

Trajectories on Violence, Slavery and Misogyny in the Bible

Section 01: A Trajectory on Slavery in the Pauline Corpus

John Dominic Crossan informs us that many critical scholars believe that seven of the thirteen New Testament epistles attributed to Paul were *definitely* written by him, three were *probably* not written by him and three were almost *certainly* were not written by him. This should not be surprising in and of itself. Pseudonymous composition was a common thing in antiquity showing up in many Jewish, Roman and Christian writings. A host of Gospels (Thomas, Peter) and other non-canonical works with spurious authorship are evident in the second century and even Jude in the New Testament quotes from the spurious 1 Enoch. Paul was a prime candidate for pseudonymous composition given his popular appeal and authority as a Christian. Christians defending the traditional authorship of the Gospels often ask why the Church would attribute a gospel to a less prominent follower of Jesus such as Mark if they were making it up? A good question for Gospel authorship but if we turn that same type of thinking towards the Pauline corpus, the appeal of writing in Paul's name is quite obvious. We do know of several works outside the New Testament written in Paul's name (Paul and Seneca, 3 Corinthians and Acts of Paul). Tertullian considered *Acts of Paul* heretical because it permitted women to teach and baptize—something very much relevant to the discussion in the next section on patriarchy.

None of this demonstrates that Paul did not author all the epistles bearing his name in the New Testament but is meant as an introduction for readers new to these issues. This is a thing in New Testament criticism. Every work has to be analyzed, its textual history ascertained and its authorship validated. Scholars have generally agreed seven of the thirteen letters belong to Paul and three most likely do not. The authorship of the other three is somewhat divided though critical scholarship leans away from traditional authorship. The discussion below is going to assume Paul only wrote seven letters now attributed to him in the New Testament.

There is no issue with a disciple of Paul writing in his name to address changing situations, but what if these later authors writing in Paul's name contradict him and a trajectory emerges?

[Crossan](#): "In other words, the radical Paul is being deradicalized, sanitized and Romanized. His radical views on, for example, slavery and patriarchy, are being retrofitted into Roman cultural expectations and Roman social presuppositions." Crossan's list is similar to that of most critical scholars minus the adjectives for describing Paul in each stratum.

Real-Paul	Post-Paul	Anti-Paul
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Romans • 1 Corinthians • 2 Corinthians • Galatians • Philippians • 1 Thessalonians • Philemon 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ephesians • Colossians • 2 Thessalonians 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 Timothy • 2 Timothy • Titus <p>Collectively: the Pastorals.</p>

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Real Paul on Slavery	Post-Paul on Slavery	Anti-Paul on Slavery
<p>Two texts from real-Paul depict him throwing down the distinctions between slaves and free (Gal 3:28 and 1 Cor 12:13). These do not necessitate dismissing all social customs as the passage on head-coverings shows.</p> <p>The most important Real-Paul text is the letter to Philemon on behalf of Onesimus, a converted slave. We learn it is Philemon's duty to not just forgive Onesimus but to embrace him as a brother in both flesh and the Lord. Paul could command this but wants Philemon to do it on his own and knows he will go above and beyond even what Paul is asking. There is rhetorical brilliance in the letter and Paul is essentially telling him without telling him to free Onesimus. He is no longer his slave but to be welcomed as a brother. This is not just <i>spiritual</i> freedom as <i>flesh</i> makes clear. For real-Paul in the 50s, a Christian cannot own another Christian as a slave. They cannot be unequal in Christ.</p>	<p>For Paul it was Philemon's duty to release Onesimus but now post-Paul in Ephesians 6:5-9 presumes Christians can own slaves and that Christian slaves should obey their Christian earthly masters in all that they do as if they were serving God. Yet it also dares to give instruction to Christian slave owners, albeit in fewer words. Crossan writes, "A Roman paterfamilias might growl: How dare you tell my slaves about my obligations to them, and by the way, do not dare to address my slaves directly rather than through me."</p> <p>This Paul was not as radical as real-Paul but certainly was conservative in the sense that Roman sensibilities would still be stepped on here.</p>	<p>Titus 2:9-10 reads, "9 Tell slaves to be submissive to their masters and to give satisfaction in every respect; they are not to talk back, 10 not to pilfer, but to show complete and perfect fidelity, so that in everything they may be an ornament to the doctrine of God our Savior."</p> <p>Notice how in anti-Paul the statement is no longer addressed directly to slaves but to free people or their masters. Crossan writes, "Apart from the concluding "God our Savior," any Roman paterfamilias would nod approval to this injunction. Obligations are from slaves to masters, with nothing said about any reciprocal ones from master to slave."</p>

Crossan writes, "For Paul, Christ had died by Rome to live *with* God. So, by baptism—imagined as a metaphor of burying in the grave rather than a metaphor of washing in the baptismal font . . . Christians had died to Rome to live for God . . . That is, they have died to the core Roman values of victory and hierarchy and their derivative values of patriarchy and slavery."

Admittedly there are a lot of moving parts in this interpretation, but notice how real-Paul in the 50s is domesticated and normalized to Roman society over time. Crossan: "'Paul's vision of the *radicality of God* has been co-opted by the Roman *normalcy of civilization*.'" We see God's accommodated scripture in tension with itself.