

## Evangelical Christianity- Paul

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### 1. Notes to add

- a. Paul's conversion is not away from Judaism but a broadening of Judaism from an ethnic religion to a more axial inclusive universalism.
  - i. History of a diaspora Jew defining himself by his ethnic Judaism against Hellenist population (the "Greeks"). Studies under Pharisees, travels to Jerusalem for advanced study, persecutes heretics identifying Christ as the Messiah, not violent but still dangerous and divisive, threatening violent Roman retribution.
  - ii. Does not abrogate law but universalized it, ethnic practices not required from Greek converts, but Law of Noah is that inclusive law. Upholds "spirit" of the Law over its "letter."
    1. But what of Jewish Christians? Are they still bound to ethnic elements of the law. James thinks so, but leads to divisions in table fellowship, as Jews cannot eat with Gentiles. leading to some Jewish Christians in Pauline churches adopting view of the "strong".
    2. On the other hand, Paul interprets Jesus, relation to the Torah as moving from universal rule (the letter) to individual application (spirit of law in this circumstance for this person).
    3. Later radicalizes whole notion of law as mere external observance, prohibitions, earning salvation vs faith inspiring good works. (Romans?)
      - a. Or is this Marcion's take on Paul's take on the law?
- b. Christian community is an inclusive universal community. Particular distinctions between ethnic groups, social status, gender and church position secondary. All have their part to play in the whole. Not relativist, or even pluralist though. Still axial exclusivism re cosmotheism as with 'false prophets' preaching "another gospel"

- c. Paul's understanding of eucharist. Last supper replaces Paschal meal, Jesus: I am the paschal lamb. This wine, is my blood, this bread is my flesh. Community is body of Christ.
2. Welcome! In the last video lecture I introduced Jesus of Nazareth as an illiterate day laboring construction worker from rural Galilee. At about the age of 30, what would have been middle age in his time, Jesus left the worksite, and began to wander the countryside preaching to whoever would hear him out, and working wonders for whoever would put their faith in him. Within at most three years, perhaps even as short as one, he got himself arrested and executed as a rebel and a heretic, just one more in a string of Messianic pretenders crucified by Rome during a politically volatile time. Yet what followers he managed to recruit in that short period of time did not disperse. Rather over the next hundred years the band grew and extended across the Roman Empire as a new bureaucratically structured axial religion in its own right. Two centuries later yet, it became the official and exclusive religion of the Roman Empire. And today 2000 years later, for students of religion across the globe, many of whom, like myself, have dedicated their lives to following this Jesus, I am creating and you are watching this video lecture in cyberspace. What happened? How could this have happened?
3. In the next series of videos we shall be exploring the variety of schools of interpretation and practice inspired by this man. Early Christianity proved to be a laboratory of axial prophetic experimentation, all seeking to transcend the mimetic desire, violence and scapegoating inherent in imperial cosmotheism. While the overwhelming majority of followers will continue to inhabit oral and scribal culture, it will generate a plethora of original writings, not scribal copies of traditional sacred texts but a new testament of teachings, stories, letters, testimonials and treatises not to be memorized and recited but to be read aloud and creatively applied to contemporary assemblies or congregations of believers.
  - a. In this first lecture we shall study Paul, the first to put Jesus words and deeds into writing. He will counter the logic of mimetic desire and violence of the "gods of this world" with a logic of recognition and conversion. Himself a Hellenistic Jew raised outside of the land of Israel, he will begin by evangelizing fellow Jews in the Hellenic diaspora of Syria, Asia Minor and Greece. Soon enough however he

will extend his mission beyond even diaspora Judaism to outsider “Greeks” transforming Jesus’ reform movement within Judaism into a universal religion in its own right.

- b. In a second lecture I will turn to Paul’s first prominent disciple, Marcion, another diaspora Jew. He will make a more radical break with the religion of his ancestors. Yahweh, while the creator of this world, is still but another ethnic warrior god of power and conquest. Analogously he will radicalize Paul’s logic of recognition and conversion with an ascetic logic of dissociation and perfectionism. He looks not forward not to a messianic transformation but to a liberation from it altogether.
- c. A third lecture will explore a shamanic interpretation of Jesus and his ministry in the person of Simon Magus. A Samaritan, and contemporary of the original apostles, for him the logic of the Gospel was the logic of shamanic spiritual power, working wonders, especially miraculous healings. In contrast to Paul’s Gospel of the cross, Simon will preach a gospel of celestial divinization (*theodosia*)
- d. The fourth lecture in this series of receptions of Jesus, will study mystical appropriations of Christianity emergent in Egypt and its philosophical center, Alexandria. I shall focus on Valentinus, who like Paul focuses on the power of recognition, but approaches it less through the logic of conversion than through the logic of trauma, healing and redemption achieved through awakening to one’s dormant and suppressed true self, a self that as with Simon from which it may have evolved, is ultimately a spark of the divine itself.
- e. I then circle back to the original followers of Christ for whom, even after his death and resurrection, accepting Jesus as Messiah never involved ceasing to be faithful Jews devoted to both Torah and Temple. Led by James, the brother of the Lord, these followers of Christ will remain centered in Jerusalem, and will experience the ups and downs of subsequent Jewish Messianic revolts and brutal Roman suppression until by the mid 130’s all Jews in Jerusalem had been either killed, enslaved or banished into exile and Jerusalem refounded as an imperial Roman metropolis. I wait to cover the Jerusalem church and James its leader

until then, as it contested with all of the new forms of Christian thought and practice exploding throughout the Hellenistic world.

- f. I conclude with the unification, universalization and centralization of these diverse movements into a unified, and institutionalized axial religion, defined by a common creed, a universally accessible moral code, a well-regulated cult and a centralized governing bureaucracy. We shall explore the story of this routinization of Christ's original charisma through the creation of an "official" or canonical compendium of Christian writings, a New Testament to succeed the "Old," Jewish Testament. I shall follow more recent revisionist historians who argued that this was created and disseminated from Rome itself, the very capitol of the Empire at or around 150 AD. .
4. But first a word of caution: The history of early Christianity is so theory-laden that nothing changes faster than claims over its historical "facts. " Like any account, I shall need to choose sides among competing speculative reconstructions. In line with the focus of these lectures on the co-evolution of religion and technology I shall be following the work of several recent living scholars who have foregrounded the role of axial literacy and bureaucratic technologies in the evolution of this first world religion to claim to transcend not only the logic but the geography and ethnicity of imperial cosmotheism. Virtually nothing of what I recount here was historical "fact" when I studied theology in the late eighties. Its all new to me too. So take it all with a critical eye and ear.
5. As I related in the last lecture, Jesus himself was an oral prophet, but one steeped in the proto-axial reforms of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Deuteronomy. He launched an axial critique of the mimetic desire, mimetic violence and mimetic scapegoating powering the Roman Empire and its imperial cosmotheism. He warned that this same mimetic logic of power had infected even his own ancestral Jewish rituals and beliefs. Jesus was a critic not only of imperial culture but even more of temple culture with its exclusionary logic of priestly ritual purity and its rigid bureaucracy run by the scribal elite.
6. Jesus' execution left his followers confused and frightened. Jesus announced himself as the long awaited Messiah, who preached the coming of God's Kingdom. Why had it not happened? Even Jesus appears in the first gospel written, the Gospel according to Mark,

to be disappointed and confuse. His last words transcribed in the original Aramaic for emphasis: “My God, My God, Why have you abandoned me?”

7. Historical speculation begins with what happened next. One reconstruction has everyone dispersed back to Galilee picking up their old lives again. The fishermen go back to fishing, when Jesus appears to them to tell him that he is alive and missions them to spread the good news (the euangellion or Gospel). On the other hand, another tradition has the disciples staying in Jerusalem trying to figure out what to do when, again, Jesus appears in their midst.
8. The result in either case was that Jesus’ followers regrouped, and inspired by visionary revelations of a resurrected Jesus, they continued his ministry of preaching and wonder working. They announced that “the one you crucified is risen from the dead” and that he will return to overthrow the powers of this world of mimetic power, desire and violence and inaugurate the Messianic Kingdom of God. They argued however that Jesus did not come as the popular warrior messiah of Daniel but as the self-sacrificial, vulnerable and innocent scapegoat prophesied by Isaiah—a suffering Messiah who takes on or “atones” for the sins of us all. Christians were not to join Jesus in rebellion but to be reborn into his Spirit.
9. Our first literary texts of the movement begins not with the Gospels themselves but with Paul, a contemporary of Jesus, himself trained as a scribe, but born and raised outside the Holy Land, in the Jewish diaspora. Paul completed his study the Torah in Jerusalem around the very time of Jesus’ crucifixion. While he never encountered Jesus face to face he would soon learned of “the Way” as Jesus’ earliest followers referred to their movement.
10. It did not make a good first impression. For, as with Jesus himself, it proved a divisive presence, disrupting the large crowds of pious pilgrims that would regularly visit the Holy City. Followers of Jesus would proclaim to all who would listen that despite his execution by Rome and the Temple establishment, Jesus was in fact the long awaited Messiah, and that he would soon return to complete his mission from the Father by indeed overthrowing the rulers of this world. The only real difference from other contemporary Messianic movements, it was not a call for people to take up arms against court and temple themselves, but to await the Messiah’s return at the head of his own

army of angels. It was effectively a non-violent but eagerly awaiting for celestial revolutionary violence soon to come.

11. Even so, the Holy City of Jerusalem, then, as now, was a city on edge. Uprisings and rebellions could be kindled at any moment at the slightest provocation. As had happened most graphically at around the time of Jesus' own birth, Judas, another Galilean in the city of Sephoris, just a few miles north of Nazareth where Jesus had grown up, had proclaimed himself the Messiah and sparked a rebellion that was quickly and brutally suppressed. To make their point clear, the Romans crucified hundreds of Judas the Galilean's followers and razed Sephoris the center of the revolt, to the ground. As Jesus grew up, Herod would rebuild Sephoris as a Hellenistic-styled capital of his own client kingdom of Galilee. In fact Jesus and his father would likely have found employment in the rebuilding of Sephoris.
12. Another Jewish uprising nearly happened again shortly after Jesus' death when in the late thirties, the Roman Emperor Caligula was goaded into placing a statue of Jupiter within the Jerusalem Temple itself—again to teach a lesson to his restless subjects. This provocation drew huge crowds into the streets to block the statue procession to the temple. Only Caligula's own murder soon thereafter and the calling off of the sacrilege by a more level-headed Emperor, Claudius, prevented another bloodbath.
13. A generation after Jesus' death from 66-70 there *would* be a full scale messianic revolt against Rome, leading to the death of thousands and the destruction of the Jewish temple. Finally a century after Jesus death in 132-135 AD an even larger Messianic revolt led by another Messianic pretender, Bar Kochba, prompted the Emperor Hadrian to enact a “final solution--”to Rome's perennial problem. It is estimated that his army killed an estimated half million Jews, enslaving a 100,000 others and banishing the rest of the Jewish population of Jerusalem and its vicinity into exile. The Holy City would again be raised to the ground and then rebuilt this time as a Hellenistic City with a Temple housing statues to Jupiter and Hadrian himself. This did the trick. Messianic Judaism would not reappear as a political player for almost two millennia.
14. As a devout young scribe Paul freely acknowledges that in the beginning, he “zealously” persecuted the Jesus movement. He was even sent by Temple authorities to Damascus to discipline and arrest new converts who were similarly disrupting the synagogue there. In

the Book of Acts, Luke introduces Paul just prior to his departure for Damascus, at the stoning of Stephen, the movement's first martyr. Luke describes Stephen incensing a mob by condemning the Temple. They turned on him and stoned him on the spot. The perpetrators, Luke dryly notes, laid their cloaks at the feet of a young man named Saul—our future Paul.

15. Was Paul shaken by such a turn of events? Paul talks of having “persecuted” the movement, arresting and punishing disruptors of synagogue services, but a stoning to the death of a fellow Jew by an outraged mob? Had not things gotten out of hand? One can imagine Paul ruminating over this debacle of religious violence while on the road to Damascus. Suddenly Paul relates, Jesus appears before him in a vision “Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?”
16. Paul's world was turned upside down. What if Jesus really was the Messiah? Not a military Messiah raising an army of righteous warriors to overthrow their Roman occupiers but that suffering Messiah, the innocent scapegoat Messiah prophesied by Isaiah who redeems Israel precisely by sacrificing himself, a Messiah who manifests the power of God not in power and might, but precisely by surrendering his own power so as to empower others, especially those without power, all the scapegoats in Israel. And empower them not through a political revolution of mimetic retribution but through an axial revolution of the heart,
17. But if Jesus is the Messiah, what of the Temple? and what of the Jewish Law, the Torah, Jesus was also accused of breaking it on a regular basis—healing on the Sabbath, eating with sinners, touching the unclean such as ill and the infirm, even dead bodies. After all, Jesus had accused the religious leaders of being whitewashed tombs. Clean and impressive on the outside, but rotten within.
18. Paul would anchor his teaching not in obedience to the outward “letter” of the law but in obedience to its inner “spirit,” fulfilled in the Spirit of Christ, the Messiah. And drawing from his own revelatory experience Paul would argue that such a conversion could only be powered not by one's own righteousness but by recognition of one's better, truer self from another, that is by the logic of love.
19. Recognition thereby inverts the logic of mimetic desire, violence and scapegoating. Recognition is not about imitating the other, wanting what they want and possess, be it

wealth or status. Nor is it about imitating their violence against oneself, instinctively returning evil with evil, dominating the dominator so to speak. Rather than either domination or submission, recognition is about responding to the other in a way that also expresses oneself, and expressing oneself in a way that addresses and so is responsive to the thoughts and desires of the other. Recognition is interaction as cor-response one might say. And furthermore it is only in being so recognized by another that one has the self-confidence and gratitude to recognize them. As Paul will put it in one of this letters: conversion does not begin by us loving Christ, but by experiencing Christ's love for us, while we were still sinners.

20. In Paul's vision, Christ appears asking Paul why he cannot recognize him for who he truly is—"Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" in so doing Christ already recognizes Paul as *more* than a mere persecutor. He rather recognizes Paul's as a whole, in the round, his better, truer self. It is such recognition that Paul can recognize Christ in turn, and find in Christ is own true self.
21. And so as we saw in Jesus, mimetic desire and mimetic violence gives way to mimetic affirmation. Instinctive mimetic justice gives way to super-natural mercy, tit for tat mimetic cooperation to unearned grace, and mimetic retribution to compassion and forgiveness empathizing with both victim and perpetrator, recognizing ourselves as both sufferer and sinner.
22. Paul called upon Christians not even to try to avoid suffering, but to embrace and redeem it. To work through one's suffering so as learn what it has to teach us, not a knowledge that transcends our human limitations, but a wisdom, that enables to us to live gracefully within our earthen vessel. In so taking up our own cross we not only follow Christ, but accompany him, not only disciples but companions working together with him to complete his Father's mission.
23. He would frame conversion to Christ in the language of death and rebirth: dying to one's old self, the ego of mimetic power, desire and violence,. to be reborn a son of God, in Christ, the New Adam.
24. Paul also insisted that such a radical transformation in one's life and character could not be accomplished even by Christ and oneself alone. We also need the company and support of like-minded others. For we remain earthen creatures, sons of Adam. Old habits

die hard. After the excitement of the new, inertia and familiarity with the old could be counted on to reassert themselves. The desires of the flesh and of the past remain constant temptations. In fact distinguishing between inspiration and temptation is itself not always easy. Paul preached conversion not as personal achievement, but as the fruit of unearned grace, and faith in others. Recognition is a function of belonging.

25. Now in the cosmopolitan cities of the Empire any sense of belonging was increasingly attenuated. One lived amidst strangers, who did not know you any more than you knew them. Between the extremes of city and family there arose a host of intermediary face-to-face voluntary associations. Such “clubs” or “assemblies” *ekklesia*, in Greek, *collegia* in Latin, would include not only cultic groups, but also professional associations, neighborhood associations, ethnic associations, even household associations of servants and slaves. These public/private hybrids provided needed feelings of belonging in a city full of strangers.
26. It appears that Paul’s evangelism largely attracted those already suffering from a dearth of public recognition. Not poor rural peasants this time, but “middling” urbanites suffering from “status inconsistency” –those high on some social metrics, raising expectations, but low on others, ever disappointed, disillusioned, feeling deprived of the kind of recognition they felt they deserved. In other words, Paul attracted restless seekers longing for something more. This would include not only Jewish migrants in the Greek East, but also Greek speaking migrants in the Latin West. It would also include slaves and freedmen, especially those from prominent households. And it would include women everywhere, who while running their domestic households, were socially invisible in public life. Wealthy widows would be particularly prominent in the Pauline churches. With the resources to host and fund a Christian assembly, they would receive the recognition, and status that came with being the community’s financial patron.
27. However For non-Jews the cost of conversion was still high. In a culture where there was no clean separation between the sacred and the secular, abandoning your ancestral religion would mean disrupting your entire social network. Greek cosmotheists, worshippers of Zeus or Isis, would need to die not only to the mimetic desire and violence of their old worldly inner self; they would have to die to their old public, social self as well.

28. While many of these associations were mundane and profane, none were wholly secular. All had divine patrons to be thanked and revered. In fact, the principal activities for most of these associations were regular dinners whose food was first offered to their divine patrons. Also common were wakes and memorial services for deceased members. For newborn Christians to dissociate themselves from these club activities would be for them to separate themselves from all past sources of recognition, and perhaps even to incur the lasting resentment of old colleagues and neighbors whose pious devotions they had renounced. Controversies over whether to eat meat “sacrificed to idols” in this way would split diaspora Jews from Hellenistic Greeks in the new Christian movement.
29. Ultimately Christians would need to provide one another with the recognition and support they lost by leaving their old religion. This was an important function of early Christian ritual. No grand temple sacrifice, no spectacle, no processions through the city. Early Christian rituals took place in such hybrid spaces as wealthier people’s larger homes. It was not the building but the gathered assembly that formed the Christian temple. Members were the stones with which it was built. Communal prayers were thus also hybrids between public civic temple worship and domestic devotional shrines to family ancestors and the traditional gods of home and hearth. For Paul, cultivating a tight-knit sense of belonging within the community was a sacred obligation, a holy calling for all. In the church together constituting the very Body of Christ here and now.
30. Paul understood Christianity’s earliest communal rituals, baptism and eucharist, in these terms of recognition and belonging. Baptism is not only for the forgiveness of sins, but it is also a spiritual rebirth, dying to one’s old worldly self to arise reborn into Christ’s own life giving Spirit. While never beyond temptation, Christian baptism does regenerate us, similar to other axial rituals of individual rejuvenation at Eleusis, Alexandria and elsewhere. So too the eucharist would not only be a memorial meal commemorating Christ’s last supper with his disciples but a mystical partaking in Christ’s very own body and lifeblood, the community as a whole becoming the very Body of Christ for their time and place.
31. For Christ’s Kingdom of God was not somewhere else, in some other pure, spiritual land we can all escape to. It lies in the cathartic spiritual transformation of this world of which the Christian assembly was a prophetic anticipation. As with one another, Christ calls

upon us to recognize this world of ours, despite its vicious cycle of mimetic desire and violence, as still God's creation. It would not be through messianic revolution but through cathartic purification that God's kingdom would come. And any more than we could save ourselves, it is not up to Christians to save the world. Christ will return with his own angelic army of spiritual warriors. The Christian task was not to catalyze its advent, but to await its coming in hopeful, but patient, expectation. God's kingdom will come on God's timetable not ours.

32. To Paul's mind, however, time was short. In his epistles he would advise new Christians that if they were single, they should stay single. If married though, they should stay married. There was no time to worry about such things. So too whether you were a master or a slave. Jew or Gentile, man or woman, none of that ultimately mattered; all these distinctions were soon to pass away. Christ was coming.
33. But Christ was not coming. What was he waiting for? An impatient Paul came to believe that Christ was waiting for all the Jews to convert, not only those in Israel but all Jews across the Roman world. Paul discerned that it was his mission to preach Christ to diaspora Jews like himself.
34. However in his preaching in synagogues in the diaspora, he soon began to interest non-Jews as well, religious seekers restless for something more who would visit synagogue services but had no interest in becoming Jews themselves. And so Paul began to think that Christ was waiting for them to convert as well—that Christ had come to save not just the Jewish people but all people everywhere. Indeed Isaiah had prophesied that all the peoples of the earth would flock to Jerusalem at the dawn of the Messianic Age, not to become Jews, but to be saved as Greeks, or Romans, or Persians.
35. Christ's Gospel not only fulfilled the Torah it transcended the Torah and the Jewish people altogether. Gentiles did not need to become Jews to become Christian. They did not need to submit to the Law of Moses, but to the principles of all human morality inscribed in the covenant of Noah.
36. In the next video we shall explore the writings of Paul's most prominent disciple. Marcion of Sinope, would further emphasize the originality of the new Jesus movement from its Jewish roots. In fact his gospel would follow a logic of recognition that was less about conversion than of radical dissociation from both one's ancestral religious heritage,

be one Greek or Jew. Indeed Marcion would call for Christians to dissociate from this created world altogether.