark were inferior because they were produced merely by disciples of their teachers. Later Tertullian identifies Luke and Mark as "apostolic men," but not apostles. Tertullian writes:

I lay it down to begin with that the documents of the ***gospel have the apostles for their authors***, and that this task of promulgating the gospel was imposed upon them by our Lord

himself. ***If they also have for their authors apostolic men [i.e., Luke and Mark], yet these stand not alone, but as companions of apostles or followers of apostles:*** because the preaching of disciples [i.e., Luke or Mark] might be made suspect of the desire of vain-glory, unless there ***stood by it the authority of their teachers*** [i.e., the twelve apostles], or rather the authority of Christ, which made the apostles teachers. In short, from among ***the apostles the faith is introduced to us by John and by Matthew***, while from among ***apostolic men Luke and Mark*** give it renewal, <all of them> beginning with the same rules <of belief>, as far as relates to the one only God, the Creator, and to his Christ, born of a virgin, the fulfillment of the law and the prophets.\*\*\*Marcion seems to have singled out Luke for his mutilating process [i.e., writing a gospel apparently based on Luke but altering it]. Luke, however, was ***not an apostle, but only an apostolic man***; not a master, but a disciple, and ***so inferior to a master...***<sup>6</sup>

This unquestionably puts Luke below the other Gospels of Matthew and John. Thus, Tertullian was saying that (a) to the extent Marcion is using Luke *legitimately* then (b) Luke is still inferior to the gospel accounts of Matthew and John.

Tertullian's view of Luke's Gospel as subordinate to Matthew has *de facto* been accepted by conservative Christians today, as we must. Otherwise Luke has Jesus uttering a command to "hate your" mother and father which is contrary to prior Scripture.<sup>7</sup> Matthew's account of the same exchange

---

6. Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem* (ed. trans.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972) at 262-63, Book 4, chapter 2. It is available online at [http://www.tertullian.org/articles/evans\\_marc/evans\\_marc\\_10book4\\_eng.htm](http://www.tertullian.org/articles/evans_marc/evans_marc_10book4_eng.htm) (accessed 2005).

materially differs. Jesus' command in Matthew is consistent with Scripture, saying we cannot "love more" our mother and father than Jesus. (Matt. 10:37.) Thus, today it is recognized that Luke is inferior to Matthew or John when there is a conflict, just as Tertullian teaches.<sup>8</sup>

The reason Tertullian is mentioning Luke is inferior to Matthew and John is that Marcion's gospel narrative of Jesus' life reads very close to the *Gospel according to Luke*. Tertullian is thus suggesting that Luke's Gospel is the source of Marcion's gospel account of Jesus' life. Tertullian is then saying that to the extent Marcion's gospel account was written by Luke, it is not as authoritative as either Matthew or John. The latter were apostles of Jesus. Luke was not.

Next, Tertullian discusses the possibility that Marcion is claiming Paul wrote this *proto-Luke gospel*. Scholars believe Tertullian was not merely hypothesizing. They believe that Marcion indeed was claiming Paul wrote *proto-Luke*. Whatever the truth, Tertullian is going to discuss what would be the authority of a gospel narrative of Jesus' life even if it were written by Paul as compared to narratives written by Matthew or John. We are going to get to a key issue: would such a gospel narrative written by Paul *be on par with a gospel written by Matthew or John*? Tertullian answers *no*, thereby demonstrating a *lower regard for Paul* than the twelve, in particular lower than the writings of *Matthew* and *John*.

---

7. In Luke 14:26, Luke says Jesus said, "If any man cometh unto me, and *hateth not* his own father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple."

8. Clarke realizes the contradiction between Luke & Matthew, and the terrible import of Luke's variance. He says "Matt. 10:37 expresses the true meaning" of Jesus. Gill likewise sees the problem in Luke, saying Jesus could not have uttered a command to hate, for this would be contrary "to the laws of God...and divine revelation." He says Matthew is a better "explanation" of Jesus' meaning.

Tertullian's quote below continues from the last quote above. In this next quote, Tertullian starts out by making clear that Luke is inferior to the other apostles' gospel because Luke's Master (Teacher) was Paul, and Paul was a "lesser" apostle than the twelve. Tertullian then explains Paul (a) could not come with another gospel than the twelve and (b) Paul's authority derived from the twelve and Paul was inferior to them. He cites Acts chapter 15 as proof. Tertullian explains:

Now Luke was not an apostle but an apostolic man, not a master but a disciple, in any case less than his master [*i.e.*, Paul], and assuredly ***even more of lesser account as being the follower of a later apostle, Paul,***<sup>9</sup> to be sure: so that even if Marcion had introduced his gospel ***under the name of Paul in person***, that one single document would not be adequate for our faith, ***if destitute of the support of his [*i.e.*, Paul's] predecessors [the twelve apostles]***. For we should demand the production of that gospel also which Paul found <in existence>, that to which he gave his assent, that with which shortly afterwards he was ***anxious that his own should agree***: for his intention in going up to Jerusalem to know and to consult the apostles, was lest perchance he had run in vain—that is, ***lest perchance he had not believed as they did***, or were not preaching the gospel in their manner. At length, when he [*i.e.*, Paul] had conferred with the original <apostles>, and there was agreement concerning the rule of the faith, they joined the right hands <of fellowship>....***If he [*i.e.*, Paul] therefore who***

---

9. For the doubting Thomas' over this Oxford translation, the Latin original confirms this is correct. It is: "Porro Lucas non apostolus sed apostolicus, non magister sed discipulus, utique ***magistro minor***, certe tanto posterior quanto posterioris apostoli sectator, ***Pauli*** sine dubio."

***gave the light to Luke chose to have his predecessors' authority [i.e., the twelve] for his faith as well as his preaching, much more must I require for Luke's gospel the authority [i.e., from the twelve] which was necessary for the gospel of his master [i.e., Paul].***<sup>10</sup>

Tertullian could not be more clear. Paul's authority was not recognized as direct from Jesus or by revelation. It only derived from Paul's recognition by the twelve apostles. He was their disciple, and they were Paul's masters. If Paul created a gospel text, Tertullian responds that Paul's conduct in Acts chapter 15 reveals Paul's authority could not exceed the words and guidance of the twelve. Paul was not allowed to *run beyond the teaching of Christ that the twelve had*. Thus, if Paul was Luke's source for his gospel, then Luke's gospel still must be consistent with the apostolic canon of Matthew and John or otherwise it is invalid. This means that for Tertullian, Paul was not free to utter doctrines that were inconsistent with the gospels of Matthew or John.

---

*Tertullian Questions In What Sense Paul Was An Apostle*

Tertullian is not through analyzing Paul's authority within the New Testament church. Tertullian even gets to the issue in what sense Paul was an *apostle* of Jesus. Tertullian in Book 5 of *Against Marcion* remarks that there is actually no proof in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke or John that Paul was made an apostle. It is solely Paul's word. Tertullian says that if we are forced to admit any contradiction between Paul and the twelve, we must abide in the words from the twelve. (Tertullian never admits a contradiction, and seeks to

---

10. Tertullian (ed. Evans), *Against Marcion, supra*, at 263, 265, Book IV, ch.2.

harmonize Paul, as discussed later. Thus Tertullian further on “claims him as my own,” robbing Paul from Marcion.) Here is Tertullian in book 5, chapter one, of *Against Marcion*:

I desire to hear from Marcion ***the origin of Paul the apostle***. I am a sort of new disciple, having had instruction from no other teacher. For the moment my only belief is that ***nothing ought to be believed with-out good reason***, and that is believed without good reason which is believed without knowledge of its origin: and ***I must*** with the best of reasons ***approach this inquiry with uneasiness when I find one affirmed to be an apostle, of whom in the list of the apostles in the gospel I find no trace***. So ***when I am told that he [i.e., Paul] was subsequently promoted by our Lord, by now at rest in heaven, I find some lack of foresight in the fact that Christ did not know beforehand that he would have need of him***, but after setting in order the office of apostleship and sending them out upon their duties, considered it necessary, ***on an impulse and not by deliberation, to add another, by compulsion so to speak and not by design*** [i.e., on the Road to Damascus]. So then, shipmaster out of Pontus [i.e., Marcion], supposing you have never accepted into your craft any smuggled or illicit merchandise, have never appropriated or adulterated any cargo, and in the things of God are even more careful and trustworthy, will you please ***tell us under what bill of lading you accepted Paul as apostle, who had stamped him with that mark of distinction, who commended him to you, and who put him in your charge?*** Only so may you with confidence disembark him [i.e., Paul]: only so can he avoid being proved to belong to him who ***has put in evidence all the documents that attest his apostleship***. He [i.e., Paul] himself, says Mar-

*cion, claims to be an apostle*, and that not from men nor through any man, but through Jesus Christ. **Clearly any man can make claims for himself**: but his claim is **confirmed by another person's attestation**. One person writes the document, another signs it, a third attests the signature, and a fourth enters it in the records. **No man is for himself both claimant and witness**. Besides this, you have found it written that **many will come and say, I am Christ**. If there is one that makes a false claim to be Christ, **much more can there be one who professes that he is an apostle of Christ**. Thus far my converse has been in the guise of a disciple and an inquirer: from now on **I propose to shatter your confidence, for you have no means of proving its validity, and to shame your presumption**, since you make claims but reject the means of establishing them. Let Christ, **let the apostle, belong to your other god**: yet you have no proof of it except from the Creator's archives.

\*\*\*[You may argue:] 'And do you then deny that Paul is an apostle?' I speak no evil against him whom I retain for myself. **If I deny, it is to force you to prove. If I deny, it is to enforce my claim that he is mine**. Otherwise, if you have your eye on our belief, accept the evidence on which it depends. If you challenge us to adopt yours, **tell us the facts on which it is founded**. Either prove that the things you believe really are so: or else, **if you have no proof**, how can you believe?<sup>11</sup>

---

11. Tertullian, *Against Marcion* (Oxford University Press, 1972) at 509, 511, reprinted online at [http://www.tertullian.org/articles/evans\\_marc/evans\\_marc\\_12book5\\_eng.htm](http://www.tertullian.org/articles/evans_marc/evans_marc_12book5_eng.htm).

Tertullian is emphasizing that the story in Acts is a dubious credential for Paul, if one is objective. Why must Jesus have belatedly thought to add a thirteenth apostle? Was God pressured to pick someone who was attacking the church and could not have planned this out better? Is this the best credential that Paul can come up with? Tertullian says we would precisely suspect Paul to be a false apostle because Jesus warned us that many would come in his name but be false prophets. Tertullian refers to the “many false prophets who will come and say ‘I am [of] Christ.’” (Luke 21:8.) Finally, Tertullian says Paul is basically the only witness for his own apostleship, and that is invalid. (See John 5:31.)

Tertullian then says in the quote above that he asks all these hard questions to force Marcion to prove Paul’s authority apart from the twelve. Tertullian says Paul’s authority is valid only to the extent it derives from the apostolic twelve and *their* teaching. There is no unique authority that Paul can ever have apart from the twelve, as Marcion was claiming.

Tertullian then goes on to prove that Paul is “his apostle” but only by Tertullian’s elaborate effort to prove Paul does not contradict the twelve (*i.e.*, Matthew and John). Tertullian’s arguments in the balance of Book 5 of *Against Marcion* (as well as in Book I) reveal efforts to save Paul as the source of *edifying* material by harmonizing him with Jesus, as we shall see in the next section.

Furthermore, elsewhere Tertullian denies that Paul had any experience in his heavenly visions that would allow him to contradict the Gospel message. Some were apparently claiming in Tertullian’s day, as they do now, that Paul received ongoing revelations by being taken up into the third heaven where Paul heard “unspeakable” mysteries. Then some argued these visions give Paul a priority over the apostolic accounts of Matthew and John. Paul could give contrary principles to what Matthew or John said because Jesus gave Paul a subsequent revelation. Tertullian disagreed:

Now, although Paul was carried away even to the third heaven, and was caught up to paradise [implied in 2 Cor. 12:4], and heard certain revelations there, **yet these cannot possibly seem to have qualified him for (teaching) another doctrine**, seeing that their very nature [*i.e.*, they were ‘unspeakable’] was such as to render them communicable to no human being.<sup>12</sup>

In conclusion, Tertullian’s statements in *Against Marcion* and *Prescription Against Heretics* completely marginalized the status of Paul. The church was being forced to examine Paul’s credentials. Tertullian found them wanting. Yet, Tertullian was not through.

---

*Tertullian Criticizes Every Pauline Doctrine of Marcion*

Tertullian throughout *Against Marcion* shows how Marcion’s understanding of Paul does not square with reason, Jesus, or Paul himself. Tertullian’s approach is typically “Paul says this,” but ‘you Marcion do not understand.’ However, in a stretch of four chapters beginning at chapter 23 to chapter 27 of Book One, Tertullian does a 180 degree turn. He discusses doctrines of Marcion which come from Paul but Tertullian never mentions Paul. Then Tertullian crushes each doctrine in turn. The interesting thing is that each of these doctrines were *unquestionably Pauline*. However, Tertullian no longer could attack Marcion for taking Paul out of context or misunderstanding him. These topics that Tertullian attacked in chapters 23 through 27 were: salvation by faith alone, eternal security, predestination and total depravity.

---

12. Tertullian, *The Prescription Against Heretics*, Ch. XXIV, available online from <http://www.tertullian.org/anf/anf03/anf03-24.htm>, quoting entire text from *Anti-Nicene Fathers* Vol. III.

What was Tertullian's method in this regard? Instead of quoting Paul or using clearly Pauline verbiage, and then explaining his 'true meaning,' Tertullian simply destroyed the substance behind all of Paul's major doctrines. Tertullian did so with logic and reason deduced from the nature of God revealed in Scripture. Paulinists today might not accept these deductions because Tertullian does not use our modern 'citation' method to refute a point. However, the issue I am raising here is *not* to ask you to *agree with Tertullian*. Rather I ask you to acknowledge that the very early church *was proving as heresy* everything that Paulinists emphasize today as valid.

*Tertullian on Predestination: Is Double Predestination Fair? Can Marcion's God Be Truly Good If He Thwarts Salvation In The Greater Part of Humanity?*

- "Now, when the greater part thus perish, how can that goodness [of God] be defended as a perfect one which is inoperative in most cases, is somewhat only in few, naught in many, succumbs to perdition, and **is a partner with destruction** [*i.e.*, wills the lost to perdition]? And if so many shall miss salvation, it will not be with goodness, but with malignity, that the greater perfection will lie. For as it is the operation of goodness which brings salvation, **so is it malevolence which thwarts it** [*i.e.*, if it is goodness of God that predestines salvation, Marcion must imply it is evil in God that intentionally thwarts it]." (*Against Marcion* 1.24.)<sup>13</sup>

*Tertullian on Total Depravity and Justification of the Ungodly Rather than the Righteous: Why Would God Capriciously Grant Salvation On Enemies Rather than Prefer Those Who Love Him and Are Righteous?*

- "Now I deny that the goodness of Marcion's god is rational, on this account first, because it proceeded to the **salvation of a human creature which was alien to him** [*i.e.*, an enemy not seeking Him.] [I omit here T.'s discussion on limits to *love of enemies* principle.]....Since, therefore, the first step in the rea-

---

13. You can find this at Calvin College's online resources at [http://ccel.org/fathers2/ANF-03/anf03-28.htm#P3804\\_1266834](http://ccel.org/fathers2/ANF-03/anf03-28.htm#P3804_1266834)

sonableness of the divine goodness is that it displays itself on its **proper object in righteousness** [*i.e.*, a person seeking God and to please Him, not an enemy], and only at its second stage on an alien object by a redundant righteousness over and above that of scribes and Pharisees [*i.e.*, apply kindness, not salvation, to enemies], how comes it to pass that the second is attributed to him [*i.e.*, salvation for enemies] who fails in the first [*i.e.*, salvation for those who are not enemies], not having man for his proper object, and who makes his goodness on this very account defective? Moreover, how could a defective benevolence, which had no proper object whereon to expend itself, overflow on an alien one? Clear up the first step, and then vindicate the next.... Suppose now the divine goodness begin at the second stage of its rational operation, that is to say, on the stranger [*i.e.*, salvation for them], this second stage will not be consistent in rationality if it be impaired in any way else. For only then will even the second stage of goodness, that which is displayed towards the stranger, be accounted rational, when it **operates without wrong to him who has the first claim** [*i.e.*, preference to save enemies/strangers is wrong if it neglects those who are seeking God]. It is righteousness which before everything else makes all goodness rational. It will thus be rational in its principal stage, when manifested on its proper object, if it be righteous. And thus, in like manner, it will be able to appear rational, when displayed towards the stranger, if it be not unrighteous. **But what sort of goodness is that which is manifested in wrong, and that in behalf of an alien creature?** For peradventure a benevolence, even when operating injuriously, might be deemed to some extent rational, if exerted for one of our own house and home. By what rule, however, can **an unjust benevolence, displayed on behalf of a stranger, to whom not even an honest one is legitimately due, be defended as a rational one?** (Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 1.23.)<sup>14</sup>

*Is It True If God Be In You, and You Pay Him Homage, That God Will Never Inflict Punishment? Should We Never Fear God? Didn't Jesus Threaten to Throw The Sinner Outside Mean Loss of Salvation for a Sinning Christian? (Refutation of Eternal Security.)*

“[B]y the fear of the Lord men depart from evil.”  
Prov. 16:6

- “Listen, ye sinners; and ye who have not yet come to this, hear, that you may attain to such a pass! A better god has been discovered [*n.b.*, T. is mocking Marcion], who never takes offence, is never angry, never inflicts punishment, who has prepared no fire in hell, no gnashing of teeth in the outer darkness! He is purely and simply good. He indeed forbids all delinquency, **but only in word. He is in you, if you are willing to pay him homage....the Marcionites with such pretences, that they have no fear of their god at all.** They say it is only a bad man who will be feared, a good man will be loved. Foolish man, do you say that he **whom you call Lord ought not to be feared**, whilst the very title you give him indicates a power which must itself be feared? But how are you going to love, without some fear that you do not love?...Still more vainly do they act, who when asked, What is to become of **every sinner in that great day? reply, that he is to be cast away out of sight.** Is not even this a question of judicial determination? He is adjudged to deserve rejection, and that by a sentence of condemnation; unless **the sinner is cast away forsooth for his salvation**, that even a leniency like this may fall inconsistently with the character of your most good and excellent god! And what will it be to be cast away, but to lose that which a man was **in the way of obtaining**, were it not for his rejection—that is, **his salvation?** Therefore his being cast away will involve **the forfeiture of salvation**; and this sentence cannot possibly be passed

---

14. Paul teaches we are *all* enemies of God, but God then bestowed His mercy on us while we were *yet* sinners. (Rom. 5:10.) Tertullian says this is absurd because he believes there are those who seek after God. The Lord Almighty should *pick* them to bestow His mercy. Tertullian is basing this on Jesus' clear teaching of the saved fourth seed who had prior to hearing the word been a *good and noble heart*. (Luke 8:15.) However, a Paulinist does not acknowledge *ever* that such a person exists. Yet, the Bible teaches they do exist: *e.g.*, Job 1:1, 8.

upon him, except by an angry and offended authority, who is also the punisher of sin—that is, by a judge.” (Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, 1.27.)<sup>15</sup>

Thus, Tertullian crushed all the core teachings of Paulinism in our day. Tertullian was not alone. This was the standard viewpoint of the early post-apostolic church from 125 A.D. to 325 A.D. One can never find the slightest agreement in this period with eternal security, total depravity, predestination, bondage of the will, or salvation by faith alone (*i.e.*, repentance/works are not necessary). Instead, all were rejected *universally and expressly*, as we will next review.

---

*Patristic Era (125-325 A.D.) Rejected Paul's Salvation Doctrine*

Jesus' Words Only was the earliest post-apostolic standard of orthodoxy. The era that predates the Roman Catholic period is traditionally called the Patristic era. It spans 125 A.D. to 325 A.D. In this period, the bishop of Rome was just one of many bishops competing for influence within a loose fraternity of bishops in all major cities of the Mediterranean world. It is in that period we find church leaders, traditionally called the *fathers*, who are setting forth the earliest doctrines of churches *founded by the twelve apostles*. (This is why it is called the Patristic Era.) They thereby serve as a witness of what the twelve apostles *likely* must have been teaching. A

---

15. Tertullian's chapter title is interesting: "Dangerous Effects to Religion and Morality of the Doctrine of So Weak a God." He saw eternal security as a threat to morality. Tertullian repeats this attack on eternal security forcefully in his book *The Scorpion's Bite* (207 A.D.) He felt the doctrine sapped the resolve of those under persecution. Many were teaching that if you denied Christ, Christ would not deny you and you remained saved (quoting Paul in 2 Timothy). Tertullian regarded this eternal security doctrine as the *Scorpion's Bite*.

universal consensus from this early period would be a particularly compelling proof that a teaching had an origin with the twelve apostles.

What was the position of the early church leaders on salvation? Was it Pauline?

David Bercot, an attorney, has synthesized the beliefs of the church leaders in the post-apostolic era between 125 A.D. to 325 A.D. He is the author of the 703 page comprehensive *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs: A Reference Guide to More than 700 Topics Discussed by the Early Church Fathers* (Peabody, Mass.: Henrickson Publishing, 1998.) Based on this extraordinary research, Bercot claims “early Christians *universally* believed that works or obedience play an essential role in our salvation.”<sup>16</sup> This was completely contrary to Paul’s teaching in Ephesians 2:8-9.

If true, then Bercot’s claim causes us to ponder. Are we to believe the twelve apostle taught works were *not essential* to salvation? If we believe this, then we must also believe the church which had a diffuse organization as of 125 A.D. became heretical immediately after all the apostles died. This also had to occur simultaneously in numerous disparate congregations under different authorities. Further, as Paulinists concede, we have to believe this ‘heresy’ that rejected Paul’s doctrines on salvation continued universally for 1400 years until Luther rediscovered the true salvation formula in 1517. If Bercot is correct, the Paulinist asks us to swallow a host of implausibilities if we assume the twelve accepted Paul’s teaching on salvation.

Thus, Bercot’s claim is a big one. However, it is one which Bercot backs up with thorough quotes. For example, while the early church believed you were not saved by works

---

16. David W. Bercot, *Will the Real Heretics Please Stand Up: A New Look at Today’s Evangelical Christianity in the light of Early Christianity* (Texas: Scroll Publishing, 1999) at 57.

alone, they did not believe you were saved by faith alone. Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna, and at one-time pro-Paul, wrote:

He who raised Him from the dead will also raise us up—**if we do His will and walk in His commandments**, love what He loved, and keeping ourselves from all unrighteousness, covetousness, love of money, evil speaking, falsehood;...forgive, and it shall be forgiven unto you; be merciful, that ye may obtain mercy;.....(Polycarp, *Letter to the Philippians*, ch. 2.)<sup>17</sup>

Hermas, whose work of about 132 A.D. was one of the favorites of that early era, wrote: “**Only** those who fear the Lord and keep His commandments have life with God.” (Hermas, *Shepherd* II. comm. 7; III sim. 10 ch. 2.)

Clement of Alexandria (150-212 A.D.), an elder of his church and whose works quote the New Testament 2,400 times,<sup>18</sup> wrote around 190 A.D.:

Whoever obtains [the truth] and distinguishes himself in **good works shall gain the prize of everlasting life**....Some people correctly and adequately understand how [God provides necessary power], but attaching slight importance to the **works** that lead to salvation, they **fail to make the necessary preparation for attaining the objects of their hope**. (Clement, *Rich Man* chs. 1 & 2.)

“Even a baptized person loses the grace he has attained unless he remains innocent.”  
Cyprian  
(250 A.D.)  
*Anti-Nicene Fathers* Vol. 5  
at 542.

---

17.<http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/polycarp-roberts.html>

18.Josh McDowell, *Evidence that Demands A Verdict* (San Bernardino, CA: Here's Life, 1972) at 50-52.

In response to the Marcionites' claim that salvation was by faith alone, Clement further responded:

Let us not **merely call Him Lord**, for that will not save us. For He says, 'Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will be saved, but he who does what is right.' Thus, brothers, **let us acknowledge him by our actions....**This world, and the world to come are two enemies. This one means adultery, corruption, avarice, and deceit, while the other gives them up. We cannot, therefore, be friends of both. **To get the one, we must give the other up.** (*Second Epistle of Clement* ch. 4.)<sup>19</sup>

What led into this quote was Clement's explanation that a true confession of Christ is not with the lips but with the heart by *action*.

For He himself declares, 'Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I confess before my Father.' This, then, is our reward if we shall confess Him by whom we have been saved. But in what way shall we confess Him? **By doing what He says, and not transgressing His commandments, and by honouring Him not with our lips only, but with all our heart and all our mind.** For He says in Isaiah, 'This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.' (*Second Epistle of Clement*, ch.3.)

What if we should strive to win the crown in Christ, but commit sin *en route*? Clement is clear in the next quote below: damnation is the result for such a Christian. Clement did not acknowledge for a moment Paul's contrary teaching of eternal security in Romans 8:1 that there is now no con-

---

19.A reprint online from the Roberts-Donaldson translation is at <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/2clement-roberts.html> (last accessed 2005).

demnation for those in Christ Jesus. Nor did Clement recognize we can never separate ourselves from the love of God by *sinning*, as some today read Paul's words in Romans 8:39.<sup>20</sup> Clement wrote instead:

We must remember that he who strives in the corruptible contest, if ***he be found acting unfairly, is taken away and scourged, and cast forth from the lists***. What then think ye? If one does anything unseemly in the incorruptible contest, what shall he have to bear? For of ***those who do not preserve the seal*** [unbroken], [the Scripture] saith, 'Their worm shall not die, and their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be a spectacle to all flesh.' (Second Epistle of Clement ch. 7.)

These and numerous other sources demonstrate Paul's salvation theory was not recognized. Paul's ideas were that salvation was by a one-time faith *alone*, without works, and there was no condemnation once in Christ. (Eph. 2:8-9; Rom. 8:1.) However, the only proponents who took these verses *seriously* were the Marcionites. They were branded, however, as heretics by the early post-apostolic church. Paul's salvation formulas were never accepted in the universal post-apostolic Christian church from 125 A.D. to 325 A.D. In that period, Paul, even if quoted on salvation by faith, was *always* read to line up with Christ's emphasis on the *essential* nature of works and the damning power of sin in a Christian's life.

For example, Polycarp is the ***only*** ancient 'father' to quote Ephesians 2:8-9 that we are "saved by grace, not of works." (*Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians* 1:6.) Yet, in

---

20.If you go to [www.earlychristianwritings.com](http://www.earlychristianwritings.com), every time a verse is discussed in a patristic writing, it is linked. However, neither Romans 8:1 nor 8:39 are *ever once* cited by any patristic-era 'father.' See, <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/e-catena/romans8.html> (last accessed 2005).

the very next breath in the same epistle, Polycarp has a diametrically opposed idea of how we read Ephesians 2:8-9 today. Polycarp writes:

But He who raised Him up from the dead will raise up us also, ***if we do His will***, and ***walk in His commandments***, and love what He loved, ***keeping ourselves from all unrighteousness....***  
(*Epistle to the Philippians*, 2:13-14.)<sup>21</sup>

Thus, whenever tension between Paul and Jesus were apparent, our Lord Jesus was *never* interpreted to fit Paul, as is the norm today. As Bercot puts it:

The early Christians ***didn't put Paul's letters to the Romans and Galatians up on a pedestal above the teachings of Jesus and the other apostles***. They read Paul's words about grace in conjunction with...Scriptures [where Jesus requires endurance for salvation, Matt. 24:13, doing the will of God for salvation, Matt. 7:21, the resurrected will be those who have done good, John 5:28, 29, etc.] (Bercot, *Will the Real Heretics Stand Up*, *supra*, at 63.)

Calvin's research corroborates Bercot's position. Calvin was the second major figure in the Reformation after Luther. Calvin cited Augustine as the only early church figure who agreed with *any* aspect of salvation in Paul's teachings. However, Augustine was *from the mid-300s*. Even here, Augustine's agreement was limited to the teaching of predestination and perseverance in good works as a gift of God's divine intervention. Augustine did believe works were necessary. However, Augustine placed that requirement outside human responsibility. If God predestined a Christian to salvation, Augustine taught God would also give the gift of perse-

---

21. The epistle is available online from Calvin College at [http://ccel.org/fathers2/ANF-01/anf01-11.htm#P776\\_145896](http://ccel.org/fathers2/ANF-01/anf01-11.htm#P776_145896) (last accessed 2005).

verance in good works.<sup>22</sup> Thus, works were necessary, but God would give you the gift of doing good works if you were predestined. Accordingly, Augustine did not teach Paul's doctrine of salvation by faith alone. Regardless, the point is that Calvin like Bercot could find no one earlier who had any agreement with Paul's salvation doctrine. This is most revealing.

Thus, all the evidence strongly supports that salvation in the early post-apostolic church was never thought to be correctly stated by Paul as *faith-alone without works*. While Paul was quoted on salvation by faith, he was always put back in the context of Jesus' words. Paul was always then interpreted to line up with Jesus' emphasis on the essential nature of works for salvation, *i.e.*, obedience to Jesus' commandments, doing righteousness, charity, repentance from sin, etc. The early apostolic age emphasized *always* the damning effect of denying Christ or failing to obey Him. In the early church, salvation doctrine was dependent on Jesus' words alone.

**Table: Some Reasons Why Early Church Believed Works Essential**

| Verse                   | Condition                                      | Result  |
|-------------------------|--|---|
| 1 John 1:7              | "if we walk in the light"                      | "the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin" |
| Mark 13:13, Matt. 10:22 | If you "stand firm to the end"                 | You "will be saved"                                     |
| Matthew 6:12-15         | "if you forgive men when they sin against you" | "your heavenly Father will also forgive you."           |
| Matthew 12:48-50        | If you do "the will of my Father in heaven"    | You are "my brother, sister, etc."                      |

---

22. Ironically, it was Augustine who formulated all the core problematical doctrines of Roman Catholicism too. Thus, Calvin thought Augustine was heretical on almost everything but Paul's doctrine of predestination. Why should Calvin think someone so heretical on so many doctrines could be correct about just these few points?

*The Patristic Era Church Also Rejected  
Paul's Predestination Doctrine*

Further proof of the low regard for Paul can be seen in the early church's view of predestination. The early church from 125 A.D. to 325 A.D. universally rejected Paul's teachings on predestination. Paul was not named, but they *universally* regarded his teaching as blasphemy and impiety of the worst sort. Justin Martyr died in 165 A.D. by preferring execution than to renounce his faith in Christ. He explained:

We have learned it from the prophets, and we hold it to be true, that punishments, chastisements, and rewards are rendered according to each man's actions. Otherwise, if all things happen by fate, then nothing is in our own power. For if it is **predestined** that one man be good and another man evil, then the first is not deserving of praise or the other to be blamed. Unless humans have the power of avoiding evil and choosing good by free choice, they are not accountable for their actions—whatever they may be.... (Justin, *First Apology*, ch. 43.)

Clement, Archelaus, and Methodius all spoke against predestination, and in favor of free-will.<sup>23</sup>

The Epistle of Second Peter also reflects this early rejection of predestination. It states that God "is not **willing** that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:9.) If God is not *willing* any should perish but predestination of the lost were true, then God would not be willing to have happen what He supposedly predestines to happen. God would be schizophrenic. Evidently because 2 Peter 3:9 refutes predestination, Calvin was willing to reject the entire epistle as inspired. Calvin held tightly to Pauline predestination. Calvin declared Second Peter a false addition

---

23. Bercot, *Will the Real Heretics Please Stand Up*, *supra*, at 71.

to scripture.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, Second Peter likely is a pseudograph. Yet, even as such, 2 Peter 3:9 is still an early fourth century reflection of church doctrine. It proves the post-apostolic age rejected predestination of the lost.

Methodius, a Christian martyr from the late 200s, likewise said predestination doctrine was an impious (blasphemous) claim. He wrote:

Those who say that man does not have free will, but say that he is governed by the unavoidable necessities of fate, are **guilty of impiety toward God himself**, making Him out to be the cause and author of human evils. (Methodius, *The Banquet of the Ten Virgins*, Discourse 8, ch. 6.)

Methodius was not exaggerating the meaning behind Paul's writings on predestination. Calvin in explaining Paul's writings says Paul means that God predestines all evil—God actually *directs* all evil *thoughts* with its evil *outcome*. God does not merely allow evil to happen by God's permissive will. Calvin insists Paul means God makes all evil happen.<sup>25</sup>

It was not until Luther that predestination resurfaced as a doctrine again. Luther went even farther than Augustine in drawing out Paul's meaning. Luther insisted Paul meant God damns the lost to hell without any free-will opportunity to accept Jesus. He said that Paul's doctrine takes great faith because God "saves so few and

God's Will  
For Lost?  
"Have I any  
pleasure in the  
death of the  
wicked? sayeth  
the Lord Yahweh.  
And not rather  
that he should  
return from his  
way and live?...  
For I have no  
pleasure in the  
death of him that  
dies, says the  
Lord Yahweh.  
Wherefore turn  
yourselves and  
live."  
Ezek. 18:23, 32.

---

24. Appendix B: *How the Canon Was Formed* at page xix.

damns so many” yet we must believe God is “just” despite His own will “makes [the lost] necessarily damnable.” (Martin Luther, *Bondage of the Will*.) Even though this makes God abominable, Luther skates the issue by saying “it is not lawful” to ask why God does not “change this fault of will in every man.” Thus, Luther thought you proved you had great faith when you could believe Paul is correct that God is still just despite doing something so apparently unjust as damning people while depriving them of the ability of accept Him.

Neither Luther nor Calvin stopped and asked whether Paul could be inspired when Paul ascribes such incongruous impious behavior to God.

More important, the post-apostolic rejection of predestination from 125-325 A.D. proves that the universal church was still following Jesus’ words alone. Without naming Paul specifically, they rejected every word of Paul at odds with Jesus. In particular they rejected

**Geisler on Calvinist Predestination: “It is theologically inconsistent, philosophically insufficient, and morally repugnant.” (Norman Geisler)**

---

25. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* Book 1, ch. XVIII. For example, Calvin writes that God “directs [Satan and his angels’] malice to whatever end he pleases, and employs their iniquities to execute his judgments.” (*Institutes*, Ch. XVIII, Book 1, No. 1) Calvin says some dishonestly seek to evade this truth by claiming a distinction between God permitting evil and doing evil. But God “himself, however, openly declare[s] that he does this, [and hence God] repudiates the evasion.” *Id.* Calvin means that God’s word insists He does the evil. He does not merely permit it. Another example is Calvin says: “That men do nothing save at the secret instigation of God, and **do not discuss and deliberate on anything but what he has previously decreed with himself, and brings to pass by his secret direction**, is proved by numberless clear passages of Scripture.” *Id.* Later Calvin, twisting Scripture, insists: “The fiction of bare permission [of evil] is at an end,” meaning it is false that God *merely permits* evil rather than directs it. *Id.* It was largely this blasphemous teaching that first led me to ever question the doctrine of the Presbyterian church I attended.

the notion that the lost were damned due to God's predetermined will. Rather, God is not *willing* that any should perish. (John 3:16; *cf.* 2 Peter 3:9.)

Calvin's writings indirectly corroborate Bercot's conclusion. Calvin could not find anyone other than Augustine from the late 300s who agreed with Paul's doctrines. And Augustine's agreement was limited only to Paul's predestination doctrine.

---

*The Patristic Era Also Blasted Paul's  
Doctrine on Eating Idol Meat*

We previously demonstrated that Paul three times expresses complete indifference if a Christian eats meat sacrificed to idols. Paul would prohibit it only being eaten in front of a weaker brother who thinks an idol is something. (Romans 14:21; 1 Corinthians 8:4-13, and 1 Corinthians 10:19-29.) (For further discussion, see page 122 *et seq.*)

In the Patristic Era (125-325 A.D.), Paul's teaching was condemned with no thought of even discussing Paul. Irenaeus (120-202 A.D.) wrote in his *Against Heresies*, chapter XXIV, that Saturninus and Basilides were heretics because:

He attaches no importance to [the question regarding] meats offered in sacrifice to idols, thinks them of no consequence, and ***makes use of them without any hesitation***; he holds also the use of other things, and the practice of every kind of lust, a matter of perfect indifference.

By today's standards, however, Saturninus and Basilides are not heretics on the issue of idol meat. They simply took time to read Paul's words. They got the issue straightened out by Paul's clear permission to eat such meat. How-

ever, Irenaeus' view is so clearly opposed to Paul's teaching that it reminds us *how little regard* anyone had for Paul's words back then.

However, the most intriguing quote on this issue is Irenaeus' criticism of Valentinus as a heretic. In book II of *Against Heresies*, chapter XIV, we read:

Again, their opinion as to the indifference of [**eating of**] **meats** and other actions, and as to their thinking that, from the nobility of their nature, **they can in no degree at all contract pollution, whatever they eat** or perform, they have derived it from the Cynics, since they do in fact belong to the same society as do these [philosophers]. They also strive to transfer to [the treatment of matters of] faith that **hair-splitting and subtle mode of handling questions** which is, in fact, a copying of Aristotle.

Irenaeus precisely condemned the hair-splitting quibbling with God's commands that Paul utilized himself. Paul troubles us with questions such as 'do you think an idol is *really* something?' Can't you eat it 'if you don't believe in idols'? No one back in the Patristic era showed any appreciation for Paul's teaching or methodology in how to interpret God's commands. You did not try to find hair-splitting ways to devise exceptions to commands. You simply obeyed God's word.

---

### *What Explains Almost Two Millennia of Ignoring Paul's Teachings?*

As demonstrated above at page 425, all the churches founded by the apostles never taught after the apostles had died that salvation was by faith alone without works. Instead, all the apostolic churches taught salvation was by a faith that zealously seeks after God plus works. This formula was not

only true in the pre-Roman Catholic era (125-325 A.D.), but in the post-Catholic era from 325 A.D. to the present within the territories that comprised the Roman empire.<sup>26</sup> Likewise, salvation by faith-plus-works based on Jesus' words continued on in the East where the Orthodox church flourished. For fourteen hundred post-apostolic years, no one other than Marcion, the Paulicians, and Pelagius (410 A.D.) taught salvation by faith alone without works.<sup>27</sup> Yet all three were regarded universally by Christendom to be heretics.

Furthermore, for fourteen hundred post-apostolic years no one taught predestination or the bondage of the will except during a small episode where it appears in Augustine's writings from the 300s. Augustine endorsed these doctrines to condemn Pelagius as a heretic. However, Augustine's ideas on predestination and free-will never became official teachings of the Roman Catholic church. Once Pelagius was found a heretic, the issue died off. The Roman church instead always has taught humans have free-will. God foreknows whom He will save, but He does not compel them to believe.<sup>28</sup>

Another example was that in the entire post-apostolic era, no Christian leader ever agreed with Paul's teaching that we could eat meat sacrificed to idols. Paul's indifference on the issue was soundly condemned whenever discussed in the early church.

Thus, between 125 A.D. and 1517 A.D., no church body took Paul seriously. Only Marcion did. Only Pelagius did. Only Augustine did on predestination as a temporary tool to destroy Pelagius. However, Pelagius—a pariah of Reformed theology—not only taught free-will but also Paul's

---

26. The Roman Catholic Church at the Council of Trent (ca. 1543), in its Sixth Session on Justification, declared as heretical two teachings in particular: (1) that "the sinner is justified by faith alone" (Canon 9) and (2) that "men are justified either by the sole imputation of the justice of Christ or by the sole remission of sins...." (Canon 11.)

doctrine of salvation by faith alone. (See footnote 27 below.) Yet, Pelagius and the Marcionites were expelled from the church in both East and West as heretics!

---

*The Eastern Orthodox Church & Paul*

We in the West often ignore there was an older and wider church than Roman Catholicism: the Orthodox. Its view on Pauline doctrine deserves great respect due to its antiquity. This original church is still going strong with **250**

---

27. A little known fact about Pelagius is that he taught salvation was by faith alone. In Augustine's attacks on him as a heretic, he focused on Pelagius' belief that human free-will could, in theory, permit one to live a sinless life. Augustine never revealed what truly made Pelagius dangerous. Pelagius was resorting to Marcion's doctrine that Paul taught salvation by faith alone. Zimmer in the modern era discovered a work by Pelagius that was spared destruction. It survived because it was miscatalogued as a work of Jerome. In it, Pelagius defends that free-will allows one to live a sinless life. However, in this same book entitled *Commentary on the Epistle of St. Paul* (410 A.D.), Pelagius is a proponent of salvation by faith alone, without repentance. Pelagius even ridiculed James' doctrines. The *Catholic Encyclopedia* comments on this modern discovery, noting Pelagius taught: "By justification we are indeed cleansed of our personal sins through faith alone (loc. cit., 663, 'per solam fidem justificat Deus impium convertendum'), but this pardon (gratia remissionis) implies no interior renovation of sanctification of the soul." (Zimmer, "Realencyklopädie für protest," *Theologie* XV, 753 (Leipzig, 1904.)) The *Catholic Encyclopedia* comments: "Luther's boast of having been the first to proclaim the doctrine of abiding faith [must be re-evaluated because] Pelagius [earlier] insists expressly (loc. cit. 812), 'Ceterum sine operibus fidei, non legis, mortua est fides.' [transl. "Moreover, without the work of faith, not of law, faith is dead."] Pelagius was making fun of James by twisting his words around to sound Pauline. This raises the question whether Augustine went after Pelagius merely on the issue of capacity of free-will to avoid sin or because Pelagius rejected James' teaching in favor of Paul's on salvation. For more on this, see "Pelagius," *Catholic Encyclopedia*, reprinted at <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11604a.htm> (last visited 2005).

**million members.** (Protestantism represents, by comparison, only 350 million members worldwide.) We know the Orthodox today in the West as the Eastern Orthodox church.

The Orthodox church has continuously flourished from the first century in Israel, Ethiopia, Egypt, Turkey, Syria, etc. Each national church traces their roots to James as the first bishop of Jerusalem. They insist it was to him alone that the original bishops looked to for guidance. (“Eastern Orthodox Church,” *Encarta*.) The Orthodox maintain an unbroken list of bishops in all its original territories (including Rome), tracing back *name-by-name* right down to the period of James and Paul. As Paul says, the Jerusalem church, in those earliest days, was regarded as the “mother of us all.” (Cf. Gal. 4:21-26.)

But isn't the Roman Catholic Church the original church? No. This is pure myth. The original church was the one founded at Jerusalem and led by James, described in Acts chapter 15. ***Ten years later, Peter went to Rome and founded a church there.*** Peter also had founded a church at Antioch in Syria.<sup>29</sup> Neither the one at Rome nor at Antioch could claim superiority over the other. Each was founded by Peter.

---

28. In 1520, Luther attacked the doctrine of free-will. Pope Leo X condemned Luther's claims. Erasmus, a Catholic reformer, in 1524 rebutted Luther, pointing out that if man lacks a free-will ability to do good, then God is unjust to condemn man for sin. Luther's response in 1525 was to say that Paul's doctrine of grace excludes any ability of man to contribute *positively* toward his salvation. Otherwise salvation would be by works. However, Luther's response did not address the question posed by Erasmus: how can God condemn the lost if they have no free-will ability to do good? Regardless, this episode demonstrates that Paul's doctrines are used to defend the notion that man lacks free-will to do good. Paul teaches God gives man a will bound to evil unless God 'in His infinite wisdom' having nothing to do with our behavior decides to spare some. God then infuses the few with the will to believe and be saved. *Then, and only then, can man do good.* For Jesus' contrary teaching, see *Jesus' Idea of Faith* at [www.jesuswordsonly.com](http://www.jesuswordsonly.com).

29. See discussion of the Jerusalem church at 242, 295, 298, and 304.

Furthermore, prior to the 300s, the bishops throughout the Roman and non-Roman world operated as one inter-connected Christian church. There was no single head except initially James at Jerusalem. In the 300s, the Roman bishop, with the power of the Emperor behind him, began to exert direct control over churches within the Roman territories. This led to the Roman bishop (aka *the pope*) developing doctrines divergent from the bishops outside of Roman territorial control. These Orthodox Christian bishops outside the control of Rome in 1054 excommunicated the bishop of Rome (aka *the pope*). Particularly irksome to the original church of Christ was that the Roman bishop (aka *the pope*) had developed doctrines on purgatory and original sin which the Eastern bishops rejected. However, the grounds of divorce in 1054, also known as the Great Schism, rested upon the fact that the bishop of Rome (aka *the pope*) altered the Nicene Creed. Since then, the bishops outside of Roman influence have called themselves the Orthodox Church. As already noted, we in the West call them and their 250 million members the Eastern Orthodox Church.

What is the Orthodox Church's view on Paul's teachings? Despite Paul's presence in their New Testament canon, the Orthodox church's official salvation doctrine as far back as the post-apostolic records take us (125 A.D.) up through today completely ignores Paul. Not a single doctrine of Paul surfaces in the Orthodox' church doctrine. Not the doctrine of original sin from Romans chapter 5 (which the Orthodox specifically reject). Not predestination of the will. Not total depravity. Not grace alone. Not faith alone. Not one iota of anything uniquely Pauline appears in the official teachings of the Orthodox church from the earliest post-apostolic records to the present. As one Calvinist Reformed writer puts it in his critique of the Eastern Orthodox:

Eastern Orthodox Christians reject the Reformed [*i.e.*, Pauline] teaching of the natural man's ***bondage of the will*** as well as the ***Doctrines of Grace***. They reject the Reformed view

of **Predestination**....They reject the doctrine of **justification by grace alone through faith alone**. The Orthodox reject the biblical idea (Romans 5) of **inherited (imputed) guilt**...Orthodox hold to baptismal regeneration—no one can be saved unless he is baptized with water.<sup>30</sup>

For the Orthodox, only the words of Christ and His twelve apostles have influence over belief and practice. Their foremost creed was the Nicene Creed (325 A.D.). To this day, they insist it is the most accurate summary of the faith of the Church. Yet, this Creed too contains *nothing* uniquely from Paul!

So what does the Eastern Orthodox church teach about salvation? Most succinctly, it teaches you have to stay on the narrow road of following Jesus. This aims at being perfect in conduct, obeying all of Jesus' commands. We will never be perfect while on earth, but starting with baptism and following Jesus we will become more and more like God in perfection. This is called *theosis*. It means becoming like God by imitation, not like God in one's nature. For support, they rely upon Jesus' words: "whoever obeys my teaching should never ever die." (John 8:51.) When one sins, the Orthodox urge repentance and penance. Their doctrines are heavily focused therefore on Jesus' teachings. The Orthodox wholly ignore Paul's unique doctrines.

In fact, perhaps most startlingly of all, the Orthodox have an unbroken string of twenty centuries of ongoing belief in the validity of the true Saturday Sabbath. This is hardly a *Pauline* view. This was the early church's practice as well.<sup>31</sup>

The Orthodox' views on salvation are hard to amalgamate in our way of thinking because of our long conditioning to Paulinism. We need to mull over their ideas. They are calling for an internal transformation, not merely a verbal or

---

30.<http://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/topic> (last visited 2004).

internal confession of some *knowledge about Jesus*. When we realize this is their point, it is truly closer to Christ's teaching. It completely ignores the Paulinist-inspired teachings of the Western church that focus on a mental belief change.

Regardless, what cannot be denied is the Orthodox represent a longer tradition than Roman Catholicism. Their doctrines are deeply rooted in the post-apostolic period of 125 A.D. to 325 A.D. Yet, it thoroughly rejects everything that Paul uniquely stands for. Are all 250 million Orthodox Christians lost because they emphasize Jesus' words? Whatever the answer, the history of the Orthodox church proves one thing: Paul early on and a long time thereafter was never taken seriously.

---

31. As one encyclopedia says, the "Eastern Orthodox churches distinguish between 'the sabbath' (Saturday) and 'the Lord's day' (Sunday), and both continue to play a special role for the believers...though the Lord's day with the weekly Liturgy is clearly given more emphasis. Catholics put little emphasis on that distinction and most of them, at least in colloquial language, speak of Sunday as the sabbath." (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sabbath>.) Thus, the Orthodox not only reject all uniquely Pauline teachings, they also reject Paul's fright over the Galatians observing "days" (Sabbath). (Gal.4:10.) Irenaeus (130-202 A.D.) of Lyon, France gave the early rationale at total odds with Paul. "The decalogue [Ten Commandments] however was *not cancelled by Christ*, but is always in force: men were never released from its commandments." ("Against Heresies," *Anti-Nicene Fathers*, Bk. IV, Ch. XVI, at 480.) He then explains the Sabbath must be kept on Saturday as a sign. This explains why the earliest Christian tradition followed Saturday Sabbath except at Rome and Alexandria. Socrates the Historian (b. 380 A.D.) wrote: "For although *almost all Churches throughout the world* celebrate the sacred mysteries [the Lord's Supper] on the Sabbath of every week, yet the Christians of Alexandria and *Rome*, on account of some ancient tradition, refuse to do this." (Socrates, *Ecclesiastical History*, Bk 5, Ch. 22.289). Likewise Bingham summarizes numerous ancient sources: "The ancient Christians were very careful in the observation of *Saturday*, or the seventh day... It is plain that all the *Oriental [Eastern] churches*, and the *greatest part of the world*, observed the Sabbath as a festival... Athanasius likewise tells us that they held religious assemblies on the Sabbath, not because they were infected with Judaism, but to worship Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath, Epiphanius says the same." (Joseph Bingham, *Antiquities of the Christian Church* (1878) Vol. II, Bk. xx, Ch. 3, Sec. 1, 66. 1137,1136).

*Protestants Agree For 1400 Years No One Had The Correct Salvation Formula*

Protestant historians agree. For over fourteen centuries after the death of the apostles, the Protestant story agrees that Paul was *never followed* by the *official churches, either East or West*. It was Luther who alone in this period first discovered Paul in what eventually became a large-scale movement. “But when we say Luther ‘rediscovered’ this [salvation] doctrine, we are implying that the doctrine had been lost or obscured *between the New Testament era and Luther’s day*.”<sup>32</sup> I will label this the Luther Rediscovery Thesis.

However, in this Luther Rediscovery Thesis, this departure from *true Christianity* includes the *post-apostolic era in both East and West*. This Luther Rediscovery Thesis brands all the churches founded by the twelve apostles as quickly having become heretical. It is not merely the Roman Bishop who strays. Rather, *all* the bishops everywhere ***all simultaneously became heretical***. This has to include what we know today as the Eastern Orthodox who *never* were under the control of the Roman Catholic Church. At the outset, the Orthodox bishops were far more numerous and territorially larger than Roman Catholicism. They grew independent from the bishop of Rome (*i.e.*, whom we today call *pope*). They even later excommunicated the Roman *pope*

“The truth of the New Testament church-gathering was lost for 1400 years....Luther, Calvin, and others were used of the Lord to rediscover the truth of salvation by grace at the end of the dark ages.”  
*Assembly Messenger*  
Vol. 99, No. 26

---

32.Sermon, Dr. Michael Haykin, Grace Fellowship Church, Toronto (January 24, 2004), reprinted at <http://www.gfcto.com/articles/theology/nof3.htm> (last visited 2005.)

in 1054 for his innovations on the apostolic faith. These Orthodox Christians existed in Egypt, Ethiopia, Carthage, Turkey, and numerous other regions of the Middle-East.

Thus, the Luther Rediscovery Thesis insists the Orthodox—although independent from the RCC—departed *simultaneously* into heresy.

The Luther Rediscovery Thesis also teaches the early church leaders in the Western territories between 125-325 A.D. simultaneously turned heretical. This cannot be attributed to Roman Catholic corruption. There was not yet any papacy at Rome that could exert its influence as *binding* over Polycarp, Papias, Irenaeus, Origen, Justin Martyr and many others in the West. These voices are simply students of the apostles, not disciples of the bishop (pope) of Rome. In fact, none of these men knew of a Roman *papacy* as we do today. There were no Roman catechisms to which they had to conform. Such catechisms came much later—after the emperor Constantine (post-325 A.D.) and his successors gave muscle to the words of the bishop of Rome.<sup>33</sup> Thus, the Luther Rediscovery Thesis must also explain how in the Western pre-*papist* Roman church these early leaders from 125-325 A.D. quickly abandoned apostolic teachings if the apostles shared Paul's peculiar doctrines.

---

33. The first use of the title *pontiff* or *pontifex summus* for the bishop of Rome dates to the Sixth Century. This is recorded in Niermeyer's *Mediae Latinitatis Lexicon Minus*, citing the *Leonine Sacramentary* of the late sixth century. The term *papa* from which *pope* derives in English means *father*. It was used early on of *any* priest. It is impossible to say early on the title *papa* had the connotation we give it today. The notion of superiority of the bishop of Rome, justified on the successor-to-Peter principle, first was asserted in the late half of the second century. However, this attempt was "strongly criticized even by friends of Rome such as Irenaeus of Lyon." (B. Schimmelpfennig, *The Papacy* (New York: Columbia Press, 1992) at 12-14, *viz*, 12-13.) The *papacy* was not recognized until the Fourth Century but only in Roman territories.

In sum, we can see the Luther Rediscovery Thesis has a fatal problem when it comes to the validity of Paul's salvation doctrine. It suffers from the same notion that Marcion had—he claimed that he alone found the true gospel in Paul twenty to eighty years after the Twelve Apostles died.

In response to Marcion, Tertullian in 207 A.D. ridiculed this idea. Tertullian's language is even more apt for the modern claim that the church suffered 1400 years of *error of ignoring Paul* in the early *post-apostolic churches everywhere*. Tertullian skewered Marcion's similar claim, saying:

[I insist that] no other teaching will have the right of being received as apostolic than that which is at the present day proclaimed in the churches of apostolic foundation. You will, however, find no church of apostolic origin but such as reposes its Christian faith in the Creator [being the same in the Hebrew Scriptures as in the new]. ***But if the churches shall prove to have been corrupt from the beginning, where shall the pure ones be found?*** Will it be amongst the adversaries of the Creator [*i.e.*, Marcion saying the God of the New is not the God of the Old]? Show us, then, one of your churches, ***tracing its descent from an apostle***, and you will have gained the day. (Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, 1.23.)<sup>34</sup>

The same point holds true here. If one believes the Luther Rediscovery Thesis, one has to believe the very same churches founded by the twelve apostles were corrupt soon after the apostles died, missing out on Paul's teachings. You are being asked to believe this happened simultaneously among diverse churches in diverse locations even though there was no single controlling bishop after 70 A.D. The bishops in the 125-325 A.D. period did not yet know of a superior

---

34. [http://ccel.org/fathers2/ANF-03/anf03-28.htm#P3804\\_1266834](http://ccel.org/fathers2/ANF-03/anf03-28.htm#P3804_1266834)

council that could impose doctrine on everyone simultaneously. Yet, despite this diffuse spread of churches, run by independent bishops, we cannot find a single church tracing to one of the twelve from the Patristic Era who ever espouses Paul's core salvation doctrines. None teach his ideas of predestination. None teach his ideas of total depravity. None teach his ideas of salvation by faith alone. Instead, Paul's doctrines were universally rejected.

Tertullian rightly argues in the case of Marcion that such facts invalidate some *late* discovery previously not taught in any early apostolic church. Here, Paulinists assume there was 1400 years of darkness. Neither Paul's salvation doctrine nor most of his unique doctrines can be found in the apostolic *early church*. Instead, Paul's major doctrines were ignored for 1400 years until Luther 'rediscovered' them. Tertullian's logic is right. It is absurd to believe that the early bishops at diffuse and separate churches which had been founded by the apostles could reject Paul's doctrines unless such rejection was indeed the *orthodox* view of the *original twelve apostles themselves*.

The lesson for us is we need to **steer back** to Jesus' words as the sole test of orthodoxy. If you cannot find justification for a doctrine in Jesus' words or the inspired Scripture that *preceded* Jesus, then you do not have to follow it. If a doctrine is proposed, whether from Paul or anyone else, that does not line up with Jesus' words or the inspired Scripture that preceded Jesus, then it is not possibly a prophetic voice. We must not fall into the same trap the Young Prophet suffered when he trusted the Old Prophet who permitted him to do what God previously prohibited. (1 Kings 13.) We must not elevate such a voice to respect as *inspired*.

**“Well-meaning congregations and pastors go to great lengths to steer around the teachings of Jesus that are hard to believe.”  
John MacArthur (2003)**