

I return now to the next portion of a longer post I'm composing on the New Testament, a general survey in what is now looking like 10,000 words or so? My most recent segment was an explanation of what we can know about the life and teaching of Jesus: <https://ehrmanblog.org/who-was-jesus/> This one is a corollary: what we can know about the life and message of Paul.

Next to Jesus himself, Paul was the most important figure in the entire history of Christianity. Nearly half the books of the New Testament claim to be written by him; one other book (Acts) is largely written about him. More than anyone else we know of, he was responsible for the spread of Christianity through much of the Mediterranean world. And perhaps most important, he significantly developed the theological understanding of the significance of Jesus. For Paul, far less important than Jesus' earthly life and teaching were his death and resurrection, which were God's means of salvation to the world. It may be too extreme to say that Paul is the "founder" or even the "co-founder" of Christianity, but he certainly is the key figure in the faith after Jesus.

The difficulties in knowing about Paul's life and teachings are different from what we saw with Jesus. Unlike Jesus, Paul did leave us a written record. One problem is that scholars have long argued that six of the thirteen New Testament letters that name him as the author are probably not from his pen, but were written by later followers, probably after his death, claiming his name in order to provide authority for their views. When exploring his own ideas, scholars therefore limit themselves to Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon - the "undisputed Pauline letters." We have no authentic writings from him outside the New Testament.

Even the undisputed letters pose difficulties, however, since they are all

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