

Was Paul a Liar?

When all is said and done, there is actually no real reason to prove whether Paul was a liar or not – the man not only declared himself to be a liar, but boasted about his deceptive ways and wore them like a badge of honour! But for the benefit of the skeptics – here are Paul’s biggest whoppers.

In the letter to the church at Ephesus in the Book of Revelation, Jesus said, “And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars.” Revelation 2:2 NKJV. Some say this is a reference to the Apostle Paul, who they say appointed himself to apostleship, hence the reference to “those who say they are apostles and are not”. Whether or not Paul was an apostle is discussed elsewhere on this website. Obviously, the claim of apostleship itself might be considered a lie.

But in my thinking, the label of “liar” implies a person who uses conscious intent to deceive. When Paul called himself an apostle, he genuinely believed he was one, therefore it would be quite unfair to label him as a liar on those grounds alone – perhaps conceited and self-deceived, but not a liar. Interestingly enough, just by the way Jesus states it, he appears to make the same distinction.

Notice that the idea of apostle is completely negated first and then the idea of liar appears to be in addition to the fact. So if Paul was the one Jesus was referring to, I would expect him to be guilty of using conscious intent to deceive. Here again I would draw a distinction and not include what I see as the many errors he had in his doctrines because I’m sure he thought he was right.

If indeed it were Paul to whom Jesus is referring here, we would need to find evidence of outright bold-faced lies, otherwise we cannot say without a shadow of doubt that Revelation 2:2 is a reference to Paul.

A close examination of the New Testament reveals three instances where Paul appears to have told lies in order to support his argument or position at that time. The first relates to a meeting Paul had with the Jerusalem Council.

Paul and the Jerusalem Council

In the book of Acts, Luke records two separate trips Paul made to Jerusalem to discuss doctrinal matters with the head Messianic leaders Peter and James. The first incident is recorded in Acts 15. Here, as the story goes, there had been a disagreement as to whether the Gentiles believers needed to be circumcised.

So Paul and Barnabas were sent to Jerusalem to find an answer to the question. When they came to Jerusalem the elders received them, and Paul told them of his doings among the Gentiles. At this point a group of believing Pharisees stated that it was necessary for the Gentiles to be circumcised along with a requirement for them to keep the Law.

This must have been the hot topic of the day because it was just what Paul and Barnabas had been sent there to discuss. And it says there was “much dispute” among those who were at the conference.

Then Peter speaks and makes reference to an event where he had been sent to the Gentile Cornelius, and he goes on to say these words: “So God, who knoweth the heart, acknowledged them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as He did to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers or we were able to bear?” Acts 15:8-10 NKJV.

Here Peter is referring to the Gentiles and appears to be calling the Law an unbearable burden. Before going on to the subject of Paul, a couple of things need to be addressed in this quote because there are some who can't believe Peter or James would ever call the Law a burden. They would rather charge Luke with dishonest reporting.

As mentioned before, I see no reason to accuse Luke of malice. The book of Acts was not written to the world at large, but to Theophilus, a personal friend of Luke's. It is hard to imagine why Luke would lie to him. I believe Luke accurately recorded what he saw and heard.

The people he quotes may have been in doctrinal error, and his own commentaries may have been made in Paul-induced ignorance, but I personally have a hard time with the notion that Luke was part of a grand conspiracy to destroy the Law.

I see Luke as a very typical everyday person, a Gentile with honorable intentions. He also records events which end up convicting Paul as well as support him! Where he discredited as a reporter, nothing he says would be reliable anymore.

The key to understanding Peter's quote which appeared to call the Law an unbearable burden is to remember who started the argument and who he is addressing ... the Pharisees. (see previous three verses. Acts 15:5-7) Even Jesus called (not the law itself but) their idea of the Law a burden:

"The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses seat. Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do. But do not do according to their works; for they say and do not do. For they bind heavy burdens hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers." Matt 23:2-4 NKJV.

I believe these words were echoing in Peter's ears when he heard the Pharisees demand that the Gentiles keep the Law. He knew what their idea of keeping the Law was with all its oral traditions ... a burden! But Jesus had said: "My yoke is easy and my burden is light." Matt.11:30 NKJV

What has this to do with Paul? Bear with me, all will soon be revealed. The apostle John also said: "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome." 1John 5:3 NKJV. The true unadulterated Law of Moses is not unbearable. But Peter and James did not want the Pharisees dictating to the Gentiles their idea of the Law with all its oral traditions of additions and amendments.

This is what Peter was referring to when he called the Law an unbearable yoke. As the story continues, Paul and Barnabas tell of "the many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles". Then James begins to speak, and after a short speech says:

"Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood.

For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath." Acts 15:19-21 NKJV. Here James is obviously endorsing dietary and sexual purity laws along with Moses in general.

It is reasonable to assume that James intended for the four laws he outlined to be stop gap measures, to keep the new believers from doing damage to themselves before they could receive the rest of the Law through the reading of Moses in the synagogues every Sabbath.

The continued hallowing of the Sabbath is evident in that James uses the present tense word "being", and the attendance of the new Gentile believers to the synagogues on the Sabbath is quite obviously implied. The

idea of troubling the Gentiles is his way of saying the Pharisaic laws were too much of a burden.

The issue of circumcision is left up in the air. Again, it appears that James intended the new believers to be convicted when they heard the Laws of Moses read in the synagogues and as a result, follow through with the rest of the Law including circumcision.

This was his way of trying to keep as many of the factions together without unduly insulting the believing Pharisees, and allowing for the Gentiles to receive a more unadulterated version of the Law.

The Messianic leaders then decided to write a letter to the Gentile believers. This was to be the official position on the issue, and it was given to Paul, Barnabas, and other leading men of the congregation who went with them to confirm its authenticity and see that it was delivered properly.

The part that needs to be born out is the list of four immediate requirements concerning dietary and sexual purity laws. They are listed a second time in the official letter itself:

“...For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.” Acts 15:28,29 NKJV. Twice, these four requirements are listed in Acts 15.

Later in the book, Paul returns again to Jerusalem, only this time he was in trouble for what he had been teaching. More will be mentioned about this episode later. At the end of a lecture to Paul, James makes this statement:

“But concerning the Gentiles who believe, we have written and decided that they should observe no such thing, except that they should keep themselves from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality.” Acts 21:25 NKJV. There they are again. The same four requirements listed a third time.

Lie No. 1 – The Jerusalem Council

First, it is imperative that we understand the subject matter of the book of Galatians. Christianity fondly refers to Galatians as “the Magna Carta of spiritual emancipation”. One reference says, “...it remains as the abiding monument of the liberation of Christianity from the trammels of legalism.”

It is evident to the reader of Galatians that Paul's position against the Law is quite hostile.

His intention is to convince the Galatian believers not to give the time of day to the "Judaizers" like Peter who were teaching the Law of Moses including circumcision. In fact, he twice commands the Galatians to curse anyone who teaches anything other than his doctrine. Gal. 1:8,9.

Among his many anti-Torah/Law arguments are these quotes: "...for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified." Gal. 2:16 ... "But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident..." Gal. 3:11. Yet Deuteronomy 6:25 rebuffs these statements when Moses says:

"Then it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to observe all these commandments before the Lord our God, as He has commanded us."

Paul declares: "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law..." Gal. 3:13. But Deuteronomy, along with Jesus about everything Jesus taught about the Law, does not portray it a curse, nor does it of itself bring one. Breaking the law brings a curse. Therefore it is man and not the Law that is the problem.

Yet Paul declares, "Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by the law; you have fallen from grace. 5:2-4. Here he even drops his own name before telling the Galatians a severe doctrinal lie.

"For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" 5:14. This is in fact only the second greatest commandment. Matt. 22:36-40 says; "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" Jesus said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.'

This is the first and the great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." 1 John 5:3 describes how we are to fulfill the first and greatest commandment to love God with all our heart: "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments.

And His commandments are not burdensome." Note, John is not referring to the teachings of Jesus, he is referring to the commandments of God, which is the Law, which Jesus declared would not pass away until Heaven and Earth pass away, yet Paul says the Law no longer has relevance, as it was only given as a "shadow of things to come."

Paul even goes so far as to wish that those who preach circumcision would take the knife and cut their own penises off! (Galatians 5:11,12) He refers to circumcision as “the mutilation” in Philippians 3:2. His attitude toward the Law and those who teach it is obviously quite hostile.

In Galatians 2, Paul makes mention of the same trip to Jerusalem as mentioned above. It is obvious from the subject matter alone – and most scholars agree – that it is a reference to the same Jerusalem council meeting. Keeping Paul’s anti-Law rhetoric in mind, let’s take a look at Paul’s recollection of that meeting.

“Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and also took Titus with me. And I went up by revelation, and communicated to them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles ... But from those who seemed to be something – whatever they were, it makes no difference to me; God shows personal favouritism to no man – for those who seemed to be something added nothing to me.

But on the contrary, when they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me, as the gospel for the circumcised was to Peter ... and when James, Cephas (Peter), and John who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.

They desired only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I was also eager to do.” Galatians 2:1,2,6-7,9-10 NKJV.

When Paul said that the church in Jerusalem desired “only” that he remember the poor, he was telling them an outright lie. Remember that Paul is attempting to persuade the Galatians not to be circumcised or follow the Law of Moses.

This is the foundational theme of the entire book. Paul was trying to convince the Galatians that he had Jerusalem’s full support in spite of the fact that he didn’t think he needed it. But he could not afford to tell the truth that the official edict from Jerusalem included four requirements from the Law of Moses, three of which were dietary. So he told them a lie when he said, “They desired only that we remember the poor”.

The official letter read that the Gentiles were to “keep themselves from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality.” and nowhere in the letter is there any mention of the poor! The Greek word that Paul used and is translated “only” literally means “with nothing else”.

It should also be pointed out that in the book of Galatians, Paul begins telling of his contacts with the Jerusalem Messianic leaders in Galatians 1:18. He had just finished telling the Galatians that his doctrine was given to him by divine revelation alone.

It didn't even come from the original apostles who had spent three and a half years with Jesus. When Paul tells of his meeting with the Jerusalem leaders, his attitude was that the original apostles were of no significance to him, but if it mattered to the Galatians, he indicated that he still had Peter, James, and John's full support. Paul's description of them – "they seemed to be pillars (of the church)" ...

"those who seemed to be something – whatever they were" showed little respect for them as appointees to the role of Apostle by none other than Jesus. It was Jesus who had appointed them as pillars of the church, it was to them he had given the commission to go and preach the gospel to all nations, yet who they were and what they had to say was of no significance to him.

After beginning to mention his contacts with Peter, James and John in Galatians 1:18 he says these words: "Now concerning the things which I write to you, indeed, before God, I do not lie." Galatians 1:20 NKJV.

Paul actually had the gall to preface a lie with an oath of honesty! One has to ask the question why he felt compelled in the first place to assure the Galatians he was not lying. Jesus had a few words to say concerning this type of oath: "Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.'

But I say to you, do not swear at all, neither by heaven, for it is God's throne' nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes', and your 'No' be 'No'.

For whatever is more than these is from the evil one." Matthew 5:33-37 NKJV. Read that in the context in which Paul's oath was given, and Jesus is effectively saying Paul's word must be from the evil one.

Paul's own words convict him again. He was a liar because he lied to the Galatians regardless of whether or not the Ephesian church, who put him on trial and also found him to be a liar, was aware of his particular lie. But it is not at all unlikely that the Ephesian church was very familiar with both Paul's letter to the Galatians and the official letter from the Jerusalem council.

They are geographically quite close to each other. Also, the Jerusalem council letter would have been circulated to all the Gentile churches, and there is strong evidence to suggest that Paul's letters were being copied and circulated among the churches as well. Peter makes this apparent in 2 Peter 3:15,16 when he speaks of Paul and the content of "all his epistles".

Peter could not say this without being familiar with most if not all of them! One can also see from the passage that he assumes his readers are aware of them as well. The fact that Paul lied to the Galatians is by itself enough to establish him as a liar, but once a person crosses that bridge he will likely continue the practice. His lie to the Galatians is by no means his only one.

Lie No 2: to the Sanhedrin

When Paul was arrested in the temple during his last visit to Jerusalem he had to be rescued by the Romans. On the following day the Roman commander allowed Paul to be taken before Ananias the high priest and the Sanhedrin to defend himself against the charges he was up on. During this trial of sorts, Paul makes an interesting claim:

But when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, "Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee; concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged!" And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and the assembly was divided. Acts 23:6,7 NKJV

A close examination of the facts here show it was but a divide-and-conquer ploy in which there was not one shred of truth. For Paul to say he was being judged on the issue of the resurrection of the dead was an outright lie.

The truth concerning why he was arrested is recorded a little earlier in Acts "... the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him, crying out, "Men of Israel, help! This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against the people, the law, and this place..." Acts 21:27,28 NKJV.

The truth is that Paul was being judged on the matter of bringing to nothing the importance of Israel, the Law of Moses, and the temple. Paul claimed he was being judged on his view of the resurrection not because it was the truth, but for the purpose of dividing his accusers against each other.

Lie No. 3: to King Agrippa

A little later, Paul also lied to King Agrippa in the recounting of his conversion experience on the road to Damascus! The story of Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus is recorded three separate times in the book of Acts. The first is in chapter 9:3-19 as documented by the author of the book, Luke.

Th□ highlights are: And as he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" And he said, "Who are You, Lord?"

And the Lord said, "I am Yeshua, whom you are persecuting, It is hard for you to kick against the goads." So he, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" And the Lord said to him, "Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

The second account is in chapter 22:6-15 and here, Luke records Paul's personal account of his experience as given before the angry Jews in Jerusalem. The points of interest here are:

"Now it happened, as I journeyed and came near Damascus at about noon, suddenly a great light from heaven shone around me. And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"

So I answered, 'Who are You, Lord?' And he said to me, 'I am Yeshua of Nazareth, Whom you are persecuting.' ...So I said, 'What shall I do, Lord?' And the Lord said to me, 'Arise and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all things which are appointed for you to do.'

There is no real problem or conflict in these first two accounts. Even with the slight variations, the main points remain basically the same. The fact is, they are quite consistent and corroborate each other.

The third record of Paul's conversion experience is again given by Paul himself in his own defense before King Agrippa in chapter 26:12-19. Here is what he had to say:

"While thus occupied, as I journeyed to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, at midday, O king, along the road I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me.

And when we all had fallen to the ground, I hear□ a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting

Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’ So I said, ‘Who are You , Lord?’

And he said, ‘I am Yeshua, whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you.

I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes and to turn them from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.’ Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision...”

According to what Luke and Paul himself had previously testified, when asked by Jesus what he was to do, he was told to do absolutely nothing other than to “go to Damascus, and there you would be told ‘all things’ you were to do”.

But going to Damascus and waiting on a visit from Ananias who would tell him what he should do didn’t fit the story Paul wanted Agrippa to hear – that he received nothing from people, but everything from the Lord himself in a vision.

So Paul changes his story and tell Agrippa that he got his instructions on what to do, and received his charge to be the apostle to the Gentiles right there on the road to Damascus!

This is not just a simple case of information having been left out of the first two accounts. The story has been changed totally to support the argument he was putting to Agrippa – that he was God appointed and that no man had any involvement in delivering that appointment.

That he had to grope around in a state of blindness put on him by God, and be at the mercy of some unknown Christian who had to be sent to him, and who eventually had to “led him to the Lord” just didn’t make the cut here, so the truth was substituted with a lie.

Paul could have just not mentioned about Ananias and the role he played in his “conversion”, but Paul wanted to paint a picture for King Agrippa of what he believed to be his unavoidable destiny, so he embellished his account of his vision with a lie.

The main purpose for Jesus confronting Paul is obvious and found in his first words: “Why are you persecuting me?” Jesus’ purpose was to stop the persecution! The fact that Paul didn’t reject Jesus but submitted to him

with the words, “What would You have me do?” is a secondary outgrowth of the event.

Had Paul stubbornly tried to continue on his way to Damascus to arrest the Messianic believers, I thoroughly believe it would have been the end of him on the spot. The scene is very reminiscent of Balaam being stopped by the Angel of Lord because he intended to curse Israel. (See Numbers 22:22-34)

But then Paul seems to have made a habit of changing his story to fit the occasion in order to get his own way. Here it appears that he did it to subtly impress upon King Agrippa’s mind the picture that it was his destiny to be delivered from the Jews, as was already the case, and the Gentiles.

By saying God had told him He was going to deliver him from both the Jews and Gentiles, Paul was warning Agrippa in no uncertain terms that he would have God to answer to if he released Paul on this occasion.

It was all a lie, and the lie worked – from that time on, Paul never was delivered from the Gentiles, even though under Roman law he could have and should have been.

A little later in the story, Festus and Agrippa mock Paul (Acts 26:24,28) and come to the conclusion that Paul was little more than a harmless crackpot. This is when Paul opts for making an appeal to Caesar for justice in the matter.

Christianity has generally thought of Paul’s appeal to Caesar as a brilliant tactical move. But one quote is conveniently overlooked. It is recorded that King Agrippa said to Festus, “This man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.” Acts 26:32. Paul might have been a liar, but he certainly wasn’t stupid!

Paul’s self confessions to lying

When all is said and done, there is actually no real reason to prove whether Paul was a liar or not – the man not only declared himself to be a liar, but boasted about his deceptive ways and wore them like a badge of honour!

1. In Romans 3, Paul declares that he is free to lie on the basis that the end justifies the means: “But if through my falsehood God’s truthfulness abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner? (Rom. 3:7).

In other words, Paul is saying, Provided God's truthfulness shines through, then it doesn't matter if I lie to ensure this happens. Since I am lying for the purpose of bringing glory to God, it was all done in the name of the Lord. That justifies my actions, therefore I have not committed a sin.

2. In 1 Cor. 9, Paul again illustrates his belief that the end justifies the means, even if that means is devious: "For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more.

To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews; to those under the law I became as one under the law-though not being myself under the law-that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law-not being without law toward God but under the law of Christ-that I might win those outside the law.

To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings. (1 Cor. 9:19-23)"

Paul is saying here that there is nothing wrong with him making people believe he is one thing when in fact he is another, or that he believes one thing when in fact he believes another, or that he declares that he preaches one thing but in fact he preaches the opposite.

Paul believes he is justified in saying whatever he wants, whether or not it is the truth, so as to get people to trust him and do what he wants them to do.

He declares he will use whatever means – be they right or wrong – in order to get his message through (that I might by all means save some). He clearly knows it is wrong to do this, otherwise he would not need to justify why he does it – "I do it all for the sake of the gospel".

But the reason he gives for doing it just gets him in deeper water – "that I may share in its blessings".

In other words, Paul is saying, "if I have to lie to get someone to believe what I am saying, and by doing so, something good comes out of it, then I've done nothing wrong. My motive was right so the end justifies the means". I don't ever recall hearing that deceived, twisted logic in anything Jesus taught.

3. In 2 Cor. 11, Paul says, “Did I commit a sin in abasing myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached God’s gospel without cost to you? I robbed other churches by accepting support from them in order to serve you. And when I was with you and was in want, I did not burden any one, for my needs were supplied by the brethren who came from Macedonia.

So I refrained and will refrain from burdening you in any way. (2 Cor. 11:7-9). Paul is saying here that, because he didn’t want to be a financial burden on the Corinthians while he was with them, he made out to the brethren of Macedonia that he was destitute so that they would give him money/support.

He even admits that his deception was an act of robbery, but again, in Paul’s mind, the end – “to serve you” – justifies the means – “I robbed other churches by accepting support from them”. To me, that’s a case of robbing Peter to pay Paul, and this is actually where that phrase originated!

4. After Paul brags to the Corinthians how he conned the Macedonians with a lie, he then has the shameless audacity in his next letter to the Corinthians to boast that he has pulled the same stunt on them:

“But be it so, I did not burden you: nevertheless, being crafty, I caught you with guile.” (2 Cor. 12:16) By now Paul is in so deep with his lying and deception, he has no conscience on it whatsoever, having conned himself into believing that he can get away with anything.

If you were God, would you entrust your Kingdom and the task of bringing its message to the Gentiles of the world to such a person?

Allah Knows Best.