

Sources of Paul's Teaching (Thoughts)

Warseto Freddy Sihombing and Pelealu Samuel G.

ABSTRACT

Where is the source of Paul's teachings or thoughts? This becomes an important and serious question when we open the New Testament. Some of the things that are of concern are that there are many letters written by Paul and in his writings, there are many doctrines and theological terms that are very inherent in the church. If we look at the background of Paul's life, we will feel astonished. The question that follows the above is why his writings really dominate the New Testament while he is not an apostle directly chosen by Jesus as with Simon Peter, Andrew, James, etc.? What is the main source for all of Paul's writings so that they dominate the New Testament? Where are the main sources of his teaching?

Keywords: Paul, early teachings, old testaments, revelations, and the early church traditions

Published Online: June 2022

ISSN: 2828-5492

Warseto Freddy Sihombing^{1*}
Pelealu Samuel G²

^{1*}Institut Agama Kristen Negeri
Tarutung

² STT Bina Muda Wirawan Medan

Email:
asafremel@gmail.com

**Corresponding Author*

I. INTRODUCTION

The New Testament contains many of Paul's writings. The number of Paul's writings exceeds the writings of the other apostles. This has led to accusations (liberal theologians) that are often leveled at Paul that his teachings are contrary to the teachings of Jesus, even according to them Paul often brings up new terms that are not commonly used by Jesus. Of course, this is understandable because Paul was not from the twelve apostles chosen by Jesus. But giving such accusations must be objective and based on strong internal evidence.

In this paper, the author presents evidence that all of Paul's teachings have apostolic (apostolic) authority as the teachings of other

apostles of Jesus Christ (Peter, John, James, Philip, Thomas, etc.). This applies to all of Paul's teachings regarding salvation, redemption, the law, God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Church, Israel, obedience, eternal life, eternal punishment, and many more. The truth is that Paul's teachings did not contradict the teachings of Jesus and the apostles he had chosen. His teaching comes from the Bible (Old Testament) by understanding that Jesus is the fulfillment of all the teachings contained in the Torah, the History of Israel, and the Prophets. So, Paul's teachings do not contradict the teachings of Jesus.

II. METHODS

This research uses descriptive qualitative method. The author explores Paul's theological thought which cannot be separated from historical analysis and contextualization at that time. The “scope/Area” of the text and the “social environment” of Christianity in Paul's time are substantially related in the historical context of why and for what purpose the letter was written. The coming and work of Christ is a manifestation of the fulfillment of God's action in history which marks the beginning of the age of salvation.

III. DISCUSSION

Paul's Turning

It would be inappropriate to say that Paul had converted from an evil person to a good person. This does not mean that Paul was a sinless man, because, by his own admission, he was the ultimate sinner (1 Timothy 1:15). Repentance can mean that a person must believe in God by leaving his faith or belief in something that is not essentially God which is part of soteriology. Paul in this case is a man who believes in God, the only true and living God who has revealed himself to mankind, especially to the nation of Israel. This revelation of God is evident in the history of the life of the Jewish nation, starting with God's election of Abraham.

Furthermore, the term "repentance" carries a psychological burden. Paul did not repent of being an unbeliever or a brutal person, but he was a man who loved God and highly respected His teaching, namely the Law. It would be wiser to say that Paul had turned from one understanding

of truth to another; from righteousness by works to righteousness by faith. Paul's knowledge of God and His truth as a Pharisee was no longer the same as when he had believed and accepted Jesus as the promised Messiah.

Luke's account in the book of Acts three times on different passages regarding Paul's turning is an invaluable reference. Although it was not his main purpose to introduce himself as to who he was, Paul in his letters to the church has sometimes done so as in Romans 9:1-5; Galatians 1:11-24; 2:1-10. Why and what were Paul's reasons and thoughts that he was so zealous in persecuting God's church? Eckhard J. Schnabel also asked the same question, “Why did Saul or Paul persecute followers of Jesus? The most reasonable answer is the understanding that the preaching of the early followers of Jesus was seen as so despicable and heretical that Paul believed that an aggressive attitude was necessary to stop their activities.”

Schnabel's answer is correct. The first reaction that appeared in Paul was negative, because he was a very obedient Pharisee and obeyed every rule of the law. Paul was a very religious man and had been shown to love the God he worshiped. Paul's unique encounter with the person of Jesus Christ who died and rose became a new history (life) in Paul as recorded in the Bible, where he eventually became the most loyal follower of Jesus Christ and taught what he had received from Jesus. To this calling from heaven he never disobeyed (Acts 26:19). His basic assumption was, he had done what was right in God's eyes. Acknowledging and

accepting 'Jesus as the Messiah', which was promised in the Old Testament, contradicts the general Jewish belief about the Messiah.

Source of Paul's Teachings/Thoughts

The emergence of various schools that study Paul's theology is due to differences in understanding and the lack of agreement from New Testament experts in determining where the source of Paul's thoughts came from. Whether Paul's thoughts came from God's revelation, from his own will, or from various sources outside himself needs to be proven. It is important for the church, first of all, to pay attention to Paul's own statements about who he really was and about his teachings.

Discussing the source of Paul's thought leads us to know his Jewish educational background. As a Jew and a Pharisee, Paul was well educated and was a very good man. He is not like other Jews because he has many advantages in terms of mastery of Judaism values. Paul was also able to adapt himself to the highly developed and existing culture of the time, in which the Hellenistic-Roman world was very prominent at that time. This is evidenced by his ability to approach the preaching of the gospel that he conveys to different audiences, as stated by Hunter thus: "Paul had two "guides who led him to Christ": one Jewish, the other Greek. His indebtedness to Judaism is so evident on every page that one is astonished to hear that scholars like Reitzenstein have managed to convince people that Paul was a genuine Hellenist. Indeed, he studied Judaism in Hellenistic; but the

evidence lies with all those who maintain that the Hellenistic Judaism that Paul knew was radically different from Palestinian Judaism."

Can the teachings of Judaism be equated with the Hellenistic world? Judaism is a Jewish understanding or teaching rooted in the Old Testament and the oral traditions of the Jews that are still well preserved, including during the development of the Hellenistic world, a time when Greek culture and civilization ruled the world, including at the time of Jesus and at the time of Paul. Hunter has explained that Paul's understanding and teachings are radical and different from other Palestinian Judaism in general. His encounter with Jesus Christ on the way to Damascus has changed his life and way of thinking 180 degrees. His introduction to the highly developed culture at that time did not eliminate the Judaism nature in him.

The fact that Paul has come up with many terms that are not commonly used by Jesus during His ministry on earth with His twelve disciples does not mean that the teachings taught by Paul are contrary to what was taught by Jesus Christ. Paul personally has complex skills in the era in which he lives, because he is a combination of a person who lives amid a plurality of cultures, ethnicities, and beliefs. And he is one of the many people in the world who has an extraordinary personality.

This is what Porter said about Paul. Paul lived under the influence of various cultures: in it, there were Judaism, Hellenism, and Rome which became a great wealth and experience for Paul. One thing that should not be forgotten is

that the strong legacy of Judaism was evident in Paul, especially when he was still a persecutor of Christianity. He displayed the same qualities when he became a true Christian and a staunch follower of Jesus Christ. The extraordinary paradigm shift that occurred in Paul is something that is also quite the opposite. Paul eventually became known as a Christian persecutor who had turned into a defender of Christianity.

Back to the question at the beginning, where did Paul's thought come from? The answer to this question is the aim of this chapter. There are at least three main sources of Paul's theological thought, namely: the Old Testament, God's Revelation and the Early Christian Tradition. The three are a triad that cannot be separated from one another. As a Pharisee, Paul was the result of a very strict Judaism education in the mastery of the Old Testament. The revelation (vision) of Jesus Christ to him on the way to Damascus has changed his paradigm towards the Torah and at the same time became the source of his thoughts. God's special calling of him as an apostle to the Gentiles did not necessarily separate him from the other twelve apostles and did not cause him to teach anything contrary to early Christian tradition.

Old Testament

It would not be wise to be too quick to say that Paul was an opponent or reformer of the law (Old Testament), while he himself was a Jew who was born, lived and raised under the law. The accusations leveled against him by his opponents regarding the transgression of the law

were unfounded and groundless. To the church in Galatia, Paul gave his testimony and views on the law (Galatians 1:13-14; 2:15; 3:1-29).

Paul recognized the authority of the Old Testament as God's revelation and he had lived it first. His spiritual quality is also outstanding. He was circumcised on the eighth day, and boldly declared that in keeping the law he was "without blemish." Can anyone keep the law perfectly? Of course not. But we can understand that Paul admitted that he had tried his best to keep the law (Old Testament). Although Paul realized that the law he firmly held (the law) was not able to save people from sin because indeed what he had received in Christ far exceeded all his pride, it did not mean that Paul denied the truth in the law and immediately threw it away. As stated by Ridderbos in his writings thus: "While discussing the Jewish concept of viewing the Torah as a means of salvation, Paul views the Torah in a negative light, but his letters also clearly state what is called the 'third function' of the Torah. Despite asserting that we 'died to the Law', Christ is the end of the law" etc., Paul still maintains the meaning of the Torah as the revelation of God's will, and to some extent this is self-evident. He also talks about "good works" and righteousness in his own way. This shows that it is completely impossible to deny the double meaning of the Law as a guide to Christ and as a new rule of life.

Paul continued to hold the Old Testament as one of his main sources of teaching. He taught many themes in Christianity that are also found in the Old Testament, which he conveyed in a

different and more lively way. The Jews firmly believed that the Old Testament, which consisted of the writings of Moses, the prophets and other Old Testament writers, was "the revelation of God." Only, Paul only realized after meeting Jesus Christ on the way to Damascus a new understanding, namely Jesus who is the fulfillment of all the law. God's will was fulfilled in Jesus perfectly.

He also gives practical examples of Old Testament theological themes, such as love. Deuteronomy says, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength" (Deuteronomy 6:5-6). Paul teaches this love to be practiced in daily life in the form of patience, generosity, not pride, no pride, no jealousy (etc.) Christians (1 Corinthians 13:1-4-8). Paul often quotes the Old Testament in each of his letters to support his teaching. 2 Timothy 3:16 is the conclusion of his view of the entire Old Testament writings, inspired by God.

Donald Guthrie quotes Longenecker as saying that Romans contains more Old Testament quotations than any of his other letters. He quoted the Old Testament 45 times in Romans, 15 times in 1 Corinthians, 7 times in 2 Corinthians, 10 times in Galatians, 4 times in Ephesians and 2 times in the Pastoral Epistles. There are also a number of statements about views, events and characters in the Old Testament. Paul does this in two ways, quoting 'directly' and quoting 'indirectly'. The purpose of quoting the Old Testament is to support each of its teachings. In his teaching on justification by

faith, Paul also quotes the Old Testament that this teaching is also taught in the Old Testament. Paul quotes selectively, interprets in certain contexts and reads the Old Testament in the sense that Jesus is the fulfillment of "the Law and the Writings of the Prophets."

For Paul the formula "it is written" means that every reader should acknowledge the authority of what is already written. The continuity between the Old Testament and the gospel of Christ is Paul's premise. For him, God's work was perfectly revealed in Christ which was the culmination of the fulfillment of the Old Testament. Paul's use of the Old Testament is not intended only to search for prophecies and their fulfillment, but also to place the events of redemption according to the Old Testament school of redemptive history. But interpreting the meaning of Christianity in the Old Testament can only be done with the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit. The Old Testament had glory, but it was temporary and ended when the glory was revealed in Christ (2 Corinthians 3:1-18).

Paul quoted every verse of the Old Testament selectively and carefully. More than eighty percent of Paul has quoted from the Pentateuch, Isaiah, Psalms and Genesis. In general, Paul's quotations from the Old Testament focus on two subjects: the righteousness of God and the law and the choice of Israel and the nations. The center or main emphasis of Paul, both in every preaching and in every letter is Christology (in all aspects contained therein). Paul did not change his view of God, but he accepted God's revelation that the

gospel had become real which was the testimony of the Law and the message of the prophets (Romans 3:21).

God's Revelation

The second source of Paul's teachings/thoughts is the revelation of God. In the Acts of the Apostles there are three times how Paul received God's revelation (9:1-19a; 22:3-16; 26:9-18). The differences found in the three passages of Paul's testimony regarding his turning to Jesus in Luke's account do not contradict each other, but rather are complementary accounts. Luke himself does not see it as something to be concerned about. No one doubts that Paul was so active in preaching the gospel of Christ. His testimony of his second turning is described by Luke when Paul was before the crowd, and the third when he was before king Agrippa where the main purpose of Luke's report is not to explain the sequence of events in detail, but to explain the significance of each event that has occurred.

How can God's revelation to Paul be understood? Based on Luke's testimony and Paul's own confession it can be understood that God met Paul in a vision. This vision contains the personal revelation of Jesus Christ to Paul. In Acts 9:1-19a it is explained that only Paul had seen Jesus Christ in His glory which resulted in blindness in Paul's eyes, while those who accompanied him on the journey saw no one. For three days he was unable to see until Ananias met Paul at the house of Judas, a Tarsus man and prayed for Paul.

In this case we need to distinguish between what is called essence / essence and what is called form. The essence of the gospel is that Jesus is the true Son of God who revealed himself to Paul on the way to Damascus. For Paul, those who have been persecuted who believe in Jesus are right in understanding Jesus as the Messiah who has come. The form of the Gospels including the historical of every event recorded in the Gospels, of course, reveals the truth of God in Jesus, which Paul later believed.

Early Christian Tradition

The early church adhered to the teachings of the apostles (Acts 2:42). In his relationship with Paul, no contradiction exists between what Paul had taught and what the other twelve apostles had taught. For about a hundred years the church lived in the teachings of the apostles which were preserved both in writing and even more so orally. This Christian tradition includes the kerygma (content of the message) and the preaching of the apostles. The early church preserved the teaching of the apostles orally very well.

Finally, the source of Paul's teachings/thoughts comes from this Early Christian Tradition. It must be understood to believe that Paul did not teach anything different from the other apostles before him. Although it must be admitted that in some respects the oral tradition of the early church was similar to the Jewish tradition, there was one striking difference. Accepting the Christian tradition is twofold, that is, it is a historical and pneumatic-

pneumatic tradition at the same time. From a historical perspective, it relates to the events that occurred, while from a pneumatic-pneumatic perspective, it relates to the confession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord, God is behind the history of this world.

Thus, Christian Tradition relates to what Jesus taught which has been very well remembered as reported by the authors of Acts in various variations. It can be concluded that there are three things that are very closely related to the Christian tradition, namely: Worship, Teaching and Preaching. Worship centers on the Person of Jesus Christ as found in Acts 2:42-47; 4:23-37; 20:7-11; 1 Corinthians 11:2-34; 14:1-40. The early church gathered regularly in worship to express their faith, praise, pray, hear Bible explanations and break bread (holy communion). Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:1-5, the Christian kerygma is that Christ died for the sins of mankind, according to the Scriptures, was buried and was raised according to the Scriptures. This was accepted as an ancient pre-Paulic kerygma which he had accepted as a tradition from the apostles who preceded him. Another example is the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 11:23. "Essentially these words mean that the chain of historical traditions that Paul accepted stems from the words of Jesus himself."

IV. CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that the source of Paul's thought comes from the Old Testament, God's Revelation and the Early Christian Tradition as explained above. Paul's turning to Jesus Christ

has given him a new and clear understanding of the law, not abandoning the Old Testament and trying to establish a new understanding. Just as the Old Testament taught justification by faith, so Paul taught the same thing. Paul's message was basically the same as Jesus' message that God had visited His people (Luke 7:16). Justification in Redemption History is the fact that God has perfectly worked out redemption as part of the "historical process." God's work in Christ is understood as the center of history, where we gain understanding between the past and the future. Paul has been given the understanding of the revelation of God's will and mystery which has been fulfilled and perfected in Christ.

REFERENCES

- Alkitab, Jakarta: Lembaga Alkitab Indonesia, 2011.
- Arndt, F., F. W. Gingrich. Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Others Early Christian Literature. Pent. W. Bauer, Direvisi. F. W. Danker. Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000.
- Carson, D. A., Douglas J. Moo dkk., An Introduction to The New Testament. Philippines, Manila: OMF Literature Inc., 1998), 222.
- Childs, Brevard S. Biblical Theology of The Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993.
- Delling, G. Kata "πλήρωμα" dalam Theological Dictionary of the New Testament. Ed. Gerhard Kittel dan Gerhard Friedrich. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1985.

- Dunn, James D. G. *The Theology of Paul The Apostle*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998.
- Dunn, James D. G. dan Alan M. Suggate. *The Justice of God: A fresh Look at the Old Doctrine of Justification by Faith*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993.
- Friberg, Barbara, Timothy Friberg dkk. *Analytical Lexicon of The Greek New Testament*. (Bible Works 9, CD-ROM).
- Guthrie, Donald. *Teologi Perjanjian Baru, Jilid 1*. Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2001.
- Holladay, Carl R. *A Critical Introduction to the New Testament, Interpreting The Message and Meaning of Jesus Christ*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005.
- Hunter, A. M. *Memperkenalkan Teologi Perjanjian Baru*. Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2004.
- Ladd, George Eldon. *Teologi Perjanjian Baru Jilid 2*. Bandung: Kalam Hidup, 2002.
- Marshall, I. Howard. *Acts, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*. Surabaya: Momentum, 2007.
- Moo, Douglas J. *The Epistle to The Romans: The New International Commentary on The New Testament*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996.
- New English Translation Bible. Version 1.0 - Copyright © 2004, 2005 Biblical Studies Foundation.
- Porter, Stanley E. *Paul as Jew, Greek, and Roman: An Introduction*. Ed. Stanley E. Porter. Leiden-Boston: Brill-Hotei Publishing, 2008.
- Ridderbos, Herman. *Paulus: Pemikiran Utama Theologinya*. Surabaya: Momentum, 2010.
- Schnabel, Eckhard J. *Rasul Paulus Sang Misionaris*. Yogyakarta: ANDI Offset, 2010.
- Zugg, Julian Michael. *Pauline Theology*. Houston, Texas: Miami International Seminary.