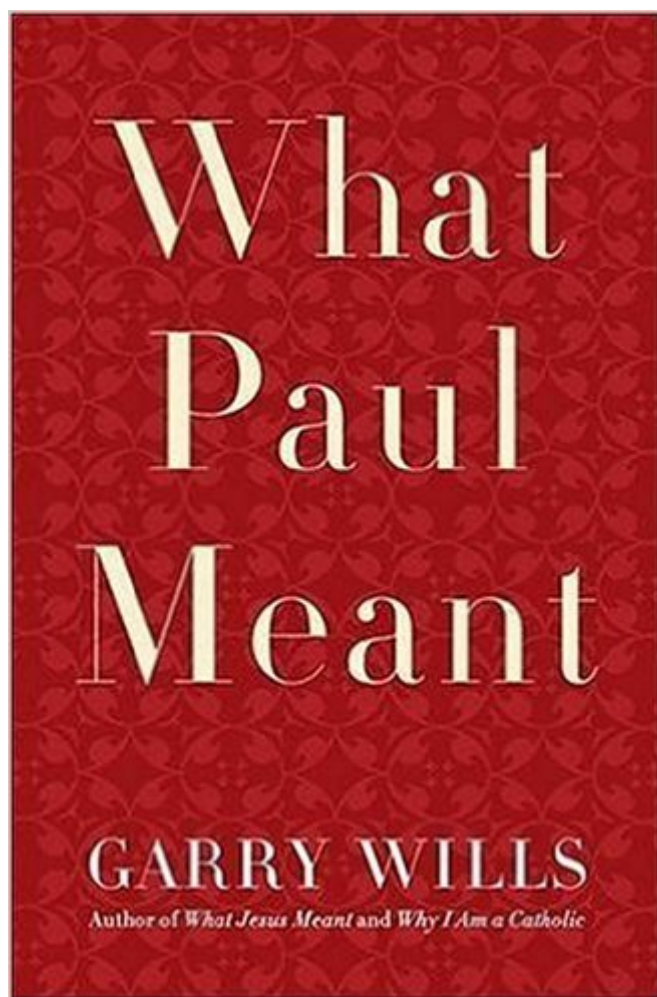


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# What Paul Meant



## Synopsis

A brilliant synthesis of the Apostle Paul's thought and influence, written by a "foremost Catholic intellectual" (Chicago Tribune) All through history, Christians have debated Paul's influence on the church. Though revered, Paul has also been a stone on which many stumble. Apocryphal writings by Peter and James charge Paul, in the second century, with being a tool of Satan. In later centuries Paul became a target of ridicule for writers such as Thomas Jefferson ("the first corruptor"), George Bernard Shaw ("a monstrous imposition"), and Nietzsche ("the Dysangelist"). However, as Garry Wills argues eloquently in this masterly analysis, what Paul meant was not something contrary to what Jesus meant. Rather, the best way to know Jesus is to discover Paul. Unlike the Gospel writers, who carefully shaped their narratives many decades after Jesus's life, Paul wrote in the heat of the moment, managing controversy, and sometimes contradicting himself, but at the same time offering the best reflection of those early times. *What Paul Meant* is a stellar interpretation of Paul's writing, examining his tremendous influence on the first explosion of Christian belief and chronicling the controversy surrounding Paul through the centuries. Wills's many readers and those interested in the Christian tradition will warmly welcome this penetrating discussion of perhaps the most fascinating church father.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

'What Paul Meant' by Garry Wills is a new entry into the growing field of popular and semi-popular / semi-scholarly books on the life and doctrines of the apostle, Paul of Tarsus. Other recent entries into this sweepstakes include N. T. Wright's 'What Saint Paul Really Said', 'Rabbi Paul, An

Intellectual Biography' by Professor of Religion, Bruce Chilton, and 'The Gospel According to Paul' by Oxford (Lincoln College) don, Robin Griffith-Jones. And, this is not all of them, but only the ones I've read and reviewed recently. Pastor Wright's book, for example, is a reply to another recent book, 'Paul: The Mind of the Apostle' by A. N. Wilson and Wills' book is rich with bibliographic notes to yet other, more scholarly titles. The best thing about this bumper crop is that each and every volume has been written by a major scholar in the field of New Testament studies. Most, other than Professor Wills, appear to have a Protestant affiliation. This is not surprising as ever since Martin Luther, Paul has been the hero of Protestant theology to the likes of Calvin, Wesley, Edwards, Kierkegaard, Barth, Harnack, and Bultmann. My hunch is that the wellspring of all this popular writing has been the scholarly writings of Professor Ed. P. Sanders, who, with some others, has created a 'new perspective' on Paul's intellectual background with his books published over the last thirty years. While I have been studying Paul and the New Testament for just a short time, my overall impression at the moment is that what most of these 'new perspective' writers, including the authors of these popular works, is to restore us to the opinion of Albert Schweitzer, whose scholarly works on Paul were published between 60 and 90 years ago.

This is a solidly argued but uninspiring sequel. And though the author jokes about it in the acknowledgements, I'm forced to wonder if this follow-up wasn't forced on him by the editor or his publisher. Where his "What Jesus Meant" easily rates 5 stars for theology, readability, and inspiration, "What Paul Meant" is a rather dull formulaic defense of Paul against mostly formulaic criticisms. Where "What Jesus Meant" cast light and glory on Jesus love in a very positive way, "What Paul Meant" was nothing more than a point by point defense often using subtle translation differences. While those subtleties are important, they fail to come together in any single unified uplifting message the way the author did in his first book. Some positives that some readers will take away from this: For those who don't know, the author does a good job of outlining which of "Paul letters" Paul is thought by current scholars to have actually written versus which have been mistakenly attributed to him. This is the critical first step in building a solid defense of Paul. The author makes a solid case that in a thorough reading of the remaining letters that he actually wrote, Paul commonly and frequently lifts up the work of women in the early church and ministry and far from being the sexist he's accused of, he's well ahead of his time in recognizing the crucial value of women in the church. Possibly the author's greatest contribution was a very well laid out case that Paul didn't indeed have any prejudice toward "the Jews" - which of course he was one of and a learned Jewish scholar at that. He makes the solid case that Paul did see Jesus as the Jewish

Messiah and as a fulfillment of Jewish prophesy.

Review of: "What Paul Meant" By: Garry Wills Paul was the first letter writer of Christianity. His epistles are considered the most pessimistic writings of the early church. Despite the pessimism of Paul's epistles, he guided the early church and aided the growth of the early church. The author, Garry Wills, calls the growth of the early church an explosion of belief. He says of Paul: "Paul was part of this explosion of belief." Garry Wills says that Nietzsche called Paul the "dysangelist" or the bad news bearer, and "a man with a genius for hatred." This is in contrast to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, the "evangelists" or the good news bearers. The author asks the question: "how much of this notoriety is deserved?" His answer: "very little." This book uses seven of Paul's letters: "Letter to the Thessalonians", "Letter to the Galatians", "Letter to the Philippians", "Letter to Philemon", "First Letter to the Corinthians", "Second Letter to the Corinthians" and "Letter to the Romans." These are the letters whose authorship is not disputed. Author Wills shows that Paul echoed and amplified the message of love spoken by Jesus. Paul had the same message of love as Matthew, Mark, Luke and John when he reports on the teaching of Jesus. This book also gives details of the life of Paul and of the history of early Christianity. See Also: What the Gospels Meant and

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