

The Source and Scope of Paul's Apostolic Authority¹

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I. INTRODUCTION

One of Paul's primary goals in writing a number of his letters was to respond to challenges from various opponents, both internal and external to the recipients' contexts.² In many instances Paul seeks to reassert his authority in the face of these confrontations. Nevertheless, and unexpectedly, there are occasions when he is instead at pains to draw attention to ways in which his authority is actually constrained in particular and important ways.³ Some of these restrictions are divinely imposed; others are self-imposed in response to specific circumstances; and still others are a consequence of having to negotiate the extent of authority he has with a particular church. However, subsequent

¹A draft of this paper was presented to the "Authority and Influence in Biblical Texts" seminar at the 2013 Society of Biblical Literature International Meeting in St Andrews, Scotland, in my capacity as a guest researcher of the Research Institute for Theology and Religion, University of South Africa.

²The reconstruction of opponents or detractors is particularly necessary in critical interpretation of Galatians, 1-2 Corinthians and Philippians.

³Cf., Andrew D. Clarke, *A Pauline Theology of Leadership*, Library of New Testament Studies, 362 (London: T & T Clark, 2008) 106, "Paul's power rhetoric and his power dealings need to be explored within their wider context, including the ways in which Paul defined the limits of his power, the ways in which he undermined the power that was inherent in his own position, how he responded to the power plays of others, and how, and when, he articulated what are appropriate power strategies for local leaders to adopt."

generations of Paul's interpreters have often insufficiently noted the apostle's awareness of these limitations or distinctions.⁴

With no access beyond the texts either to the author(s)⁵ or original recipients of the letters, it is to be expected that where these texts are considered to have a continuing authority, many interpreters will ascribe a more generic and uniform authority across the corpus of letters than the apostle initially presented or is likely to have conceived. This will sometimes entail the unintended consequence of sidelining those passages where Paul concedes authority. By contrast, in passages where the apostle's authority is in any case to the fore and to be locally applied, its scope may inadvertently be extended further still by universalizing its sphere of impact beyond the original contexts. In stark contrast to either of these tendencies, a recently growing hermeneutical phenomenon has been to suggest that any apparent limitations Paul presents in regard to his authority are a subtle, even manipulative, smoke screen for underlying intentions that were actually more authoritarian or controlling.⁶ The effect of each of these moves is a heightened focus on the apostle's authority.

Each of these stances begs subtle, but important, questions about understanding the differences between Paul's authority and what might be called Pauline authority, between the authority he understood himself to be exercising in a particular context *qua* living apostle and the more transcendent authority of the author's words as biblical text, subsequently applied in different times and places.⁷ (This distinction is especially

⁴Cf., Hans von Campenhausen, *Ecclesiastical Authority and Spiritual Power in the Church of the First Three Centuries* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 52-53, "The ... stress on the self-limitation of the apostolic authority may have been a personal trait of Paul himself; certainly, in so far as it is consciously elaborated, it goes beyond the general concept in primitive Christianity of the apostle's role and character. It is understandable too that a later generation, even when it appealed specifically to Paul, should have failed to preserve his discovery."

⁵While most of the apostle's extant letters identify Paul as one of a number of co-senders, the significance of this has not been adequately integrated into studies of Pauline authority. Cf., however, Karen E. Fulton, "The Phenomenon of Co-Senders in Ancient Greek Letters and the Pauline Epistles," Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation (University of Aberdeen, 2011), which compares Paul's practice with that of other Graeco-Roman letter writers.

⁶Graham Shaw, *The Cost of Authority: Manipulation and Freedom in the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1983) provides one of the earlier treatments that argues Paul's exercise of power is essentially abusive. More recent studies include Elizabeth A. Castelli, *Imitating Paul: A Discourse of Power*, Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991); and Sandra Hack Polaski, *Paul and the Discourse of Power*, Gender Culture Theory; Biblical Seminar (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999). For a contrastive reading of Paul's engagement with power, see Kathy Ehrensperger, *Paul and the Dynamics of Power: Communication and Interaction in the Early Christ-Movement*, Library of New Testament Studies, 325 (London: T & T Clark, 2007); and Clarke, *A Pauline Theology of Leadership*.

⁷John K. Goodrich, *Paul as an Administrator of God in 1 Corinthians: The Graeco-Roman Context of 1 Corinthians*, SNTSMS, 152 (Cambridge: CUP, 2012) 2-12, presents an overview of recent studies on Pauline apostolic authority in regard to 1 Corinthians, and

significant, of course, for those interpreters who conclude that some "Pauline" letters should be regarded as pseudonymous, though perhaps still authoritative.) Without here engaging with the appropriateness of any of these responses to the apostle's authority, nor denying the authoritative role of text as Scripture within a given faith community, this article seeks to draw particular attention firstly back to the statements in which the apostle frames for his first readers both the source and scope of his authority, and secondly, to ways in which later interpreters may have reframed them.

II. THE AUTHORITY OF PAUL THE APOSTLE

In his letter to the Romans, Paul describes himself as one who was "set apart for the gospel of God" (Rom 1:1), and through Jesus Christ, "received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the ἔθνη" (Rom 1:5).⁸ Thus, his office and charge embrace not only those in Rome, but extend to all the ἔθνη.⁹ Paul understands himself specifically to be "an apostle of the ἔθνη" (Rom 11:13) and a "priestly servant (λειτουργός) of Christ Jesus among the ἔθνη, serving the gospel of God as a priest (ἱεουργέω)" (Rom 15:16), charged with presenting an acceptable offering of sanctified and obedient ἔθνη to Christ.¹⁰ This task of bringing about the obedience of faith among the ἔθνη, through the gospel, is understood by Paul to be his divine mandate. The preaching of this gospel among all the ἔθνη had been forecast by the prophetic writings,¹¹ and in significant ways Paul saw himself in the same tradition as these prophetic figures.¹² Paul's position

rightly draws attention to the significance that the earliest Corinthian Christian community placed on the question of Paul's apostolic authority in regard to them.

⁸Whether ἔθνη should be translated here as "Gentiles" or "nations" will be discussed below. It is uncertain whether the agency identified by the phrase δι' οὗ (Rom 1:5) refers to God or Jesus Christ. Romans 1:8 clearly adopts Jesus Christ as an agent, where God is the primary character ("I thank my God through Jesus Christ"); and both "God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" are identified as co-operative in Romans 1:7. Galatians 1:1 suggests that a clear distinction between the two on this matter is unnecessary. Paul is appointed "through Jesus Christ and God the Father" (Gal 1:1), all in the will of God (cf., 1 Cor 1:1; 2 Cor 1:1), notwithstanding Paul's statement elsewhere that it is God who appoints some to be apostles (1 Cor 12:28).

⁹Cf., also Rom 1:13.

¹⁰Rom 15:18; 16:26.

¹¹Paul refers to, rather than quotes, the Hebrew prophets in Romans 1:2 and 16:26. On several occasions in Romans and Galatians, Paul uses the phrase πάντα τὰ ἔθνη in connection with reference to them in the Scriptures (Rom 15:11; 16:26; Gal 3:8). In Romans 10:15, Paul quotes Isaiah 52:17; so it may be that Isaiah 52:7-10 is in mind in Romans 16:26. As a consequence of one who proclaims good news, "the Lord shall reveal his holy arm before all the ἔθνη, and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation that comes from God" (cf., also πάντα τὰ ἔθνη in Ps 116:1 [LXX], quoted in Rom 15:11).

¹²J. Aernie, *Is Paul Also Among the Prophets?: An Examination of the Relationship Between Paul and the Old Testament Prophetic Tradition in 2 Corinthians*, LNTS 467

is succinctly expressed also in his statement to the churches of Galatia, that God, who “set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach the gospel about him among the ἔθνη” (Gal 1:15-16).¹³

In each of these letters Paul briefly presents what he understands to be both the source and scope of his authority. First, it derives directly from his divine calling and appointment as an apostle of Jesus Christ; and secondly, it is anticipated and corroborated by those scriptures that forecast the preaching of the gospel. Thirdly, in terms of its scope, its content is limited in regard to the gospel of God, which Paul received; and fourthly, his authority is expressly in order to bring about obedience, specifically among the ἔθνη. Each of these four aspects of source or scope warrants further detailing.

However, it is important first to note that these verses from Romans and Galatians do not imply that Paul regarded apostleship to be uniquely, or even pre-eminently, his calling.¹⁴ In concert with the Synoptic Gospels and Acts, which record the appointment of twelve apostles,¹⁵ Paul’s letters recognize James, Cephas and other apostles appointed prior to him by Jesus. Many of these were associated with the Jerusalem church, and a few also with Antioch. They were in some sense superior to Paul, who saw himself as one appointed under anomalous circumstances and undeserving.¹⁶ Even though not archetypal, Paul nonetheless understood his position to be a calling by the highest source. Still the scope of his authority is clearly and precisely constrained.¹⁷ It is neither unique, nor absolute, nor universal. Despite being “inseparable from the whole of the person authorized,”¹⁸ this authority is, nonetheless, also not autocratic, in a strict sense of the term – a power invested in oneself.

1. Source: Dominical

Called by God’s will, specifically to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, Paul considers his appointment to be dominical, meaning that it derives

(London: T & T Clark, 2012), demonstrates how, in some of Paul’s autobiographical passages (2 Cor 2:14-7:4; 1 Cor 9:15-18; 14:20-25), the apostle aligns his own role with those of Moses, Jeremiah and the Isaianic servant.

¹³Cf., also the phrase ‘the churches of the ἔθνη’ (Rom 16:4).

¹⁴It is not immediately clear why Paul adopts the first person plural (‘we received grace and apostleship’, Rom 1:5), when this is not a co-authored letter, no other apostle has been identified at this stage, and, Paul pointedly employs the first person singular in the significant verses Romans 1:8-16.

¹⁵Mk 3:14; Mt 10:2; Lk 6:13; cf. the eleven in Acts 1:26.

¹⁶1 Cor 9:5; 15:7-10; Gal 1:17, 19.

¹⁷The conundrum of discussing Paul’s authority as an historic and/or present reality is part and parcel of the issue at hand.

¹⁸John H. Schütz, *Paul and the Anatomy of Apostolic Authority*, SNTS Monograph Series, 26 (Cambridge: CUP, 1975) 284; also, *Ibid.*, “The apostle illustrates in his own person the power which called and commissioned him and now impels him in his efforts on its behalf.”

from God's Son. While the Twelve were also commissioned by Jesus Christ, this cannot be said of all in the New Testament who were called apostles.¹⁹ Given the significance of apostles within these texts,²⁰ it is unexpected both that the origins of the term are so uncertain, and the use of this noun, prior to the Christian era, is so rare. As a further complication, within the New Testament the term is used with a wide spectrum of significance. There is no obviously dominical appointment in regard either to Epaphroditus, described as an "apostle," or perhaps "messenger/envoy," of the Philippian believers ("your apostle," Phil 2:25), nor of Andronicus and Junia/s,²¹ nor of other unnamed individuals described as "apostles/messengers of the churches" (2 Cor 8:23).²² Thus, while 1 Corinthians 9:1 may at first glance suggest that seeing "Jesus our Lord" is a mark of apostleship, rather it is significant in regard to the dominical source of Paul's authority – an apostle *of the Lord Jesus*, as one of the Lord's messengers, is likely to have seen Jesus – but it is not a necessary pre-requisite for all those described as ἀπόστολοι. Similarly, in defense of his own apostleship, Paul reminds the Corinthians that he performed "signs and wonders and mighty works" (2 Cor 12:12). Such miracles may endorse his calling, but it is not otherwise evident that they are qualifications for being an ἀπόστολος. Paul does not assume or maintain that all those who do perform miracles are apostles, while those who do not cannot be apostles. Thus, the particular basis of Paul's calling lies in its dominical source, not the performance of miracles, nor merely seeing Jesus.

Clearly Paul's dominical calling, though not uniquely distinctive, is significant and warrants emphasis rather than downplaying. This is

¹⁹Paul draws attention to those who falsely claim to be apostles by dominical appointment (cf., 2 Cor 11:13).

²⁰The noun "apostle" occurs in every book of the New Testament, except some of the shortest epistles: e.g., 2 Thessalonians, Philemon, James and 1-3 John.

²¹Whether or not Romans 16:7 implies that Andronicus and Junia/s, Paul's acquaintances, were notable apostles or considered notable by the apostles (ἐπίσημοι ἐν τοῖς ἀποστόλοις) is unclear. This debate hinges both on whether Junia/s was male or female and whether apostleship was a male preserve. Cf., Eldon Jay Epp, *Junia, the First Woman Apostle* (Minneapolis: Portress, 2005) for an extended treatment of a view that has gained popularity. Determining the status of Timothy and Silvanus is more difficult. They are identified alongside Paul either "as apostles of Christ" in regard to the Thessalonian believers, or as those who could have acted in a way similar to "apostles of Christ," but who elected rather to act as nursing figures (1 Thess 2:6-7, δυνάμενοι ἐν βάρει εἶναι ὡς Χριστοῦ ἀπόστολοι). However, neither is elsewhere recognized by Paul as an apostle (cf., 2 Cor 1:1, 19; Phil 1:1; Col 1:1; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1). Note also that Acts 1:26 records Matthias being added to the Eleven following a ballot in regard to two individuals who met key requirements, rather than directly as a dominical appointment.

²²In both these references, the sense of ἀπόστολος may better be conveyed by "messenger" or "envoy," than "apostle." The institutionalized title, which later came to predominate, can too readily be assumed when the rather more pedestrian meaning was actually intended.

characteristically displayed not least in the Pauline letter openings.²³ In introducing himself, Paul describes this calling as a divinely-given grace, which significantly is also recognized by his fellow apostles.²⁴ As a dominical messenger, he is especially authorized to give instructions from the Lord,²⁵ directly handing down dominical tradition.²⁶ Appointed by the Lord, Paul admonishes others,²⁷ and gives directives, especially in relation to church practice.²⁸ Obedience of others is to be expected, not only to the gospel, to parents and to masters, but also to Paul's teaching²⁹ and example.³⁰ Indeed, in many instances, Paul's commands are framed forcefully and categorically.³¹

However, it is important to note that these features of Paul's ministry that focus on his dominically-sourced authority are tempered by a number of contrasting aspects. Although he is aware that some regard him as domineering in his correspondence,³² it should nonetheless be noted that his letters reveal his preferred and, indeed, most frequent recourse to be simple, verbal persuasion – that is, to appeal, implore, or encourage (“knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade [πειθομεν] others,” 2 Cor 5:11).³³ Indeed, one of the most common forms of Pauline influence is παράκλησις/παρακαλέω, found in all of the Pauline letters except Galatians.³⁴ On occasion Paul seductively appeals to the emotions of his audience, whether through irony, pleading, or presenting himself vulnerably.³⁵ In these instances, he opts not to be more directive. He

²³Cf., 1 Cor 1:1; 2 Cor 1:1; Rom 1:1; Gal 1:1; Eph 1:1; Col 1:1; 1 Tim 1:1; 2 Tim 1:1; Tit 1:1.

²⁴ Cf., Rom 1:5; 12:3; 15:15; 1 Cor 3:10; 2 Cor 8:19; Gal 1:15; 2:9; Eph 3:7-8; 2 Tim 1:9.

²⁵Cf., παραγγέλλω, 1 Cor 7:10; 1 Thess 4:2; 2 Thess 3:6, 12; διατάσσω, 1 Cor 9:14.

²⁶Cf., παραλαμβάνω, 1 Cor 11:23; 15:3; also 1 Thess 4:1; 2 Thess 3:6.

²⁷Cf., νουθετέω, 1 Cor 4:14; Col 1:28.

²⁸Cf., διατάσσω, 1 Cor 7:17; 11:34; 16:1.

²⁹Cf., 2 Cor 2:9; 2 Thess 3:14. Paul repeatedly exhorts using the adjective “obedient” (ὀπήκοος) and verb “obey” (ὀπακούω). In writing to the Romans, he affirms their obedience to received teaching (if this is his first letter to them, presumably he is not affirming their obedience to his teaching, Rom 6:17); and to the Philippians, he affirms their obedient behavior (Phil 2:12; cf., also specifically in regard to Paul's example, Phil 4:9: “What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me – do these things, and the God of peace will be with you”).

³⁰Cf., 1 Cor 4:16; 11:1; 1 Thess 1:6; Phil 3:17; Gal 4:12. See also Andrew D. Clarke, “Be Imitators of Me:” Paul's Model of Leadership,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 49 (1998), 329-360.

³¹Cf., Clarke, *A Pauline Theology of Church Leadership*, 164-167.

³²Cf., 2 Cor 10:10 (“his letters are weighty and strong”), in which he also notes that others consider his personal presence to be weak.

³³A distinction in force between “rebuke” (ἐπιπλήσσω) and “encourage” (παρακαλέω) is highlighted in 1 Timothy 5:1. Timothy ought to encourage an older man as if he were his father, rather than rebuke him.

³⁴Von Campenhausen, *Ecclesiastical Authority and Spiritual Power in the Church of the First Three Centuries*, 52, “The hortative and not the imperative is really the mood of the verbs in Pauline paraenesis.”

³⁵Cf., Gal 4:12-16; 2 Cor 2:4; 6:11; 11:11.

senses that either he cannot, or should not, apply any greater pressure.³⁶ The result is that he frequently applies a degree of influence that falls significantly short of absolute insistence, as, for example, in one of his communications with the Corinthians regarding the collection.³⁷ In so doing, he draws attention to the importance of emulating the meek and gentle method of entreaty of Christ.³⁸ Intriguingly, therefore, the dominical *source* of Paul's authority also offers a model to him. It permits, but does not require, him to be assertive.³⁹

In addition to those instances where Paul might apply greater pressure, but chooses not to, there is a notable occasion in which he declares himself expressly to be speaking in his own capacity, and distinguishes this from mediating a command from the Lord. This is starkly seen in the parallel statements in 1 Corinthians 7:10, 12: “*I command* [παρᾶγγέλλω] the married (not I, but the Lord) ... *I say* [λέγω] to the rest (I, not the Lord) ...” In these verses emerges a clear distinction. On the one hand, there is a directive to those in the Corinthian church who were married. It is conveyed by the apostle, and is framed as a command that originated in the Lord (whether or not as a saying of the earthly Jesus). On the other hand, there is the subsequent and more tentatively expressed personal recommendation from Paul.⁴⁰ Unlike the earlier injunction, this is neither sourced in the Lord, nor is it a command. He thus distinguishes between an absolute, dominical injunction that is mediated through Paul and a personal judgment that is sourced in Paul. In both instances, of course, he remains the divinely-appointed apostle. The implication of this juxtaposition is that he considers the latter recommendation to carry significantly less weight – notwithstanding the high source of his calling and appointment. Paul's calling does not presuppose divine assent of everything he says, and this is especially reflected in those occasions when his words are more tentative.

It has already been noted above that Paul's role required him to expect obedience and admonish with authority. However, not only is there little evidence of coercion on his part, but he clearly urges that the task of admonishment be exercised also by other leaders, and, indeed, by all believers.⁴¹ Similarly, Paul frequently draws attention to his preference

³⁶Cf., the following instances in which Paul demurs from taking decisive action: 2 Cor 13:10; 1 Thess 2:6-7; Philem 8-10.

³⁷2 Cor 8:8.

³⁸Cf., 2 Cor 10:1.

³⁹Cf., von Campenhausen, *Ecclesiastical Authority and Spiritual Power in the Church of the First Three Centuries*, 52, “Unequivocal though it is, [the dynamic of Paul's approach to his congregation] is nevertheless at the same time genuinely dialectical, a combination of powerful thrust and gentle retreat, at once threatening and inviting.”

⁴⁰Cf., 2 Cor 8:8, 10, which Paul similarly identifies as not being commands (Ὁὐ κατ' ἐπιταγὴν λέγω).

⁴¹Cf., Rom 15:14; Col 3:16; 1 Thess 5:12-14; 2 Thess 3:15; see also Titus 3:10. Claire S. Smith, *Pauline Communities as 'Scholastic Communities': A Study of the Vocabulary of 'Teaching' in 1 Corinthians, 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus*, WUNT (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), drawing on both 1 Corinthians and the Pastoral Epistles, reinforces the earlier thesis

for collaborative teamwork over working unilaterally;⁴² and the prescripts of his letters to communities normally identify co-senders.⁴³ In these ways some of the authoritative features that have often been viewed as characteristic of Paul's office he in fact either encourages in others, who have no apostolic appointment, or he shares with fellow-workers, who do not hold apostolic office.⁴⁴

Furthermore, Paul does not consider that an apostle is, by virtue of his dominical appointment, inherently a model of right behavior.⁴⁵ Not only does Paul discourage individuals from seeing themselves as his followers (pupils/disciples), strongly resisting the kind of personality cult that might place him, or other apostles, on a pedestal,⁴⁶ but he pointedly recognizes good practice in others,⁴⁷ indeed encourages all to set an example,⁴⁸ and identifies Christ as the principal model.⁴⁹ Likewise, evidenced by his disagreement over Cephas' behavior in Antioch, he concedes that apostles do not themselves always act impeccably.⁵⁰ Paul even draws attention both to his own shortcomings and to areas in which he has yet to be morally victorious.⁵¹ In Paul's eyes, those who would be mature must keep traveling towards the goal defined by Christ, not by him.⁵² Notwithstanding his dominical appointment, Paul neither presents apostles as having an exclusive authority, nor does he conceal his own fallibility, weaknesses and faults.

Core to Paul's message is also the reminder that both individual believers and assemblies of believers should be prompted by the direction

of Edwin Judge that Paul's focus in his churches was on communities of transformative learning. This is evidenced not least in his use of didactic language, and not just in regard to Paul's apostolic role.

⁴²Cf., Paul's characteristic use of the following συν- nouns: συνεργός, συνέκδημος, σύνδουλος, συγκοινωνός and συναιχμάλωτος.

⁴³Cf., Fulton, "The Phenomenon of Co-senders in Ancient Greek Letters and the Pauline Epistles."

⁴⁴Cf., however, the notable reference in 1 Thess 2:7 in which Silas and Timothy appear to be identified alongside Paul as Christ's apostles, perhaps "messengers." (English translations often move this title to the preceding verse.)

⁴⁵Nonetheless, Paul does confidently direct the Philippians to take note of his behavior (Phil 4:9).

⁴⁶Within the New Testament, the verb "to follow" is predominantly found in the Gospels, where it is almost exclusively used in regard to following Jesus. It is not a characteristic term in the Pauline letters, occurring only in 1 Corinthians 10:4 (the rock, which is Christ, followed the fathers in the wilderness). In 1 Corinthians 1:10-17, the apostle distances himself from those who would identify themselves with him, or Cephas or Apollos. He objects to those who, by saying, "I am of . . .," are effectively promoting one or other of these figures.

⁴⁷Cf., 1 Thess 2:14; 2 Thess 1:4; 2 Cor 8:1-7; Phil 3:17.

⁴⁸This is especially seen in regard to 1 Thessalonians; cf., Clarke, "Be Imitators of Me," 333-340.

⁴⁹Cf., e.g., 1 Cor 11:1.

⁵⁰Cf., Gal 2:11-14.

⁵¹Cf., 1 Cor 9:27; Rom 7:14-20.

⁵²Cf., Phil 3:12-16.

of the Spirit.⁵³ There is, thus, no expectation that their behavior was to be prescribed in all matters by the apostle's written or spoken injunctions.⁵⁴ Although the apostle regards himself as father or parent (γονεῦς) to many of the assemblies, with a concomitant paternal right to punish,⁵⁵ like many parents he often (although not always) resists exercising parental authority, preferring rather to see his offspring develop into maturity, acting independently of him.⁵⁶ As followers of Christ, they should walk in step with the Spirit⁵⁷ and many of their ecclesiastical, and other, decisions should be determined without direct recourse to the apostle.⁵⁸ Instead of bondage either to the law or to other humans (including himself),⁵⁹ in this Spirit believers enjoy a freedom that is constrained simply by love for each other.⁶⁰

Rather than members of a congregation belonging either to Paul or other apostolic leaders, the hierarchy is inverted, and these leaders instead belong to the Corinthian believers. Although this inversion is counter-intuitive, Paul insists that those leaders who think otherwise are delusional.⁶¹ Hans von Campenhausen regards this aspect of Paul's authority to be extraordinary.

For the truly astounding feature ... we must ... consider the fact that Paul, who both as one called to be an apostle of Christ and as a teacher of his churches is a man of the very highest authority, nevertheless does not develop this authority of his in the obvious and most straightforward way by building up a sacral relationship of spiritual control and subordination. Quite the contrary; whenever there seems to be a possibility of this, it is balked by Paul himself, who rejects in set terms either his right or his desire to construct such an authority: "Not that we lord it over your faith; we work with you for

⁵³1 Corinthians 5:1-5 may be exceptional in this regard. The community is here urged to execute the judgment Paul has already passed. They should do so in the 'power of our Lord Jesus' and as if he were present with them.

⁵⁴Also see the suggestion that even Paul's subsequent message has to be measured against the originally presented gospel. If he, "or an angel from heaven should preach ... a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed" (Gal 1:8).

⁵⁵1 Cor 4:15-21; 2 Cor 12:14.

⁵⁶Cf., 2 Corinthians 1:24 and also 2 Corinthians 9:7 in which the Corinthians are expressly told that they are not under human compulsion, but should decide for themselves how much to give – albeit, they are reminded that "God loves a cheerful giver."

⁵⁷Cf., Gal 5:16, 25; Rom 7:6; 8:4, 6. The Synoptic Gospels present Jesus as one who was guided by the Spirit (see Lk 4:1, 14, 18).

⁵⁸Cf., 2 Cor 4:13; Eph 1:17. Note, however, the contrast between 1 Corinthians 5:3-5 and 1 Corinthians 6:3-5. In the former, Paul determines, in his absence, the decision to be taken in regard to the immoral brother while in the latter, he reminds the Corinthian believers that even the least of them is capable of exercising judgment over others in the church.

⁵⁹1 Cor 7:23 (cf., 1 Cor 3:21; 5:6).

⁶⁰Within the New Testament, freedom is a particular emphasis in Paul; cf., Rom 8:2; 1 Cor 7:23; 10:23-30; 2 Cor 3:17; Gal 4:31; 5:1, 13 (also, Jas 2:12; 1 Pet 2:16).

⁶¹1 Cor 3:18-23.

your joy, for you stand firm in your faith.” Again: “You were called to freedom, brethren’, and: ‘Do not become slaves of men.’”⁶²

It is clear, therefore, that not all early Christian apostles were appointed by Christ. Even though Paul was one such, he interacts with the churches in different ways, ranging from absolute injunction or gentle appeal – both of which may derive from the Lord – to an appeal that is sourced in Paul rather than the Lord. However, it is also clear that Paul encourages others to teach and otherwise be directive; and he is keen that his life not be seen as an exclusive model for imitation, but that others, indeed all, should set an example. However, it is significant that he also emphasizes that all believers enjoy the freedom to be led by the Spirit, pursuing maturity, rather than living under the perpetual control of either one’s flesh or another’s leading. Thus Paul’s authority is clearly rooted in Christ, not himself. Furthermore, it is not presented as an exclusive, personally-invested, autocratic, devolved authority, which he can exercise and apply unilaterally or independently.

2. Source: Scriptural

Secondly, it has already been noted that Paul also considers both his ministry and message to be rooted in the scriptures, both in fulfilment of them and corroborated by them. Much of his argumentation, although by no means all, is clearly constructed by recourse to those scriptures, whether by direct quotation, specific reference, or allusion. Extensive sections of both Galatians and Romans are particularly densely packed with these indications. His view is that he can neither abandon nor diverge from those texts. As such, they prescribe and constrain both his message and his behavior.

Also Paul is sufficiently immersed in rabbinic and other contemporary Jewish bodies of interpretation to the extent that he is aware he is not merely referencing the scriptures, but also serving as their interpreter – and, at times, clearly and expressly presenting interpretations that he knows to be at odds with those of some of his contemporaries.⁶³ Yet even in this sense, the source of his authority lies in the content of the scriptures; and his interpretation of those scriptures needs to be convincingly consistent with those scriptures. The scriptures, therefore, are a second element of the source of Paul’s authority. They are perceived by Paul to be established boundaries, which can be neither negotiated nor ignored.

However, it has also been argued that the apostle understood himself to be occupying a place in the trajectory of biblical prophets. Aernie has

⁶²Von Campenhausen, *Ecclesiastical Authority and Spiritual Power in the Church of the First Three Centuries*, 46.

⁶³Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 1.

extensively argued from the Corinthian correspondence that Paul understood his apostolic ministry to be an extension and development of the prophetic tradition of the Old Testament. The apostle positioned himself within that tradition, and his rhetorical agenda was directly influenced by it.⁶⁴ This is a defining factor in both the apostle's self-presentation and authority. Not only is the content of Paul's message framed by the scriptures, but the shape and rhetoric of his ministry are also determined after the pattern of God's own prophets, as Paul's predecessors.

For Paul, an authority that is rooted in the scriptures is inevitably enhanced by reference to them. However, it is essential to recognize that it also circumscribed expressly by that connection. Apostolic authority that is validated by recourse to the scriptures loses that validation if not also limited by those scriptures.

3. Scope: Gospel

Thirdly, Paul's apostolic authority is constrained by the "gospel." Schütz succinctly summarizes that,

[o]ne term, one central concept stands out as inextricably tied to the purpose and the activity of the apostle. Nothing is more closely associated with the "apostle" than the "gospel." Paul cannot separate his calling as apostle from its purpose – to serve the gospel.⁶⁵

Paul's calling is specifically to proclaim the gospel.⁶⁶ Although Paul describes it in Romans 2:16 and 16:25 as "my gospel" and in 2 Corinthians 4:3 as "our gospel," he is clear that it is something that he received from God and is compelled to pass on to others.⁶⁷ The Jerusalem authorities may or may not corroborate this gospel, but they cannot amend his message.⁶⁸ It may have been as well that they offered such an endorsement since Paul gives the impression that, had Jerusalem questioned the content of his message, he would sooner have diverged from them than from what he believed he had received. For him, it is of crucial importance that both in his actions and statements, "the truth of the gospel might be preserved" (Gal 2:5; cf., also 2:14). This is graphically framed by the statement that, if Paul, or any other person (including, presumably, those from Jerusalem who seemed to be

⁶⁴Aernie, *Is Paul Also Among the Prophets?*, finds particular connections with Moses, the Isaianic servant and Jeremiah.

⁶⁵Schütz, *Paul and the Anatomy of Apostolic Authority*, 35.

⁶⁶Schütz, *Paul and the Anatomy of Apostolic Authority*, 36, notes that Paul juxtaposes the noun gospel and the verb to preach the gospel on a number of occasions, with an element of tautological redundancy (cf., 1 Cor 15:1; 2 Cor 11:7; Gal 1:11 – to which can be added, 1 Cor 9:18).

⁶⁷Cf., 1 Cor 11:23; 15:3; Gal 1:12; 1 Thess 2:13.

⁶⁸Gal 2:2.

something),⁶⁹ even an angel (envoy) from heaven,⁷⁰ were to diverge from this gospel, he would be *anathema*.⁷¹

This gospel is so central to the scope of Paul's calling that even when some are found to preach the authentic gospel, but in so doing are motivated deliberately to cause him some personal disadvantage, he is nonetheless content. The supreme importance of the gospel trumps any negative consequences for his own ministry.

Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice (Phil 1:15-18).

Having noted above Paul's stated intention normally to write in 'meekness and gentleness', it is all the more telling that he becomes most categorical, dogmatic, and insistent on those occasions where he is defending the gospel. He has no autonomy regarding the scope or content of the message. He cannot and will not change it; nor will he countenance others doing so. His task and authority are constrained by it; and he is bound to it, even though it may cause him considerable discomfort and disadvantage.⁷²

4. Scope: Obedience of the Gentiles?

Fourthly, we return to the notion that Paul regards his authority as specifically focused on bringing about the faithful obedience of the ἔθνη. In the phrase "all the ἔθνη" the plural term ἔθνη may either be applied universally in description of all "peoples,"⁷³ or it may be restricted to

⁶⁹Gal 2:6.

⁷⁰Both ἀπόστολος and ἄγγελος may convey the sense of an envoy.

⁷¹Gal 1:8.

⁷²Cf., the hardship catalogues in 1 Corinthians 4:9-13 and 2 Corinthians 6:3-10; 11:23-29.

⁷³While the plural may mean "peoples," the singular cannot refer to an individual person, but to a nation (contrast the adverb ἔθνικῶς in Gal 2:14, referring to Cephas alone, and the adjective ἔθνικός in Mt 18:17). Only in his quotation of Deuteronomy 32:21 (Rom 10:19) does Paul use this noun in the singular. In that verse the meaning is clearly nation: "I will make you jealous over those who are not a nation; over a foolish nation I will make you angry (ἐπ' οὐκ ἔθνη, ἐπ' ἔθνη ...)." See Douglas R. A. Hare & Daniel J. Harrington, "'Make Disciples of all the Gentiles' (Mt 28:19)," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 37 (1975), 359-69, [359-361]. There is a clearly universalistic emphasis in Rev 14:6: "an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth (ἐπὶ τοὺς καθημένους ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς), to every nation and tribe and language and people (ἐπὶ πᾶν ἔθνος καὶ φυλὴν καὶ γλῶσσαν καὶ λαόν)." Similarly, this is the likely emphasis behind πᾶσιν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν, when qualified in Matthew 24:14 by the phrase "in the whole inhabited world (ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ οἰκουμένῃ)." Cf., J. P. Meier, "Nations or Gentiles in Matthew 28:19?" *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 39 (1977), 94-102, [98].

foreign “nations” – from a Judeo-centric perspective, that is the “Gentiles,” which may include gentile Christians, but often is used yet more restrictively of unbelievers or idolaters.⁷⁴ This potential confusion between the inclusive and the various exclusive constructions is inherent in a biblical narrative in which God's concern for all humanity begins with his creation of the progenitors of all people.⁷⁵ God reacts to continuing signs of the disintegration of human society by subsequently distinguishing one nation to be both blessed and a channel of his blessing to all families of the earth.⁷⁶ Nonetheless, God occasionally causes other nations to be a vehicle of his judgment of the chosen nation.⁷⁷ An ultimate hope is expressed in the final book of the Christian Bible, and presumably shared by Paul, that there would be a restored relationship between God and those drawn from all peoples.⁷⁸

Of course in many biblical and extra-biblical passages, frequency or context ensures that it is evident whether the inclusive or one of the exclusive senses of ἔθνη is in mind; and subsequent translation often directs the reader one way or the other. Thus, although the Latin Vulgate translates ἔθνη as *gentes* (plural of *gens*, race, clan),⁷⁹ most English versions since Tyndale have in different places translated this Latin word either by the narrower term “Gentiles” (cf., pagans, heathen) or the wider term (e.g., nations).⁸⁰ For this present study, frequency alone cannot be determinative; and the question is specifically whether the scope of Paul's

⁷⁴E.g., 1 Cor 5:1; 10:20; 12:2. The MT interchanges עַם and גּוֹיִם, both of which terms can be used either of Jews or non-Jews.

⁷⁵Charles H. H. Scobie, “Israel and the Nations: an Essay in Biblical Theology,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 43 (1992), 283-305, [284-86].

⁷⁶Genesis 12:3. Cf., Michael A. Grisanti, “Israel's Mission to the Nations in Isaiah 40-55: an Update,” *The Master's Seminary Journal* 9 (1998), 39-61, [59-60]. See also Chee-Chiew Lee, “גּוֹיִם in Genesis 35:11 and the Abrahamic Promise of Blessings for the Nations,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 52 (2009), 467-82 [470-74], who argues that the blessing to Jacob at Bethel (Gen 35:11), in which “a nation and a company of nations” are promised will come from him, reflects, not the multiple tribes of Israel, but the connection and distinction between the people of Israel and the whole of humankind (cf., Gen 1:28; 12:1-3; 17:4-5). As the father of many nations, Abraham becomes related not just to his physical descendants, but also to all nations. Cf., the use of “Israel” in Galatians 6:16 to refer both to Jewish and Gentile believers.

⁷⁷Michael A. Grisanti, “Israel's Mission to the Nations in Isaiah 40-55: an Update,” *The Master's Seminary Journal* 9 (1998), 39-61.

⁷⁸Rev 21:24; 22:2. Also see Dave Matthewson, “The Destiny of the Nations in Revelation 21:1-22:5,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 53 (2002), 121-142, who engages R. Bauckham and explores the tensions inherent in the text, leading many commentators to decide between the inclusive and exclusive interpretations, widespread salvation and widespread judgment. Cf., in regard to salvation/judgment tensions in Deutero-Isaiah, Rikk E. Watts, “Echoes from the Past: Israel's Ancient Traditions and the Destiny of the Nations in Isaiah 40-55,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 28 (2004), 481-508.

⁷⁹Except in Acts 2:5; 10:45; 22:21; Rev 5:9 (*natio*); Acts 14:5; Rom 15:27 (*gentilis*; the Vulgate also uses this adjective to translate Ἕλληνας or Ἕλληνας, in Mark 7:26; John 12:20; Acts 16:1, 3; 17:4, 12; 19:10, 17; 20:21; 21:28; 1 Cor 10:32; 12:13; Gal 2:3; Col 3:11); Acts 17:26 (*genus hominem*, “type of mankind”); Acts 24:2; Rev 20:8 (omitted).

⁸⁰Cf., the ESV, NIV, NRSV, RSV, ASV, KJV, NKJV.

calling should be regarded as focused on all nations or, more narrowly, on all non-Jewish nations.

Paul distinguishes more frequently between Jew and *Greek*.⁸¹ In 1 Corinthians 1:22-24 he uses the terms Ἕλλην and ἔθνος interchangeably, sandwiching ἔθνος between two references to Ἕλλην. In all three instances in this passage, the contrast is with Ἰουδαῖος. Paul also contrasts *Greeks* with the derogatory term βάρβαρος (foreigner, non-Greek-speaker, non-Hellenized).⁸² The parallelism reflects the view that the Greeks are portrayed as typically educated, whereas ‘barbarians’ are presumed to lack learning (or foolish). Significantly, Paul’s obligation here is to all non-Jews, whether Greek or foreign. A fourth contrast he uses is between those circumcised, and those not, as for example in Galatians 2:7, where the ‘uncircumcised’ parallels τὰ ἔθνη in verse 9. In regard to Paul’s apostolic ministry, it may be concluded that τὰ ἔθνη should be regarded as embracing all non-Christian Gentiles, whether Greek or not.

Luke’s account in Acts corroborates the gentile scope of this calling; but initially at least, it additionally includes a wider scope – effectively embracing *all* nations. The Lord is said to announce to Ananias that Paul “is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before ἔθνη (here, ‘Gentiles’) and kings *and sons of Israel* (ἐνώπιον ἔθνῶν τε καὶ βασιλευσίων τε Ἰσραήλ)” (Acts 9:15).⁸³ Luke subsequently relates Paul repeatedly visiting synagogues in order to present the gospel. Following a pattern of challenges by the Jews, the frustrated Paul and Barnabas re-frame their intention to focus exclusively on the Gentiles (τὰ ἔθνη, Acts 13:46; cf. Acts 18:6; 22:21; 28:28). In a joint statement, they consequently apply Isaiah 49:6 to themselves: “For so the Lord has commanded us [plural], saying, ‘I have made you [singular] a light for the ἔθνη [ἰσραήλ], that you [singular] may bring salvation to the ends of the earth” (Acts 13:47).⁸⁴

This deliberate move, prompted by repeated harsh treatment at the hands of the Jews, and subsequently justified through reference to Isaiah 49, effectively narrows the scope of Paul’s ministry in Acts, drawing it in line with the specific focus on the Gentiles that is reflected, as already noted, in Galatians, 1 Corinthians, and Romans. This does not contradict Paul’s statement that the gospel is “to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Rom 1:16);⁸⁵ nor that God will “justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith” (Rom 3:30);⁸⁶ nor indeed that most of the

⁸¹Cf., Rom 1:16; 2:9-10; 3:9; 10:12; 1 Cor 1:22, 24; 10:32; 12:13; Gal 3:28.

⁸²Rom 1:14.

⁸³Cf., Luke’s statements, inclusive of Jews and Gentiles, on the lips of Paul in Acts 26:16-18, 20, 23.

⁸⁴Cf., however, Acts 26:23: “the Christ ... would proclaim light both to the [often translated “our” or “his”] people and to the Gentiles (τῷ τε λαῷ καὶ τοῖς ἔθνεσιν).”

⁸⁵Cf., Rom 2:9-10.

⁸⁶Cf., Rom 4:9.

Pauline congregations consist in a mixture of both Jewish and gentile believers. Rather, while the gospel is to be presented to the circumcised principally through the Petrine mission, the scope or primary focus of Paul's apostolic ministry is narrowed on the Gentiles.

That said, although the scope of Paul's mission is to non-Jewish nations, it is short of universally embracing all Gentiles. Paul reflects that there are important additional limitations to the scope of his ministry. Specifically, God assigns to each his own area within the wider whole. Paul is not, therefore, free to pursue ministry among the Gentiles at will and wherever he pleases.⁸⁷ Rather, he must avoid building on another's foundation or in another's territory;⁸⁸ and instead, where there is no further room, he must seek out fresh territories.⁸⁹ Indeed, Paul offers an implied critique of those who do go beyond their allotted brief.

... we will not boast beyond limits, but will boast only with regard to the extent of the domain [τὸ μέτρον τοῦ κανόνος]⁹⁰ God assigned to us, to reach even to you. For we are not overextending ourselves, as though we did not reach you. For we were the first to come all the way to you with the gospel of Christ. We do not boast beyond limit in the labors of others. But our hope is that as your faith increases, our area of influence [κανών] among you may be greatly enlarged, so that we may preach the gospel in lands beyond you, without boasting of work already done in another's area of influence [κανών]. "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends (2 Cor 10:13-18).

Despite claiming that he does not "boast beyond limits," Paul nonetheless frequently draws attention to his boasts, which focus on both his own discipleship and his ministry towards others.⁹¹ He especially expresses justification in staking a claim in regard to the Corinthians, and

⁸⁷Cf., the occasions in Acts 16:6-10 when Luke presents Paul's missional strategy as being directed away from certain places and towards others, by spiritual intervention.

⁸⁸The statement in 1 Corinthians 3:10 that someone else (Apollos) is building in Corinth on Paul's foundation is not to be seen as necessarily contradictory. In this instance, Paul clarifies that the foundation he laid is in fact Jesus Christ (1 Cor 3:11).

⁸⁹Cf., Rom 15:20, 23, "I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation ... But now, since I no longer have any room (τόπος) for work in these regions (ἐν τοῖς κλίμασι) ..." Such a portrait of constrained geographical locations is again a feature of Luke's description, in which the apostle is presented as being prevented from going into certain locations and summoned, rather, to others (see Acts 16:6-10).

⁹⁰In the New Testament, κανών is only found in the Pauline corpus. It occurs in Galatians 6:16 and these three times in 2 Corinthians 10. Murray Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 712, argues that, unlike Galatians 6:16, the most likely sense in the present passage is either "territory" or "administration." If so, it represents the missionary concordat identified in Galatians 2:7-9.

⁹¹Cf., Phil 2:16; 1 Thess 2:19-20; Rom 15:18; 1 Cor 15:31.

considers himself to be numbered among their comparatively few “fathers” – although, he might consider Peter, apostle to the circumcision to be another of their fathers.⁹²

Not only does Paul understand his mission to be geographically constrained, but even within a given locality, specific responsibilities or roles are assigned, again by God. Whereas Paul was called to plant in Corinth, it was given to Apollos to water. Apollos consequently is building on the foundation laid by Paul, but these respective tasks were assigned to each by God, and the foundation for both ministries is none other than Christ.⁹³ One aspect of Paul’s task is repeatedly stressed, especially in his Corinthian correspondence, and impressed also on others; namely, the up-building, including the mutual up-building, of the community.⁹⁴

It is clear then that both the field of exploration and a defined task within that mission are assigned to Paul. Even then, however, the apostle’s authority over the Corinthian believers is neither divinely given, nor assumed by Paul. Rather, it must be earned from the Corinthians. Instead of his dominical appointment guaranteeing a return among or authority over the Corinthians, it is they who recognize or are the *proof* of Paul’s apostleship; “If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you, for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord” (1 Cor 9:2). Paul recognizes his authority over the Corinthians is only granted by them, and cannot be forced on them; thus, “as your faith increases, our area of influence [κωνών] among you may be greatly enlarged” (2 Cor 10:15). There is an element, therefore, in which Paul’s apostolic authority, though dominical in source, is nonetheless limited in proportion to the extent that the Corinthian believers recognize it. Paul’s endorsement lies not merely in his dominical calling, but importantly also in the fruit of that calling. That fruit will become manifest on the day. The challenge, of which he is all too aware, is that he may yet suffer loss.⁹⁵ Although the apostle’s salvation may be secure, his dominical calling and authority do not guarantee his reward. It is in this way that the Corinthians may be described as Paul’s letter of recommendation (ἐπιστολή) – more tangible indeed than Paul’s statement of his divine appointment as an apostle.

While the source of his authority is circumscribed in a non-negotiable way (by the scriptures), his leadership is in part by divine appointment and in part consensual or socially negotiated – by dialogue, rather than coercion.⁹⁶ It is an authority that is authenticated by the fruits of his life

⁹²Cf., Gal 2:7; 1 Cor 4:15.

⁹³Cf., 1 Cor 3:5-10.

⁹⁴Cf., the use of οἰκοδομή and οἰκοδομέω, in terms of Paul’s own task: Rom 15:20; 2 Cor 10:8; 12:19; 13:10; and, in terms of the shared, mutual task: Rom 14:19; 15:2; 1 Cor 8:1, 10; 10:23; 14:3-5, 12, 17, 26; 1 Thess 5:11.

⁹⁵1 Cor 3:12-15.

⁹⁶Cf., 2 Cor 1:14.

and ministry – which should be emulated – and he has limited sanctions that he can impose in the task of influencing his readers.

5. Conclusion

Paul can and does issue instructions; yet while they may be apostolic, their essential content derives from something other than the apostle himself. Paul's authority comes from the highest source; but as an envoy, he regards himself as a conduit or representative. His authority is specifically and significantly circumscribed – not just in regard to its content (the gospel), but also its field of jurisdiction (divinely allocated tasks in regard to a predominantly gentile mission and in particularly assigned localities). Beyond these parameters, Paul has no freedom to claim authority; but even within these constraints, his authority is negotiated by those who, through their obedience to the gospel, prove the authenticity of his apostleship. Paul's authority extends only to embracing those whom he has successfully won over – the fruit of his ministry. Under these constraints, it is not surprising that the apostle focuses more on personal appeal and up-building than on categorical injunction or coercion. He does, of course, make outspoken comments, but these tend to be in defense of the gospel – over which, it should be noted, he considers neither he nor others have any flexibility. In these ways, Paul views his authority as neither autocratic, nor autonomous – but externally limited in particular and significant ways.

III. THE POST-PAULINE AUTHORITY OF THE PAULINE TEXTS

Having identified the parameters that Paul consistently recognized as circumscribing his authority, it is significant that post-Pauline processes of tradition have materially changed perceptions about the nature and location of "Pauline" authority. His extant correspondence became incorporated into a Pauline letter collection, and later still into a collection alongside other apostolic texts, eventually forming part of successive versions of the Christian biblical canon.⁹⁷ At some stages in the history of interpretation, the Pauline collection has been divided by many into those letters held to be authentically by the apostle, and those treated as in some way derivative, not stemming from the apostle.⁹⁸

In important ways, the personal authority and influence of the living apostle, more or less successfully negotiated as they were within

⁹⁷David Trobisch, *Paul's Letter Collection: Tracing the Origins* (Minneapolis: Portress, 1994) presents the leading contribution on this.

⁹⁸It is not irrelevant to the argument of this article that, even where some do not consider these later letters to be Pauline, they may nonetheless carry an authority that is indistinguishable from those not regarded as pseudonymous.

particular relationships,⁹⁹ differ markedly from the textual authority and influence of Paul acceded by later generations of interpreters, when these letters are subsequently mediated as part of a wider collection of sacred texts. This distinction between the authority of the person and the posthumous authority of his writings, whose original recipients cannot be accessed, is, of course, very significant – although for many it is so subtle that it may be easily overlooked. Frequently, no nuanced distinction is drawn between the narrowly defined authority of the apostle (e.g., in this territory, and not that), and the far wider authority of his writings as they are incorporated into Scripture and subsequently accessed and applied.

The process of situating Paul's texts within early ecclesiastical tradition, incorporated within wider collections of authoritative texts, necessarily results in other apostolic sources and a range of subsequent church contexts serving as interpretative lenses for the Pauline letters, and vice versa. Paul is no longer read in isolation (as once his epistles more easily might have been), but alongside the words not only of other apostles (and Jesus), but also of a developing body of historic interpretations and an ever more complex set of contemporary influences and agenda.

In the first of these stages, not only does Paul's voice become merged in some measure with other apostolic voices (i.e., the apostolic tradition), but those instances when he speaks in his own capacity can become indistinguishable from those which he identifies as the voice of the Lord (1 Cor 7:10, 12). For strategic reasons, Paul's messages to discrete churches become conformed together and read alongside those to other churches or by other apostles. Each can be and is used to clarify or interpret the other, as in a Lectionary selection of texts. At this point, it may not even be significant whether or not a given letter actually derives from the divinely-appointed apostle or is pseudonymous. The authority now resides in the status of the words of the text rather than the identity or status of its author.

In a subsequent stage, Paul's words can be strategically employed to specific ends, inevitably beyond those originally conceived by the long-dead apostle. In particular, his message can be brought to bear on the task of reinforcing later ecclesiastical or moral authorities, apparently as an adjudicator.¹⁰⁰ The eventual canon becomes a singular, widely-accepted, transcendent and normative text, to a large extent necessarily and inevitably dislocated from its originating problems. Beker is right to argue that these texts can sustain this transition because they contain an inherent, underlying, internal, logical coherence, which is corroborated by

⁹⁹The existence of many of the letters presupposes that, on certain points and at particular times, Paul's authority was not fully recognized.

¹⁰⁰Cf., the later application of 1 Corinthians to the church in Corinth in 1 Clement 5:5; 47:1.

appreciating all of their contingent, contextual set of originating circumstances.¹⁰¹

This raises a third sphere of influence or authority, associated with Paul. Where the first sphere may be the authority of the living apostle, and the second may be the authority of these texts at a stage somewhat removed from the living apostle, the third is the authority of the interpreter, who inevitably (but not always knowingly) brings to the Pauline texts answers, rather than questions – that is, a wider framework in the light of which Paul must be interpreted.¹⁰² These interpretative lenses may be authoritatively and historically determined by a community of faith, which employs specific interpretations of selected texts as a means of reinforcing a confessional standpoint. This has been variously described either as an organizing principle, a theological center, or a canon within a canon.

We might compare how two major biblical interpreters differently draw on the Pauline corpus in addressing their respective questions. For Tertullian, who ranges widely across the New Testament, 1 Corinthians is notably the most frequent port of call within the Pauline corpus. His key questions include resurrection, chastity and women. By contrast, Luther, who again ranges widely across the New Testament, has recourse more frequently to Romans than 1 Corinthians, driven as he is by questions of justification. For both, whether prior to the formation of the canon or after, Paul is clearly influential and authoritative. However, a significant proportion of influence has transferred from Paul to Paul's interpreter, who may select from the corpus in a way that is far more flexible than the original recipients of a single letter. Especially within scholarly circles, the focus of enquiry can shift even more significantly towards the interpreter of Paul, when more energy is devoted to engagement with Paul's interpreters (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) than with the Pauline texts themselves. Access to a 'free-standing' Paul, who can interject and defend himself against abuse and misunderstanding, is no longer possible. Instead, a number of different Pauls can be, and at times have been, constructed – the apocalyptic Paul; the pastoral Paul; the environmentalist Paul.

¹⁰¹Johan Christiaan Beker, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980). There are many who would disagree profoundly with the suggestion of an internal coherence, for whom the inconsistencies within the Pauline corpus, never mind the wider New Testament or the Bible as a whole, are unresolvable. For some, apparent inconsistencies can be explained or relativized by recourse to other biblical or confessional texts; for others, those inconsistencies need to be highlighted and exploited.

¹⁰²While Paul's letters can be very effectively used to reinforce a theological position, it can also be the case that an interpreter can ignore (and thereby exercise an authority over) those passages that are theologically inconvenient. Cf., Geoffrey D. Dunn, "Tertullian, Paul and the Nation of Israel," in *Tertullian and Paul*, eds., Todd D. Still & David E. Wilhite (London: Bloomsbury, 2013) 97; and Andrew M. Bain, "Tertullian: Paul as Teacher of the Gentile Churches," in *Paul and the Second Century*, eds. Michael F. Bird & Joseph R. Dodson, LNTS (London: T & T Clark, 2011), 223.

In these ways, both the source and scope of Paul's authority and influence have significantly changed – and their scope in particular has grown immensely, freed from a number of the constraints under which the apostle perceived that he personally operated. This later authority is now inevitably mediated by the greater weight both of a canon of texts, ecclesiastical tradition, and a succession of interpreters, all of which are able to straddle chronological and geographical contexts far more adeptly than the living apostle.

The focus in this final section has not been on whether, where, or when Paul's apostolic authority has been reasonably appropriated or misappropriated. Rather, it has been to recognize that while the apostle was transparent about the limitations of his authority, his subsequent interpreters will often be oblivious to those boundaries when they interpret his letters in subsequent and widely divergent contexts. In so doing, there have been times when the apostle has been criticized for over-reaching himself, when the challenge may more appropriately be leveled at the interpreter, who has not fully grasped the subtle, but inevitable, differences between the authority of a living apostle working in specific contexts and the more widespread authority of his writings as sacred text.



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