

Strangers or Allies? Paul's Knowledge of Jesus

1. Should you care?

If Paul was our only source for knowledge about Jesus, we would not know that Jesus came from Galilee and was the son of Mary (but see Gal 4:4), nor that he was baptized, taught in parables and performed miracles, nor that he ate with sinners and confronted Pharisees, nor that he entered Jerusalem and overturned tables in the Temple. Makes you wonder how much Paul knew about Jesus. A few have suggested that Paul didn't really care about the earthly life of the "historical Jesus"—he cared only about the risen and now heavenly Christ. What do you think?

2. Thoughtful readers wonder . . .

- . . . how much Paul knew about the historical Jesus and where he learned it
- . . . whether Paul's readers were already familiar with Jesus' teachings, leaving Paul had little reason to include them
- . . . why Paul doesn't more often buttress his argument with appeals to Jesus' teachings
- . . . whether Paul was too focused on the cross and resurrection (cf. 1 Cor 2:2)

3. Your Quest: To examine Paul's teachings for clues to his knowledge of Jesus.

3.1. Compare the following Pauline texts and Gospel parallels. Summarize the points of overlap and difference below. In the shaded boxes write a number from 1 to 5 to show how close Paul and Jesus seem to be (1 = not very close at all; 5 = very close indeed).

Possible References to Jesus' Teachings in Paul			
Parallels / differences between Jesus & Paul	Paul's Introduction	Paul	Gospels
	"I give this instruction, not I but the Lord, . . ."	1 Cor 7:10-11	Mt 5:31-32 & Lk 16:18; Mk 10:11-12 & Mt 19:3-12
	"So also the Lord commanded those who proclaim the gospel. . ."	1 Cor 9:14	Mt 10:10; Lk 10:7
	"For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you... "	1 Cor 11:23-24	Mt 26:26; Mk 14:22; Lk 22:19
		(To which of the Synoptic accounts does Paul seem closest?)	1 Cor 11:25 Mt 26:27; Mk 14:24; Lk 22:20
	"For this we say to you by a word of the Lord. . ."	1 Th 4:15-17	Mt 24:30-31; cf. Mk 13; Lk 21
	"The things I write to you are the Lord's commandment"	1 Cor 14:37	?

3.2. What does Paul mean by "I give this command—not I but the Lord" followed by "*I say—I and not the Lord*" in 1 Cor 7:10 & 12 (NRSV)? After preliminary reflection, consult some of

the commentaries on pp.89-90 of *ENT II* for help on this one. Summarize your conclusions and include a list of the sources you consult.

3.3. What might Paul mean by “the Lord’s commandment” in 1 Cor. 14:37? Again, consult a commentary or two and list any sources consulted.

3.4. Compare the following passages, once again, for signs of similarity and difference. The overlap here may not be as obvious or pronounced, but may still be significant.

Parallels / differences between Jesus & Paul	Paul	Gospels
(Does Paul seem to reject the very faith Jesus commends?)	1 Cor 13:2	Mt 17:20 & Lk 17:6; Mt 21:21 & Mk 11:22f
	1 Cor 4:12; Rom 12:14	Lk 6:28; cf. Mt 5:44
	1 Thess 5:15; Ro 12:17	Lk 6:29; cf. Mt 5:39-40
	Rom 12:18	Mk 9:50; cf. Mt 5:9
	Rom 12:19-21	Lk 6:27, 35a; cf. Mt 5:44
	Rom 13:7	Mt 22:15-22
	Rom 14:13	Mt 7:1
(Does Paul’s rare reference to “the kingdom of God” in Rom 14:17 suggest	Rom 14:14	Mk 7:14-23; Mt 15:15-20
he knew of Jesus’	1 Thess 5:2	Lk 12:39-40
teachings?)	1 Thess 5:13	Mk 9:50

3.5. Does the string of possible parallels in Romans 12 add up to a solid case for Paul’s indebtedness to Jesus?

3.6. Which of the following options makes best sense to you, and why?

- A. Paul’s knowledge of Jesus traditions was extensive; he addressed his letters to converts who were already quite familiar with Jesus’ teachings, so Paul had no reason to include them.
- B. Paul’s knowledge of Jesus traditions was extensive, but he found little of it relevant to his own mission and his message about the cross and resurrection (cf. 1 Cor 2:2).
- C. Paul’s knowledge of Jesus traditions was minimal. He probably gained some knowledge from Jesus’ apostles and family, but he did not draw heavily from these sources for his thought.