

Were Jesus and the Apostle Paul Right about Everything?

As most of you know, I believe the Christian Scriptures to be inspired, but not infallible and inerrant. I believe that the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures are a record of mankind's changing and evolving views regarding the nature of God, how we should be connecting with God, and how we should be conducting our lives. So, if you have already made up your mind that the Scriptures are infallible and inerrant in every respect, both historically and theologically, then I would advise you to read no further.

For the rest of us, who believe the Scriptures are "inspired" but not necessarily infallible, the question remains. Were Jesus and the Apostle Paul right about everything, despite the fallibility of the written records? Did the mission of Jesus and the Apostle Paul require them to be theologically correct about all matters, or is it OK that they might have been wrong about some things, so as long as they were right about the "essentials."

One case in point would be their eschatology (ie. teachings about the end times). It appears that both Jesus and the Apostle Paul believed that the inauguration of God's Kingdom on earth was imminent and would be occurring during their lifetimes. The main thrust of Jesus' message was to "*repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.*" Both Jesus and Paul described the events of the coming apocalypse in vivid detail and believed they would occur during their lifetimes.

Another case in point was that neither Jesus nor the Apostle Paul advocated for social change, the reason being that the apocalypse was imminent and they expected the political and social structure of society to be dramatically and completely altered by God very soon. For this reason, Paul never denounced slavery, and he strongly suggested that his young male followers remain single and not start families. For this reason, Jesus strongly urged his followers to renounce their love of worldly possessions and warned them that things were going to get a whole lot worse before finally getting better. Jesus said He didn't know the exact day and hour that this would occur, but He definitely expected it to happen soon. He was bitterly disappointed when He realized that first He must suffer and die. The same is true of the Apostle Paul. In his later epistles He indicated that he probably would not live to see these events, but was content to know that "*to be absent from the Body*" is to be present with the Lord.

Another case in point would be Jesus' and the Apostle Paul's accommodation to many of the religious and cultural norms of their day. Most progressive Christians

today don't believe that Satan and demons actually exist, but Jesus and the people of Jesus' day probably did. I believe that Paul accommodated the culture of his day regarding his views about homosexuality and the subservient role of women in marriage and in the church.

Does this mean that Jesus and Paul were not filled with Holy Spirit and sent by God to proclaim the Gospel? Of course not! Hundreds of thousands of Christian preachers today are filled with the Holy Spirit, and their messages are inspired by God. Do they all agree theologically? Of course not! Do they agree on the essentials? Well, that is a matter of debate.

I believe that Jesus and the Apostle Paul did agree on the essentials. Once you strip away the religious and cultural accouterments, Jesus, the Apostle Paul, and most modern day preachers would agree that God is love and that all of God's laws can be summed up by the two greatest commandments, that we *"love God with all our hearts, and our neighbors as ourselves."*

Religion continues to evolve. The Jewish system of animal sacrifices and temple worship has been relegated to ancient history. Religious fundamentalists are slowly accommodating themselves to our changing cultural values. People of all races, ethnicities, and gender orientation are being treated with more love and respect. War is no longer regarded as a God-approved means of achieving religious and territorial objectives. Diversity is increasingly celebrated, rather than feared. Science has provided us with new evidence for the existence of God and the spiritual nature of reality. People in general are becoming less committed to religious institutions, while at the same time becoming more spiritual. The rule of love, that Jesus and the Apostle Paul emphasized, is increasingly becoming the standard by which our society measures its progress.

It's been 2000 years since the Christian movement first began, and God's Kingdom on earth continues to grow and evolve. Progress has been painfully slow, but in the end love will win.

"We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have?" (Romans 8:22-24)