

**Text: Phil 3.12-16**

Unbelievers try to show that the Lord and the apostles were somehow at odds with one another, contradicting one another, and teaching different things.

There are four main ways they claim this division:

1. A division between Jesus and Paul
2. A division between John and the Synoptics
3. A division between Paul and Paul (*i.e.* Paul in Acts and Paul in the Epistles)
4. A division between young Paul and old Paul so that he contradicted himself

We stand against all these alleged disagreements. The Lord and the apostles speak with a unified voice.

Last week we talked about the alleged difference between John and the Synoptics. This week, its “Paul vs. Paul,” or, as I call it:

*Will the Real Paul Stand Up? (Part 2)*

Our message today will differ from the other three.

In the earlier challenges, we worked to show that the two alternatives were not *contradictory* but *complementary*.

This time we admit that Paul likely grew in his understanding as he continued in the faith. Everyone should!

We deny, however, that Paul ever contradicted himself.

## **I. Countering the charge with logical points**

A. Noting that over time, Paul’s understanding deepened, the first challenge to prove it simply lies in dating the epistles

1. When were the epistles written?
2. I have a certain understanding of the order
3. Yet other conservatives order them differently
4. And even within my order, the dates are held somewhat tenuously at points (no matter how confident I sound)

If the dates are uncertain, what does that do to “young Paul vs. old Paul”? You can’t know for certain which is which

B. When Paul began his writing ministry, he was at least a fifteen-year “veteran” believer

1. Not a novice!
2. Galatians (my view) is first, about AD 49
3. Paul’s conversion — approx. AD 32

Consequently, Paul’s views were those of a mature theologian, with personal training from the Lord himself, don’t forget.

C. Paul’s writing ministry spanned a relatively short period of time

1. Galatians about AD 49 (or 1 Thessalonians about AD 51)
2. 2 Timothy about AD 67

A total span of no more than eighteen years, making it “less likely that Paul significantly altered his theological perspective.”<sup>1</sup>

## II. Paul’s testimony to growth (Phil 3.12-16)

Read Phil 3.12-16

- A. Paul pressed forward to fully grasp Christ (12)
- B. Paul did not regard his personal development as complete (13-14)
- C. Paul urged the Philippians to join with him in this pursuit (15)
- D. At the same time, Paul insisted that they must maintain what they already had (16)

It is hard to see Paul developing inconsistencies as he held on to what he had learned, and pressed to learn more in the same direction.

## III. Paul’s writing purposes varied from epistle to epistle

- A. The Judaizers’ attack: Galatians
- B. Reassuring harassed believers: 1 & 2 Thessalonians, Philippians
- C. Correcting disobedient and fractious believers: 1 & 2 Corinthians

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<sup>1</sup> Andreas J. Köstenberger and Michael J. Kruger, *The Heresy of Orthodoxy*, Kindle Edition (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2010), 88.

## D. Developing biblical doctrine

1. Salvation: Romans (plus Galatians)
2. Church: Ephesians
3. Christ: Colossians

## E. Instructing church leaders: 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus

## F. Promoting personal piety: Philemon

The topics varied, but did not contradict.

## Conclusion:

The New Testament, though written by different writers over an extended period of years is a unified document.

It centers on:

1. A very confident monotheism
2. The revelation of Jesus the Christ as the exalted Lord (this brings in the Trinity, and much else)
3. The gospel message of salvation by faith alone in Christ alone, the only way to receive forgiveness of sin and eternal life

Unbelievers try to sow doubt in their challenges. They are committed to unbelief, making contradictions where there is only, at most, contrast.

We have complete confidence in the New Testament.