



Saint Paul Was Not Virgin Born: A Study Intended to Humanize Paul of Tarsus and to Honor Jesus of Nazareth

Ronald Lee Cobb

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Saint Paul was Not Virgin Born is compelling as it argues for putting Jesus back at the center of Christian life.

Military chaplain Ronald Lee Cobb's *Saint Paul was Not Virgin Born* is a theological argument for placing less emphasis on Paul in order to focus on Jesus.

While Paul and Jesus are both presented as important in this book, Cobb argues that Jesus's words are too often overlooked in favor of following Paul's guidance. Such popular tendencies, the book claims, become an impediment to believers who are looking to follow God in the best ways possible. Paul and Jesus, Cobb points out, disagreed on some key points, including the place of women, the role of the Jewish people, and sin; he argues that it is best to let Jesus's positions take the lead.

The text posits many reasons for churches losing sight of Jesus, and shares a story about a pastor who used Jesus and Paul's words interchangeably during a church service to support its sense that the problem is wide. It points to historical frustrations with Paul's prominence, too, and makes the intriguing claim that, because Paul's directives are more rigid than Jesus's, the sense of structure that they provide acts as a counter to contemporary anxieties. But this still means that Paul's "too-easy answers" obscure the gospels and dilute Jesus's words.

Short, topical chapters sketch out the book's important themes, including concerns about Paul's background as it's seen in Acts, the underlying language of Paul's letters, and the differences between the Greek and Aramaic and Hebrew scriptures. The book contextualizes its claims by addressing biblical geography, language, and culture. Further, personalized metaphors help to humanize its claims: here, Paul is called the first "basic training sergeant" of Christianity, and a stormy cruise on the Mediterranean is tapped to address a similar experience in Paul's letters. The book's assertions are more approachable because of such tendencies, and because they are organized in a logical fashion.

As the book moves from a general outline of Paul's life and ministry to specific concerns about his teachings, it covers considerable ground, musing on topics as varied as the biblical patriarchs, witchcraft, and stoic philosophy. Its focus on Paul's teachings involves some repetition, but its arguments to take Jesus more seriously are still well supported.

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