

A Mission Intended to Last?

The (Fragile) Sustainability of Paul's Leadership According to 2 Timothy

Mathias Nell

Theological Academy Stuttgart; University of Pretoria

ABSTRACT

The closer the end of the apostle Paul's life and ministry comes into view, the more some of his co-workers and congregations turn away from him. This article speculates on the reasons for this phenomenon, which Paul himself expresses in his presumably last letter, 2 Timothy. The focus is particularly on the personality of the apostle, which seems to intensify with advancing age, even in its challenging features. Based on the results of the study, the article concludes by reflecting on sustainable leadership for those in positions of responsibility in today's churches. The article provides connection opportunities, especially for psychological and sociological studies focusing on guidance by leaders in advanced age as well as for studies in historical research on emotions and studies in the field of organizational development.

Keywords: Paul; 2nd Timothy; sustainability; leading; breakup; averting; personality; age

INTRODUCTION

When applying *sustainability* to Paul the leader, some characteristics of his ministry quickly come to mind: Paul founded communities, established local structures and leaders, gathered a large group of co-workers around himself, and used the means of communication available to him in a masterful manner. However, does all this indicate that his mission was sustainable, that is, one which was able to have a lasting impact in every area of Paul's ministry? After all: Heresy arose in many of the communities (which Paul strove to address and refute). While such challenges are already evident in his earlier letters (e.g. Gal 1:6-9; 2 Thes 2:2, 3:6; 2 Cor 10-13), they seem to appear more strongly at the end of Paul's epistolary correspondence. It is certainly not surprising that such challenges can also lead to the breakup of relationships. The apostle's presumably last letter, the 2nd letter to Timothy,¹ is particularly impressive in the way it addresses this subject. There is evidence that some of Paul's companions and co-workers left him at a later stage: Öhler (2013, p. 252) counts eight individuals within the *Corpus Paulinum* who are exclusively named in the *Pastoral Epistles*, among them six who turned away from Paul for different motives or problems: Alexander (1 Tm 1:20; 2 Tm 4:14), Hermogenes (2 Tm 1:15), Hymenaeus (1 Tm 1:20; 2 Tm 2:17f), Onesiphorus (2 Tm 1:16-18; 4:19), Philetus (2 Tm 2:17f) and Phygelus (2 Tm 1:15). In addition, Demas (already mentioned in Colossians 4:14 and Philemon 24) also left the apostle (2 Tm 4:10). Not only that: Paul even states that the

¹ Paul is to be named as the author here, even if Luke may have been the scribe (for discussion, see Neudorfer, [2017, pp. 15-21.36]). Following Quinn & Wacker (2000, p. 821), Riesner (2016, pp. 96-98) assumes that 2 Timothy is a concise treatment of Luke's originally planned third volume of his complete works. A wide standard in scholarship is the firm conviction that "the author [...] was an unknown member of the Pauline school" and that the letter was written around 100 AD (Schnelle 2017, pp. 409f – own translation). Evidence *against* a Pauline authorship includes in particular the assumed historical situation, the problems dealt with, linguistic peculiarities as well as theological differences to the undisputed Pauline letters (cf. *ibid.*, 405-408). However, all too often there is a lack of awareness of the fact that even "an optimally applied historical method [...] may only produce probability assessments and not absolute certainty" (Baum 2019, p. 87 – own translation). Haacker (2009, p. 226) remarks: "There are, to my knowledge, no reliable, empirically founded parameters for the coherence of content and temporal stability of Paul's theology!" (own translation), although such parameters are often applied to the *Corpus Paulinum*. Therefore, there is a growing number of alternative interpretations in support of the traditional assumption of Pauline authorship. One of the main arguments against the Pauline authenticity of the 2nd Epistle to Timothy has long been its vocabulary, which would be more in line with the 2nd century. This view was most recently refuted by van Nes (2021). At the same time, the increasing age of a person should be considered more strongly as a cause for a change in speaking style (see e.g. Lehr [2000]). Weißenborn (2012, p. 362) points out that the letter was regarded as an uncontested authentic letter of Paul until the 19th century, "even though the early church was already aware of the problem of forged letters" (own translation) and provides a detailed confrontation of the above-mentioned arguments *against* a Pauline authorship (*ibid.*, pp. 361-376). See also Baumert & Seewann (2019, pp. 9.219-225), who likewise provide considerations and comprehensive references to recent research literature on the Pauline authenticity of the so-called *Pastoral Epistles* (1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus) in discussion with the main counter-arguments of the last 200 years. See also in favour of Pauline authorship: Wright (2004, pp. 4f), Towner (2006, pp. 86-88), Carson & Moo (2010, pp. 671-691), Keener (2014, pp. 601f.616), Yarbrough (2018, pp. 69-90). On the most recent argumentation against the Pauline authenticity of 2 Timothy (though only with unspecific references to the proponents of Pauline authorship) see Veit-Engelmann (2022, pp. 18-26). In accordance with most proponents of the Pauline authenticity of 2 Timothy, I date the writing of the letter between 65 and 67 AD.

entire province of Asia had turned away from him (2 Tm 1:15), that everyone had abandoned him at his “first defense”² (2 Tm 4:16), and only Luke remains with him (2 Tm 4:11). While 2 Tm 2:16-18; 4:11f.19-21 shows that Paul at the time of writing the letter still had (at least collegial) relationships, this does not diminish Paul's obvious pain of loss over the other relationships. At the end of his life and ministry, Paul seems to expect a rather lonely death, facing some broken pieces as he looks back at his ministry.

How can this development of a possibly crumbling sustainability of what emerged under Paul's leadership be explained? A development that becomes very apparent in the apostle's own words, especially at the end of his life. This paper seeks to examine these issues and apply its findings to the current discussion of sustainability in leadership.

I will proceed in a simple process consisting of two steps: I will first carry out an exegetical analysis of the biblical texts, especially from 2 Timothy. In the second step I will combine the exegetical findings, include observations of thematically relevant texts from other Pauline letters and use the overall results to consider cautiously, and with some speculative reflections, their impact on Paul's personality as a leader and contemplate on their application for leadership responsibility in the churches today. In both steps, I will specifically address the ancient strategies of rhetorical self-representation where they have something to contribute. I will also consider insights from (ancient and modern) research on aging (as it is incorporated into academic theological literature). In the process, I am aware that the evaluation of ancient personalities on the basis of modern methods is not unproblematic (cf. Malina & Nerey, 1996, pp. 1-99) and should only be done with great caution. This is particularly relevant in light of the fact that in view of Roman antiquity, it is difficult to speak “of a sociologically clearly identifiable population of the elderly”³ (Sigismund, 2005, p. 59) at all. In principle, however, modern approaches are also justified, since scholars of ancient history speak of surprising insights “into the often so uninhibited, reflected, sometimes downright modern way in which antiquity dealt with old age and the elderly”⁴ (Brandt, 2002, p. 12).⁵ With Sigismund (2005, p. 59), the “exegetical examination of old people in biblical or pagan texts [...] must therefore take place under the methodological convention that each case is to be considered separately”. All things considered, I understand my contribution as an approach to a topic with regard to Paul that – as far as I can see – is still largely untreated and in the expectation that other studies will build on it in a supplementary and revising way.

EXEGETICAL STUDIES *IN AND PROCEEDING FROM* 2 TIMOTHY

The first section of significance in 2 Timothy is the text of 2 Tm 1:15-18. After the urgent call to uphold the right doctrine (2 Tm 1:13f), Paul reminds Timothy of something he actually already knows (2 Tm 1:15: “You are aware that all who are in Asia turned away from me, among whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes”). Paul's sorrow is clearly heard in this absolute (but factually hyperbolic) formulation, especially about the (surprising?) turning away of

² Bible text is quoted throughout the paper – unless otherwise stated – from the ESV with text edition of 2016.

³ Own translation (here and below).

⁴ Own translation (here and below).

⁵ The contribution by Malina & Nerey (see above) also was not left uncontested in its categorical questioning of comparisons between ancient and modern personalities (cf. Pelsler, 1998, p. 449).

Phygelus and Hermogenes (2 Tm 1:15b), who are explicitly mentioned.⁶ Since they are not introduced in detail (with Wright [2004, p. 94], we can only “glean by reading between the lines at this point”), Paul assumes Timothy’s familiarity with them (and probably also that of the church in Ephesus).

A turning away (*ἀποστρέφω*) from the apostle as a person is obvious. But does this also mean a turning away from *sound doctrine*, from *faith* and *love* – in short: the “good deposit entrusted to you”, of which Paul has just spoken (2 Tm 1:13f)? The question is not only an academic one: Does Paul go so far as to argue that a break of loyalty to him as a person – even while maintaining (his) sound doctrine – is necessarily also a turning away from Christ? The immediate literary context suggests this at this point (see also 2 Tm 1:8), as does the comparison with 2 Tm 4:4 and Ti 1:14, where “turn away” is connected with “truth”.⁷ For Oberlinner (1995, p. 57) it follows that “since [...] Paul is the God-appointed messenger of the gospel (cf. 1:10f; also 1 Tm 2:6b, 7; 2 Tm 2:8), turning away from Paul is equivalent to turning away from the right faith and turning toward false doctrine”⁸; further:

Just the previous passage had emphasized that the right faith is to hear the gospel, which is to be kept as a ‘precious good’ (1:12.14), only in communion with the apostle, in listening to the ‘sound words’ preached by him (1:13). Whoever turns away from the apostle loses this basis of the right faith.

Towner (2006, p. 480f) translates *ἀποστρέφω* with military connotations “that everyone in the province of Asia has deserted me”⁹ thus supporting Oberlinner’s reading that it is about apostasy. The military mode of expression would, moreover, fit well overall into the linguistic atmosphere of the apostolic self-presentation in 2 Timothy:¹⁰ The key verse here is 2 Tm 2:3, in which Paul refers to his *comrade* or *fellow fighter* Timothy as such with the honorary title *στρατιώτης*¹¹ and thus equates him directly with a soldier of an army in which Jesus Christ Himself is the supreme commander.¹² He – the recruiter (from the verb *στρατολογέω*) – is to

⁶ It remains speculation whether such turning away movements also occurred in other areas of Paul’s activity. Becker (1998, p. 179) sees at least the Galatian churches lost too. Possibly Paul mentioned the province of Asia here with emphasis, precisely because his letter to Timothy goes to Ephesus and thus to Asia. – Cf. also Oberlinner (1995, p. 58). At the same time it is evident, that the turning away from Paul in Asia is not to be understood with regard to every single believer in Asia (similar absolute formulations are found numerous times in the New Testament in other local references, e.g. in Mt 3:5, Acts 21:31 or Rom 11:26, and are obviously not to be understood in relation to every single human individual), but will – supported by the literary context of 2 Tm 1:15 – concentrate on most of his co-workers (see also 2 Tm 4:12.19f for still vivid connections). See also Yarbrough (2018, p. 367); Veit-Engelmann (2022, p. 166). For the discussion of a possible “specific occasion known to Timothy”, see Quinn & Wacker (2000, p. 613).

⁷ See also Neudorfer (2017, p. 110f).

⁸ Own translation (here and below).

⁹ With reference to Heb 12:25; Josephus, *Antiquities* 2.48; 4.135; Philo, *On the Confusion of Tongues* 131 *et al.* See also Yarbrough (2018, p. 367).

¹⁰ See Nell (2017, pp. 201f.209f) for more details.

¹¹ Cf. Punt (2016, p. 212): “Military commanders used *στρατιώτης* as honorific address, to praise their troops; cf. Caesar who used *commilitiones* (Suetonius, *Julius* 67) and Brutus *στρατιώται* to address his troops in 42 BCE in Philippi (Appian, *Civil Wars* 4.117)”.

¹² Συγκακπάθησαν ὡς καλὸς στρατιώτης Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ. Generally in the *Pastoral Epistles*, “the figurative use” around the entire word group of *στρατιώτης* “seems to be presupposed as common to the behavior

be pleased in all circumstances and set aside other concerns (2 Tm 2:4). With the turning away from Paul as a *commander*, a turning away from the task or assignment of the *spiritual army* as a whole is determined.

In contrast, however, Neudorfer (2017, p. 109) observes: “There is no question of Phygelus and Hermogenes abandoning the common tradition and relationship with Jesus; rather, it is Paul as a person from whom they turned away.”¹³ The fact that a turning away from the gospel is not implied could be supported by the fact that nothing is said about a further (negative) activity of Phygelus and Hermogenes, which had to be warned against (as later on about Alexander in 2 Tm 4:15). Similar Baumert & Seewann (2019, p. 113): “Not that these co-workers have fallen away from the faith, but they have obviously [...] withdrawn from its leadership.”¹⁴ Phygelus and Hermogenes would thus not become “heretics”, however, “personal mortification and disappointment” can nevertheless be sensed in Paul (ibid.).¹⁵ Paul does not say anything about the motives for the departure of these two, one can only speculate cautiously with Neudorfer (2017, p. 110): “It could also be a matter of separations that were forced by external circumstances or by fear of getting into the claws of Roman justice (and that probably meant persecution of Christians at that time) together with the apostle.” I will return to this later.

With regard to Onesiphorus (and his house/family), based on the benevolent and thankful speech Paul uses in 2 Tm 1:16-18 as well as in the greeting to his “house” at the end of the letter in 2 Tm 4:19, there seems to be no hard break in relationship (as Luke, for example, reports about Paul and Barnabas in Acts 16:36-41). Do Onesiphorus and his family also belong to those who turned away from Paul? Probably not (see also Towner, 2006, p. 486), which would explain the gentleness in Paul's words. Apparently Onesiphorus “had already put into practice what the addressee of the ‘letter’ was exhorted to do in v 8; he had stood by the apostle in his distress” (Oberlinner, 1995, pp. 58f). It also seems that Onesiphorus served the apostle for a longer time without fear of personal consequences (see below), as 2 Tm 1:16f suggest (cf. Neudorfer, 2017, pp. 112f).¹⁶

In the 2nd chapter, Paul finds drastic words in 2 Tm 2:16-18 to use against people who chatter “irreverent babble”. “It is [...] about speeches or conversations that focus on issues that do not lead to salvation. Situations in which such conversations take place are to be avoided by Timothy” (Neudorfer, 2017, p. 153) because they lead further and further into ungodliness. Paul emphasizes the inevitable, negative character to which such conversations lead, which obviously does not only mean casual conversations, but also doctrinally taught *words*¹⁷, which purposefully cause mischief (see the comparison with a fatally ending “cancer” in 2 Tm 2:17). It seems clear that Hymenaeus and Philetus are both victims and perpetrators

of Christians, otherwise it could not be used there paraenetically.” – Bauernfeind (1964, p. 711 – own translation).

¹³ Own translation (here and below). See also Wright, 2004, p. 93.

¹⁴ Own translation (here and below).

¹⁵ See also Neudorfer (2017, p. 110): “The formulations in, say, 1 Tm 1:6, 19f; 4:1-3; 6:20f; 2 Tm 4:10, 14f; Ti 1:10-14 are of a very different caliber!”

¹⁶ Nevertheless, something seems to have happened that, at least from Paul's point of view, has relevance “on that day” (2 Tm 1:18) – meaning the day of judgment – and causes him to pray for “Lord's mercy” for Onesiphorus himself as well as for his family (2 Tm 1:16).

¹⁷ Neudorfer (2017, p. 155): “In the context of the text *their word* (ὁ λόγος αὐτῶν) is the instrument of the opponents. Therefore they work with comparable methods like Paul and his co-workers and like already Jesus himself. However, their word is *the word of truth* (v.15; cf. Jn 17:17).”

of such words, and Paul warns explicitly against them: “Paul’s language indicates that the situation is extremely serious (as also in Titus 1:11)” (Towner, 2006, p. 529). Their departure from the truth is mentioned which presupposes that both originally knew the truth proclaimed by Paul (here especially with regard to the resurrection of Jesus) and they possibly also previously represented it themselves earlier.

Hymenaeus has already been known for a long time, Paul had already spoken of him in 1 Tm 1:20, alongside Alexander (who is ultimately and roundly judged by Paul in 2 Tm 4:14¹⁸).¹⁹ In 1 Tm 1:20 both seem to be already *shipwrecked* in faith, but by the standard of the today’s so-called *church discipline* by “handing them over to Satan”, Paul probably still had hope for repentance or at least an improvement of their behavior.²⁰ (This also indicates that both originally belonged to the church!) It does not seem to have had the desired effect with either of them (at least not permanently). On the contrary, their doctrinal views and aberrations seem to have worsened. Philetus is otherwise not further mentioned in the New Testament, he seems to have had here a similar *wingman position/function* next to Hymenaeus, as also Alexander.

It seems right to jump directly to 2 Tm 4:14f: Is Alexander – a (by now?) *fierce opponen*²¹ for Paul – among the apostle’s ‘personal losses’? Although the 2nd letter to Timothy does not indicate that Alexander originally belonged to Christianity, 1 Tm 1:20 allows this consideration (see above), from which – in the context of 1 Tm 1:6f – a strong and resolute turning away from the faith, a quasi deliberate apostasy, can be assumed. In view of 2 Tm 4:14, Baumert & Seewann (2019, p. 149) even see Alexander as a former co-worker of Paul: “Paul draws a closing line: ‘It is God’s business to call him to account. He is judge between him and me!’ This formulation also speaks for the fact that Alexander must have been his co-worker once.” Öhler (2013, p. 252) also counts Alexander among Paul’s (former) co-workers, as well as Hermogenes, Hymenaeus, Onesiphorus, Philetus, and Phygelus. In contrast to the situation with Phygelus and Hermogenes, however, it becomes very clear with regard to Alexander that a turning away from the apostle as a person is at the same time connected with a turning away from the teaching proclaimed by the apostle. Furthermore: It remains speculation also here, but possibly the *hostility* of Hymenaeus and Alexander against Paul intensified after they were *handed over to Satan* by him. After all, Oberlinner (1994, pp. 59f) notes:

While Paul then in 1 Cor 5:4f calls the church to act together with him, the Paul of the Pastoral Epistles remains the only decider; he [...] sets this act of church discipline in his own authority. [...] Particularly striking, in any case, is the concentration on the "I" of the apostle. [...] The church remains passive. It is the "absoluteness and solitary authority of the apostle" that acts as a guardian of the right faith, as a decisive and determining authority.²²

¹⁸ “The treacherous role of Alexander’ in the events of Paul describes elicited a very strong pronouncement of judgment.” – Towner (2006, p. 631); further: “In making it, he creates a contrast, by means of the same verb and same tone of certainty, with the statement of his reward in 4:8: ‘the Lord will award/recompense me’ // ‘the Lord will repay/recompense him.’ [...] Just as Paul’s faithfulness and loyalty assures God’s action of vindication on his behalf, so Alexander’s treachery assures the Lord’s (The reference is to Christ [see on 4:8].) action of judgment on him.”

¹⁹ For the probable assumption that the Alexander of 1 Tm 1:20 and the one of 2 Tm 4:14 are the same person, see Neudorfer (2017, p. 277).

²⁰ See in detail: Neudorfer (2017, p. 156).

²¹ On interpretations of the content see Neudorfer (2017, pp. 277f).

²² With quote from Brox (1989, p. 121). – Own translation.

This remains the case when Paul speaks about Alexander in 2 Tm 4:14 (Oberlinner 1995, p. 176):

Since the content of the accusation is not developed and substantiated, the accent is placed generally on the opposition to Paul. But because "Paul" is completely identified with his mission and because Paul's actions correspond to the will of God (cf. 1 Tm 2:7; 2 Tm 1:11), the opposition against Paul is ultimately directed against God. Consequently, those who act against the apostle face the judgment of God.

Continuing in the fourth chapter: In 2 Tm 4:10 Paul speaks of three of his co-workers who are no longer with him. While the departure of Crescence and Titus is not discussed, the case of Demas is different. The apostle had already mentioned him in Colossians 4:14 and Philemon 24 among those from whom he sends greetings.²³ Demas, therefore, seems to have joined Paul in his earlier period of activity, “the obvious presupposition is that Demas belonged to the Pauline entourage, the traveling *curia* who served him, implemented his directives, were dispatched by him” (Quinn & Wacker, 2000, p. 800). But now he had “deserted” the apostle, Paul says in 2 Tm 4:10 and that out for “love with this present world” (see below for this phrase). The departure of Demas seems to be dramatic because Paul lacks a second witness in his favor – besides Luke (2 Tm 4:11) – in the course of his trial (this principle does not only originate from Jewish practice coming from Deuteronomy 19:15 but also has parallels in the Greek and Roman legal system²⁴). However, just like Onesiphorus (see above), who served the apostle for a longer time without fear of personal consequences, as 2 Tm 1:16f suggests, Demas does not seem to have left Paul out of fear of personal reprisals. Already in the case of Hermogenes and Phygelus in 2 Tm 1:15, I speculated whether this could have been a motive for turning away from the apostle (see above). Presumably, however, this will not have been the case for any of the co-workers in the first place, because – with Neudorfer (2017, p. 264) – this

to decide [...] would require that we know whether the historical situation in Rome of the first systematic persecution of Christians was such that the officially acting persons (justice, judiciary, etc.) were ideologically fanatized. If this was not the case (and the fact that apparently support of the accused was possible up to the trial itself speaks in favor of this!), we may assume that the helpers were only slightly endangered [...].²⁵

Instead, Paul attests to Demas that he “took too much pleasure in the attractive offers of his time” (Neudorfer, 2017, p. 264). Since Paul does not warn of him further, he probably does not see in Demas any danger of a distorted and thus false gospel being preached, as was also the case with Phygelus and Hermogenes (see above). Also, he does not pronounce *judgment* on Demas, like on Alexander (see above), despite the bitter *being forsaken*. But what is meant by

²³ Here – as with the greetings to the house of Onesiphorus in 2 Tm 4:19 – it must be remembered “that ‘greeting’ in antiquity is nothing superficial or merely polite. ‘The greeting clarifies the open situation, it encompasses the persons of the encountered holistically and in many cases also determines their further behavior’ – one could add: and says something about their relationship to each other.” – Neudorfer (2017, p. 292), with quote from Trummer (2011, p. 416).

²⁴ See in detail Neudorfer (2017, p. 262).

²⁵ Was Timothy himself possibly afraid of reprisals? Although Paul presumably asks Timothy to come to him quickly for the legal reasons mentioned (2 Tm 4:9 – see also in view of Mark [2 Tm 4:11]), there are both direct and indirect encouragements respectively exhortations not to be ashamed because of the person of Paul himself (2 Tm 1:8.16).

the “love with this present world”²⁶, that motivated Demas to turn away from Paul? The obvious assumption of a (complete) apostasy is rather denied by the exegetes.²⁷ But with Towner (2006, pp. 622f) in “each case a contrasting set of values is implied – the present age/world and its values versus the age to come/and its promises – as the use of the language in 1 Tim 6:17 and Titus 2:12 reveals (cf. 1 Tim 4:8).”

In tension with the interpretation of a categorical apostasy could also be the remark that follows from the apostle that Demas went to Thessalonica. To Neudorfer (2017, p. 265) it does not seem very likely that someone

who wants to make a total break with the "milieu" [...] which determined his life for years, would go to one of the strongholds of this "milieu", of all places, where he was probably known at least by name. [...] The distance is after all about 900 km as the crow flies!²⁸

So Demas was not necessarily moved by a turning away from the Gospel, but rather from the person of Paul, in which Demas' inner turning away from the apostle, motivated by whatever reason, would “as a consequence also entail the outer separation” (Neudorfer, 2017, p. 265). Accordingly, Quinn & Wacker (2000, p. 799f) emphasize: “The first person pronoun *me* as object is not to be overlooked. It is Paul who has been abandoned or left helpless”. It might have been similar with Hermogenes and Phygelus (see above), all the more so when we take into account that 2 Tim 1:15 “has an undeniable rhetorical effectiveness as well, throwing into high relief the loving loyalty that is about to be narrated” (ibid., p. 612).

When Paul speaks of his “first defense” in 2 Tm 4:16, in which not only no one stood up for him, but categorically *everyone* left him (again: “all deserted me”!), he is referring to his defense before the imperial throne in Rome (to which he has been on his way since Acts 25:10)

²⁶ For the discussed multiplicity of meanings of the phrase, see also Neudorfer (2017, p. 264).

²⁷ Oberlinner, 1995, p. 169: “The accusation is directed at the crucial point that Demas has abandoned the apostle [...]. The added reason that he ‘loved this world’ need not be interpreted as apostasy. If one follows the formulation in Polycarp (ep. 9,1 f), which depends on this verse – Paul and the other apostles are praised that their love did not concern the present world [...] –, then a contrasting picture is to be presented here: on the one side Paul, who is expecting death in a knowing and firm way, on the other side Demas, who is clinging to ‘this world’ and who fails precisely in this decisive situation.” See also Towner (2006, pp. 621-623), who in addition refers to 1 Jn 2:15 (“Do not love the world or anything in the world”) and summarizes: “There is thus no reason to think that his desertion from the Pauline team, as serious as that was in Paul’s eyes, indicates his rejection of the faith or even necessarily his retirement from Christian service.”

²⁸ Neudorfer continues: “Thessalonica, located at the northeastern end of the Gulf of Thermae and at the northwestern approach to the peninsula of Chalkidiki, was at that time the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia. Paul had worked there around the year 49/50 AD on his 2nd missionary journey and 55/56 AD on his 3rd missionary journey (Acts 17:1-10; 20:1ff). Aristarchus and Secundus, probably members of the newly formed church, accompanied the apostle on the 3rd journey from Macedonia toward Judea (Acts 20:4). In our context it is interesting to note that Aristarchus was already part of Paul's 'troop' in Ephesus around the year 55. When Col (Col 4:10) and Phlm (Phlm 24) came into being, he again stayed with him together with Demas (Col 4:14; Phlm 24). In 59 he was still (or again) in his following and accompanied him when the apostle was transported from Caesarea to Rome (Acts 27:2). We may assume that he also reached Rome with him for the first imprisonment. So there was a connection between the Christians in Rome and in Thessalonica, which was related to the person of Aristarchus. In other words, if Demas went to Thessalonica after a falling out with Paul, he did not (consciously) burn all bridges behind him.”

or probably the *receptio nominis*, i.e. “a first hearing of the plaintiff and defendant with the decision whether to open a proceeding before this court (*quaestio*)” (Neudorfer, 2017, p. 280²⁹). The Acts of the Apostles speak in its last chapters of the time leading up to this (first) defense, but not of the defense itself.³⁰ Moreover, the narrative of the Acts of the Apostles ends at a point where there seems to be no trace of loneliness in Paul's life (yet) (cf. Acts 28:23.30f). The experiences in 2 Tm 4:16 would therefore have to be chronologically located after Acts 28:31. Apart from this, the Acts of the Apostles do not tell us anything that can be brought into agreement with the pain-filled statements of Paul in 2 Timothy (which, in any case, is due to the purpose of the Lukan two-volume work as a whole³¹ anyway).

After all: Luke is still there and also within reach are Eubulus, Pudens, Linus, Klaudia ‘and all the brothers’ (2 Tm 4:21). Even the fierce rift with Mark seems to have found reconciliation so that he is to be brought to the apostle for Mark is “very useful” to him (2 Tm 4:11; cf. also Phlm 11). Luttenberger (2012, p. 77) remarks on this (additionally referencing 2 Tm 4:13): “According to this, Paul is in a relatively good situation according to ancient circumstances, despite the seriousness of his situation.”³² Nevertheless, Paul feels “deserted”. At the same time, however, the prayer-like wish “May it not be charged against them” (in the final judgment of God³³) shows with Towner (2006, p. 639): “Paul does not place them in Alexander’s camp”.³⁴

CONCLUSIONS, FURTHER OBSERVATIONS, AND REFLECTIONS ON PAUL'S AND OUR LEADERSHIP

What conclusions can be drawn from the exegetical observations for the question of how sustainable Paul's leadership was? This question arises all the more clearly for us because it is obvious in 2 Timothy: The closer the end of Paul's life approaches – recognizable for himself and obviously also for others – the more Paul himself seems to perceive a *movement away from*

²⁹ Further (with quote from Végh [1345]): “The technical term in Roman procedural law stands for ‘the final acceptance of an indictment (...) by the presiding judge of the competent *quaestio*, the entry in the list of cases pending before the court.’”

³⁰ That Luke might have known about the outcome can be assumed from the mention of the apparently completed two-year period (Acts 28:31). At the same time, however, especially the broad portrayal of Paul in Acts could still serve to influence the ongoing process in favor of the apostle, possibly by Theophilus himself. – See on this Haacker (2019, pp. 15f); Keener (2012, p. 223). On the comparatively high probability that Paul was exiled to Spain, where after a short time he came into conflict with the massive imperial cult and was again sent to Rome (to the imprisonment described in 2 Timothy), see Riesner (2016, p. 100).

³¹ This consists in the presentation of the unstoppable expansion of the Kingdom of God, specifically through the work of the Holy Spirit. – Cf. Fee (2015, pp. 148.150); Keener (2012, p. 520); Scholl (2007, p. 7).

³² Own translation.

³³ To the *passivum divinum* see Neudorfer (2017, p. 281).

³⁴ Of course, passages like 2 Tm 4:16 (and others in the letter) with biographical notes from the past and present always have a topical, rhetorical function with regard to Paul's recipients. Thus, the references to the apostle's forsaking are at the same time a call to stand by him all the more, despite the geographical distance. For almost throughout the *Pastoral Epistles*, “the importance of fellowship with Paul as a criterion of orthodoxy” is evident (Oberlinner, 1995, p. 177).

him. He expresses this in his personal letter to Timothy sorrowfully and perhaps even seeming somewhat perplexed and helpless about it. Yes, there may have been understandable reasons for the withdrawal of his co-workers, especially if the situation around Paul had become too dicey legally, but it can also be seen that such a historical situation is not necessarily to be assumed. I, therefore, want to *speculate* about this against the backdrop of the overarching question of sustainable leadership: *Could the retreat away from Paul possibly also be due to his personality and also to his increasing age?*

I turn initially to the basic personality of the apostle. Neudorfer's (2017, p. 114) following observations and considerations are certainly not compelling, but they do correspond to a general perception with regard to similar types of people:

In terms of character, Paul was a goal-oriented innovator, a founding figure, someone who gave impulses and was able to assert himself. Certain qualities are indispensable for this type of person: motivation, straightforwardness, determination, the ability to persuade, assertiveness, worldliness, for example, or the ability to inspire and lead people. Conversely, however, these qualities mean that they leave little room for others to develop: the ability to work in a team, for example, or sensitivity, and empathy. Many who have worked with the apostle have experienced this. It was probably not always easy, because he told where to go – after all, he was an apostle of Jesus Christ. Then, when he was literally "at the end", in the worst Roman prison, with no hope of release, some may have seen the chance to break away from him – externally and internally. This does not have to mean that they also turned their back on their Lord Jesus Christ like Demas (2 Tm 4:10).

"[...] because he told where to go" (ibid.). Certainly, directive announcements bring with them the potential for conflict. Clear demarcation lines often lead to polarization, especially when the lines are drawn primarily or even exclusively by one person. The popular wisdom from modern politics "In a one-man system, you're either all in or you're out" could also be verified in Paul's ministry.³⁵

Argumentative and confrontational Paul has always been, although with clear lines about *who* Paul confronts and *how*. Here, too, some explanations for what is difficult about his character may become evident: The instruction to Timothy (and secondarily to the church) in 2 Tm 2:16-18 to avoid people like Hymenaeus and Philetus corresponds here as elsewhere to Paul's own example of preferring to talk *about* his opponents rather than *with them* (Becker, 1998, pp. 178f): "In the course of a dispute, Paul does not address an opponent directly. There is no letter section or separate letter to opponents. It is always only spoken about them to the church. The church is to be convinced, not the opponents themselves."³⁶ To be fair, however, one should keep in mind that Paul's non-addressing of his opponents in the epistolary context might not necessarily be out of line with his time, as a comparison with the (though much older) 2nd letter to Demosthenes shows. Thus, according to Lampe (2013, p. 155), a "*letter* of

³⁵ McKnight (2018, p. x), in light of Paul's instruction to Euodia and Syntyche in Phil 4:2 to be of one mind, asks what this instruction means for Paul himself in the event of conflict. Referring to the confrontation in Gal 2:11-14 (see below) or the breakup with Barnabas and John Mark (Acts 15:37-40), McKnight notes, "Euodia and Syntyche could have looked Paul square in the eyes and said, 'One mind, Paul?'" It seems that for Paul to be of *one mind* means to be of *his mind*.

³⁶ Own translation (here and below). The strong polemic that Paul can use in view of his opponents (see below) underlines his approach, since polemic generally makes almost any useful communication between two fronts impossible.

defense [...] served the apologetic self-presentation of its author and could – unlike the judicial defense *speech* – refrain from naming the opponents and charges concretely, which explains Paul's restraint at this point."³⁷ Nevertheless, Paul's opponents are categorically in a different position than the members of the church, who should be "corrected" in order to escape from "the snare of the devil" (cf. 2 Tm 2:25f).³⁸ The emphasis is on "correcting", as Oberlinner (1995, p. 95) remarks on the phrase "word of truth" in 2 Tm 2:15 that this is intended to

emphasize the substantive demarcation to be established in doctrine. However, the tendency of rejection and refusal of any discussion and search is also clearly apparent here. The claim to the possession of truth and the task of the leader, based on it, to take care of its preservation, excludes any discussion.

According to Paul's own words, there was a severe confrontation with Peter,³⁹ about which the apostle finds clear words (Gal 2:11ff). Here another complicating circumstance becomes vividly clear (Gnilka, 1996, p. 148): "Objectively, the difficulties are primarily due to the fact that we have no direct statements from the opponents. We are entirely dependent on Paul. And Paul is party."⁴⁰ And because Paul is "party", he is also "not at all interested in presenting the opponents in a differentiated and »objective« way"⁴¹ (Pratscher, 2013, p. 257), which would only enhance their position.⁴² One can see this precisely in Gal 2:11-21, "where Paul once as a direct witness to a dispute later reports the event to others himself" (Becker, 1998, p. 174). The apostle (ibid.) "immediately describes the opposing side only selectively and with authoritative disparagement. It only gets the floor in a very limited way, while his own point of view is given discursive and broad expression and, of course, stands unchallenged at the end." The question of how Peter may have thought about this incident, cannot be answered definitively. Since we do not have any picture of him regarding this incident and according to our knowledge there was no discord between the apostles, we are left to assume that Peter probably accepted the rebuke. Because in the end there seem to be only two alternatives for Paul (Becker, 1998, p. 179): "Where the either so - or so is so highly stressed, where the diastasis

³⁷ Own translation.

³⁸ By the measure of avoidance Paul is not only concerned with the exclusion from the church, which should lead to repentance (cf. 1 Tm 1:20), but Paul also knows about the real danger of temptation and its serious consequences by such false teachings. Exactly on this line already ends the 1st letter to Timothy, 1 Tm 6:20f (see also the mentioned *success* of Hymenaeus and Philetus in 2 Tm 2:18). The instructions in 1 Tm 1:3 and Ti 1:11 to forbid any teaching in the churches that deviates from Paul's preaching are also to be understood along this line. The command to *turn away* comes also later in 2 Tm 3:5-9. That this *moment* of turning away may be preceded by a time of attempted teaching is indicated by Ti 3:9-11. On Paul's general tactic of avoidance (from a modern point of view), see Visser & Mamula (2018, p. xxiv).

³⁹ The overarching theme of the conflict may indicate one reason for the hostility of some radical Jews toward Paul: The political events in Judea in the wake of the first Jewish war (66–73 AD), probably played a role in fueling the opponents of Paul's mission and its way of including Gentiles into the people of God.

⁴⁰ Own translation (here and below).

⁴¹ Own translation (here and below).

⁴² Apart from the pragmatic argument that Paul can take the positions of his opponents for granted among his recipients anyway.

between truth and lie is so extremely drawn out [...], there are as a general rule only two exits of the conflict: Submission or breakdown of relations.”⁴³

The way Paul speaks *about* his opponents also shows something of his personality. The fact that Paul can become highly emotional, especially in cases of conflict (see especially the disputes about the churches in Galatia and Corinth, but also Thessalonica and Philippi) has been treated many times, e.g. by Becker (1998, p. 178), with the observation: “The closer the opposing front is to the apostle, and the less a point of view of their advocated cause as such already differs from the Pauline position, the more emotionally charged his polemic becomes,” as is evident, for example, in Gal 1:6-8; 2 Cor. 11:4 or Phil 3:2. Pratscher (2013, p. 259) even speaks of a polemic of Paul against his opponents in view of the 2nd letter to the Corinthians, which is “hardly conceivable” in a sharper way.⁴⁴ In Galatians, “Paul does not shy away from drawing from the arsenal of ancient anti-Judaism when he speaks of castration. It could hardly be more sarcastic” (ibid., p. 262). Also in Rom 16:17-20, Paul is (ibid., p. 263)

by no means restrained in his description of the dangerousness of the opponents who also appeared in Rome. Massive polemics (belly, Satan) can be found as well as a negative description of their activities (only the alleged service of Christ; temptation as well as sowing discord and bringing down the church).

It has already been noted that some of Paul's traits, which were advantageous for reaching his goals for the *big and whole*, could have been challenging and difficult at the same time for people who were directly involved with him. One can easily imagine how those challenging traits of his personality, as they become more pronounced, likewise bring with them an even greater potential for conflict. In Paul's case, such an increase could be recognizable with age.⁴⁵ Paul, who already called himself an “old man” about half a decade before the letter to 2 Timothy

⁴³ Neudorfer (2004, p. 97): “In my opinion, the only example of Paul communicating with an addressee church in a more ‘consultative’ way, i.e. on the same level, is Rome. The church there was not his foundation, he had also not worked there. In all the other letters (even in the Phlm!) there is a sense of authority, expecting if not obedience, at least assent.”

⁴⁴ New impulses for this could come from an interdisciplinary dialogue with *historical research on emotions*, which is only about 20 years old. Especially the section 2 Cor 10-13 is fascinating, since it is probably “the most personal, revealing and emotional writing the apostle ever did”, revealing enormous stress “which is reflected in some passages in a ‘twisted’ Greek; it is certainly the most difficult Greek in the whole Corpus Paulinum”. – Carson & Moo (2010, pp. 453f – own translation). Precisely such observations on the Greek text are an indication that Paul does indeed present himself in his letters in the way he feels, which responds to Wehde's (2022, p. 213) legitimate comment: “To understand Paul as a child of his time who basically orients his epistolary correspondence with the churches to the conventions of ancient epistolography, also means to expect that philophroneic letter components [...] are intended to evoke an emotional reaction on the addressee's side, however are not necessarily emotionally motivated on the sender's side, but at least as functionally motivated. What is true for philophroneic letter motifs, however, may also be considered for the use of polemics as a stylistic device. The ancient letter writers justify the use of rebuke or polemic not with the emotional background of the letter sender, but with the intention of composition.” – Own translation.

⁴⁵ In addition, this development could also be an accompanying consequence of the many past conflicts. Particularly concerning the conflicts in Galatia, Corinth, and Philippi, Gniska (1996, p. 148) sums up: “The opponents attacked the apostle, not only his gospel, but also his person.”

(Phlm 9 – probably about 60 years old [Ebner, 2017, p. 76]⁴⁶), is all the more so now and even more so in “chains” (2 Tm 1:16).⁴⁷ At 60, Paul reached an age that in the Roman Empire – especially in the Italian and Gallic regions – can only be assumed for 5-7% of the population (Becker, 2009, p. 186; Sigismund, 2005, p. 60 – particularly for the early imperial period Brandt [2002, p. 159] assumes only 4.5-4.6% in the entire Empire). In fact, the “threshold of *old age*” (own emphasis) had thus been crossed (Sigismund, 2005, p. 59; see also Brandt, 2002, p. 13).

An advanced age of the apostle becomes apparent from a modern age-related psychological perspective already in the letter as a whole (Neudorfer, 2017, p. 40):

The 2nd letter to Timothy contains a rather large number of lists, catalogs and word series and thus shows: Here an experienced preacher, pastor, church leader and theologian puts on the table what is in his treasure on the current topic. Nothing is to be forgotten. This is a typical phenomenon of changing human consciousness: the older we get, the more we lay down “lines of argument”, add to them, summarize them, so that they become lists that we “have in our heads” and can call up and spread out at any time, possibly even count them on our fingers (2 Tm 3:16; 4:2).

In Paul's case, the advancing age is also recognizable by an increase *in severity of formulation and addressing*. Thus, in addition to “many basic and generalizing statements [...] we find here the high number of 32 imperatives and their fairly even distribution with an accumulation in 2 Tm 4:1-5” (Neudorfer, 2017, p. 40).⁴⁸ According to Neudorfer (*ibid.*), behind this is “a strong and clear will that wants to be heeded and demands submission and obedience.”⁴⁹ The aforementioned military imagery also fits into this atmosphere, which is found in Paul in increasingly explicit and detailed formulations as his life and ministry progresses (as it can be seen in 2 Timothy [see above]).⁵⁰ This observation is further supported by the vocabulary Paul uses overall in his last three letters. For example, with four occurrences, half of all the appearances of the strongly-demanding *βούλομαι* (“a deliberate willing as a result of a certain consideration, a decision of the will” [Müller, 2010, p. 1907⁵¹]) in the *Corpus Paulinum* appears in the *Pastoral Epistles* (1 Tm 2:8; 5:14; 6:9; Ti 3:8) and is, with Roloff (1988, p. 130), in “all cases [...] the

⁴⁶ Schnelle (2013, p. 48) assumes Paul to be around 55 years old at this time. Ebner (2017, p. 76) continues, this “self-identification is already accompanied by an expectation of respect” (own translation). More: Müller (2011, p. 108f) points out: “In a rhetorical perspective, the reference to age belongs to pathos (cf. Aristotle, Rhetoric II 1,1365a), whereby the auditorium is to be emotionally touched and won over.” – Own translation (here and below).

⁴⁷ In Phlm 9, by the way, this is a skilful way of building up his own authority towards Philemon after Paul has dispensed with the explicit reference to his apostolate in the letter. “Renouncing status and gaining status are not mutually exclusive; the plea of old age can achieve more than the command of apostolic authority,” which is additionally supported by Paul's reference to his imprisonment. – Müller, 2011, p. 108.

⁴⁸ For statistical comparisons to other Pauline letters on occurrence and frequency, cf. Neudorfer (2017, p. 40).

⁴⁹ Further, “the frequency of *ἄλλα*, which von Siebenthal calls ‘a particle of sharp contrast’, as a signal for controversy or for thinking in clear alternatives, also belongs in this context.” – With quote from von Siebenthal (2011, § 252.1).

⁵⁰ This is one result of my study on military metaphors in the *Corpus Paulinum* (2017), in which I examined the letters of the *Corpus Paulinum* in their presumed chronological order of being written.

⁵¹ Own translation.

stronger phrase compared to *παροικαλέω*.⁵² In addition, reference should be made to the metaphor of the *father*, which Paul already uses in his earlier letters for his role and function towards the churches: “Paul occasionally uses father-metaphors to express his exclusive role for the churches or individual Christians whom he has converted” (e.g. 1 Cor 4:14), from which he derives “the claim to a special function of authority and role model for the church”⁵³ (Gerber, 2005, p. 51), e.g. in 1 Cor 4:16; 1 Thes 2:11f). This metaphor may still have underlying power in Paul's self-perception and additionally explain his will to assert himself since a Roman father “remained [...] the undisputed head of the family until the end of his life” (Brandt, 2002, p. 151).⁵⁴

Based on these observations, one might even discuss the phenomenon of *old-age stubbornness* with regard to Paul. Should Paul really have been affected by *old-age stubbornness*, this could also explain why his co-workers and whole congregations (as discussed in the case of Asia and Galatia [see above]) increasingly turned away from him as his end became more and more apparent and his authority and influence diminished. Although there is evidence of high esteem and honor for the elderly in antiquity, there is also equal evidence of scorn and derision.⁵⁵ Thus, the perception and treatment of old people were ambivalent from every perspective throughout antiquity. After all, *old-age stubbornness* was already a deplored phenomenon in antiquity and put a strain on “the coexistence of the generations” (Wagner-Hasel 2012, p. 127⁵⁶), which is particularly evident in the late republican period of Rome (Brandt, 2002, p. 123).⁵⁷

On the other hand, we can also make ourselves far too comfortable with this explanation (which cannot be proven in any way) and brush away the (justified) demands of older people respectively older leaders. First here in view of Paul, but then also as we apply it to older leaders today. How can one effectively defend oneself against the accusation of stubbornness in old age once it has been brought forward, even in our days?⁵⁸ The accusation of

⁵² Own translation.

⁵³ Own translation.

⁵⁴ Of course, other kinds of relationships could be discussed which might substantiate and explain an authoritative disparity between Paul and his co-workers, such as the relationship between *patron* and *client* which is frequently found in Rome. Without question, Paul himself takes on the role of a patron from time to time, for example when he protects Onesimus and expects obedience from Philemon (Phlm 18-22; for illustration of authority over Philemon, see also above.). – See further: Strecker (2013, p. 242f). On the relation of patron and client specifically in the military context (following on from the observations on the military linguistic atmosphere in 2 Timothy), see: Hobbs (2002, p. 257).

⁵⁵ In this context, “Christian concepts about old age correspond generally with those of Judaism and the pagan milieu. Old age is filled with great experience and wisdom, which predestines old men for leading political offices and goes hand in hand with a position of honour for old people. At the same time, however, ancient literature also observes the bad old age, which is characterised by biological decline of body and mind and makes the old person a useless part of society.” – Sigismund 2005, p. 60. See also: Landschaftsverband Rheinland (2009).

⁵⁶ Own translation.

⁵⁷ The exhortation in Ti 2:2f also points to potential (drastic) negative behaviour of older people, even in the church.

⁵⁸ For example, when, at the beginning of the Corona pandemic, some of the so-called “young old”, who had recently been promoted as productive resources of our society, “claimed to be able to decide for themselves what protection they needed, wanted, or could tolerate, the accusation of old-age stubbornness was not far away”, according to sociologist van Dyck (2020, p. 181 – own translation).

old-age stubbornness often happens hastily and strikingly, preferably in intergenerational conflicts. Moreover, stubbornness also exists in abundance in younger years of life and is *by no means* an inevitable phenomenon among older people (cf. Focus Online, 2013).

What final conclusions can be drawn from these observations and – once again: *speculative* – inferences?⁵⁹ I would especially like to continue to be sympathetic to Paul. After all, everyone in Christianity today still profits from the impact of his life and ministry. And still, I continue to trust that Paul, as a set (by divine appointment), inspired, and recognizably confirmed apostle, was always in the correct position, at least factually, in cases of dispute. So I do not want to question Paul's *content*. I also take my stand on his emotional self-assessment as summarized in Pratschers (2013, p. 258) words on the argument in 1 Corinthians: Paul “talks of being compelled to preach and of his striving to do everything in his power to make the preaching of the gospel a success.” Some understand Paul as chronically jealous (Becker, 1998, p. 178), others react too cautiously to the partly categorical condemnations of his opponents due to the lack of generally accepted dispute-settling instances at that time (Gnilka, 1996, p. 147) or assume the immediate expectation of Jesus' return as a reason for Paul not to have built up his succession adequately, purposefully and sustainably (Neudorfer, 2017, p. 21). None of this can be refuted in a strictly academic sense, but neither can it be proven. I, therefore, assume Paul's *best motivation* and *sincere motives*, which he also expresses passionately and credibly, e.g. in 1 Thes 2:4: “but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts.” In addition, I do not want to limit the relationships between Paul and his co-workers to a merely functional level, as Öhler (2013, p. 256) rightly states: “The naming of his co-workers in the prologue, but also in the numerous rather terse recommendations or greetings, rather indicate that Paul highly valued the involvement of ‘his’ people”⁶⁰.

However, with McKnight (2018:xi): “Paul is not perfect; only Jesus gets that place in our minds and hearts. What I am saying is that Paul is not a perfect pastor and his approach to conflict is not always consistent with Jesus’ or even with his own gospel of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:16-21).” Therefore, well-meaning and constructive criticism of his *style of leadership* – inevitably always an expression of Paul's personality – cannot be taboo and certainly cannot be interpreted as criticism of God. From the observations on *possibly* difficult personality traits in Paul, which *may* have intensified due to his age, we can thus draw conclusions for ourselves.

When leaders' perception and ability to self-reflect (whether due to their age or not) becomes rigid – especially with regard to their own leadership style – this is certainly increasingly difficult for their co-workers to bear, and a question mark should be placed behind their positions and functions of ultimate responsibility sooner rather than later in order to prevent damage to their area of responsibility. Experience has shown that it is very difficult to talk about this when conflicts have already arisen. Therefore, each of us should be encouraged to deal with this issue at an early stage and to constantly mirror our own ability to perceive and evaluate or to have our behavior mirrored. This is certainly more difficult in congregational

⁵⁹ The fact that individual observations and interpretations taken together seem plausible is the basis of every theory. Nevertheless, it still remains just that: a theory that needs to be critically reviewed.

⁶⁰ Own translation.

forms where there are stronger hierarchies but it is nevertheless unavoidable if we want to prevent damage.⁶¹

We should also ask ourselves whether a discussion-free acceptance of postulated truth – even if it may in fact be biblical truth – could be demanded (both then and even more so today). I do not think that is the case. Today more than ever, truth wants – and should – be stated and perhaps also disputed in dialogue. Particularly because of our universally accessible multimedia today, categorical prohibitions not to hear and watch certain teachings no longer work anyway, but challenge leaders today all the more to present their own views in a reflective and well-founded manner in a comprehensible and convincing way – and should take into account the own maturity and responsibility of the people they lead. Of course, the universally available multimedia can also be consciously used to communicate one's own convictions. Wherever suspicious doctrinal developments come to one's attention, one is no longer at the mercy of a letter correspondence lasting several weeks as in the ancient Mediterranean region, but can at least react much more quickly from a technical point of view.

Finally, we should take heed and ask ourselves whether form and content can really always be categorically separated. To come back to Paul one last time: Could and may one go so far as to say that his sometimes harsh judgments or announcements are really only due to his character? Can 1 Cor 5:5, for example, really be softened in its severity without losing something theologically? Critical questions to human leadership may and must be possible, in order to promote maturity and prevent abuse of power. At the same time, those responsible for leadership in the church should beware of unreflected deconstruction with regard to Paul, knowing that in doing so, in the end, hardly anything will remain theologically from the heritage and the binding nature of Pauline teaching if one's trust in Paul as leader and apostle is terminated.⁶² This would in any case herald the end of sustainable leadership in the biblical-apostolic tradition. Tension remains, and discussion and debate must not end here. On the contrary, it should be continued in view of Paul as well as in view of our own leadership with a sincere and benevolently critical attitude.

⁶¹ Herzog (2021), professor at the Faculty of Philosophy and the Center for Philosophy, Politics and Economics at the University of Groningen, *mutatis mutandis*: “Hierarchies are highly susceptible to developing anti-moral dynamics. They should therefore only be present where they are functionally justified and really necessary. Hierarchies can easily be detrimental to having a good feedback culture and sufficient knowledge flow in organisations. Many moral errors and moral failures can arise precisely because certain information does not flow. In technical processes we are aware of this. In systems, if information does not flow, it goes wrong. It is no different in human systems. In strong hierarchies, little information flows from the bottom to the top. This is because people are insecure and afraid to report things upwards.” – Own translation.

⁶² For a concise introduction to the phenomenon of so-called *deconstruction* in the church context, about its reasons and risks but also opportunities, see <https://careynieuwhof.com/five-real-reasons-young-people-are-deconstructing-their-faith/>.

REFERENCES

- Bauernfeind, O. (1964). στρατεύομαι. In G. Friedrich (ed.), *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* 7 (pp. 701-713). Kohlhammer.
- Baum, A. (2019). Die historisch-kritische Methode in der Bibelwissenschaft. Ihre Geschichte, ihre Leistungsfähigkeit und ihre Grenzen. *Biblisch erneuerte Theologie* 3, 53-87.
- Baumert, M. & Seewann, M. (2019). *Hirte der Hirten. Übersetzung und Auslegung der Briefe an Timotheus (1 und 2) und an Titus*. Echter.
- Becker, J. (1998). *Paulus. Der Apostel der Völker*. 3rd edn. Mohr Siebeck.
- Becker, T. (2009). Alte Menschen im römischen Rheinland. In Landschaftsverband Rheinland (ed.), *Alter in der Antike. Die Blüte des Alters aber ist die Weisheit* (pp. 183-189). Philipp von Zabern.
- Brandt, H. (2002). *Wird auch silbern mein Haar. Eine Geschichte des Alters in der Antike*. C.H. Beck.
- Brox, N. (1989). *Die Pastoralbriefe*. Friedrich Pustet.
- Carson, D.A. & Moo, D.J. (2010). *Einleitung in das Neue Testament*. Brunnen.
- Dyck, S.v. (2020). *Soziologie des Alters*. 2nd rev. edn. transcript.
- Ebner, M. (2017). *Der Brief an Philemon*. Patmos, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Fee, G. (2015). Apostelgeschichte – Der historische Präzedenzfall. In G. Fee & D. Stuart (eds.), *Effektives Bibelstudium. Die Bibel verstehen und auslegen*. 7th rev. edn. (pp. 140-166). Brunnen.
- Focus Online (2013). Von wegen Altersstarrsinn! Viewed 2 June 2022, from https://www.focus.de/gesundheit/news/von-wegen-altersstarrsinn-psychologie_id_2456586.html.
- Gerber, C. (2005). Familie als Bildspender. In K. Scherberich (ed.), *Neues Testament und Antike Kultur 2. Familie – Gesellschaft – Wirtschaft* (pp. 48-52). Neukirchener.
- Gnilka, J. (1996). *Paulus von Tarsus. Apostel und Zeuge*. Herder.
- Haacker, K. (2009). Rezeptionsgeschichte und Literarkritik. Anfragen an die communis opinio zum Corpus Paulinum. *Theologische Zeitschrift* 65, 209–228.
- Haacker, K. (2019). *Die Apostelgeschichte*. Kohlhammer.
- Herzog, L. (2021). *Welche Moral brauchen Organisationen?* Statement as interview partner in R. Reinhard's Podcast, *Was sagen Sie dazu?* Viewed 2 June 2022, from <https://youtu.be/xNlj2QLO3Qc>.
- Hobbs, R. (2002). The Language of Warfare in the New Testament. In P.F. Esler (ed.), *Modelling Early Christianity. Social-scientific studies of the New Testament in its context*. 2nd edn. (pp. 259-273). Routledge.
- Keener, C.S. (2012). *Acts. An Exegetical Commentary. Volume 1. Introduction and 1:1 – 2:47*. Baker.
- Keener, C.S. (2014). *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*. 2nd edn. IVP Academic.
- Lampe, P. (2013). Rhetorik und Argumentation. In F.W. Horn (ed.), *Paulus Handbuch* (pp. 149-158). Mohr Siebeck.
- Landschaftsverband Rheinland (2009). *Alter in der Antike. Die Blüte des Alters aber ist die Weisheit*. Philipp von Zabern.
- Lehr, U. (2000). *Psychologie des Alterns*. 9th edn. Quelle & Meyer.
- Luttenberger, J. (2012). *Prophetenmantel oder Bücherfutteral? Die persönlichen Notizen in den Pastoralbriefen im Licht antiker Epistolographie und literarischer Pseudepigraphie*. Evangelische Verlagsanstalt.
- Malina, B.J. & Neyrey, J.H. (1996). *Portraits of Paul: An archaeology of ancient personality*. Westminster John Knox.
- McKnight, S. (2018). Paul and Conflict: Example or Not? In S. McKnight & G. Mamula (eds.), *Conflict Management and the Apostle Paul* (pp. ix-xii). Cascade Books.
- Müller, D. (2010). βούλομαι. In L. Coenen & K. Haacker (eds.), *Theologisches Begriffslexikon zum Neuen Testament*. 2nd edn. (pp. 1907-1909). Brockhaus.
- Müller, P. (2011). *Der Brief an Philemon*. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Nell, M.W. (2017). *Militärische Metaphorik im Corpus Paulinum: Eine Untersuchung zu Verkommen und Bedeutung*. MTh Thesis. Dept. of Department of Biblical and Ancient Studies: New

- Testament and Early Christian Studies, University of South Africa. Viewed 28 May 2022, from <https://uir.unisa.ac.za/handle/10500/24800>.
- Nes, J.v. (2021). Second-Century Vocabulary in the Pastoral Epistles? A Reassessment. *Filologia Neotestamentaria* 54, 227-253.
- Neudorfer, H.-W. (2004). *Der erste Brief des Paulus an Timotheus*. SCM R.Brockhaus, Brunnen.
- Neudorfer, H.-W. (2017). *Der zweite Brief des Paulus an Timotheus*. SCM R.Brockhaus, Brunnen.
- Oberlinner, L. (1994). *Erster Timotheusbrief*. Herder.
- Oberlinner, L. (1995). *Zweiter Timotheusbrief*. Herder.
- Öhler, M. (2013). Mitarbeiter und Mitarbeiterinnen des Paulus. In F.W. Horn (ed.), *Paulus Handbuch* (pp. 243-256). Mohr Siebeck.
- Pelser, G.M.M. (1998). Book Review: Malina, B J & Neyrey, J H - Portraits of Paul: An archaeology of ancient personality. *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 54/1 & 2, 448-449.
- Pratscher, W. (2013). Gegner der paulinischen Mission. In F.W. Horn (ed.), *Paulus Handbuch* (pp. 257-266). Mohr Siebeck.
- Punt, J. (2016). Paul, military imagery and social disadvantage. *Acta Theologica Suppl* 23 (pp. 201-224). Viewed 28 May 2022, from <http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/actat.v23i1S.10>.
- Quinn, J.D. & Wacker, W.C. (2000), *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*. Eerdmans.
- Riesner, R. (2016). Kam Paulus bis Spanien? (Röm 15,18-29; Jes 66,19-20). *Theologische Beiträge* 16(2.3), 92-101.
- Roloff, J. (1988). *Der erste Brief an Timotheus*. Neukirchener.
- Schnelle, U. (2013). Probleme einer Paulus-Biographie. In F.W. Horn (ed.), *Paulus Handbuch* (pp. 44-49). Mohr Siebeck.
- Schnelle, U. (2017). *Einleitung in das Neue Testament*. 9th edn. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Scholl, N. (2007). *Lukas und seine Apostelgeschichte*. WBG.
- Sieenthal, H.v. (2011). *Griechische Grammatik zum Neuen Testament*. Brunnen, Immanuel.
- Sigismund, M. (2005). Alter. In K. Scherberich (ed.), *Neues Testament und Antike Kultur 2. Familie – Gesellschaft – Wirtschaft* (pp. 59-62). Neukirchener.
- Strecker, C. (2013). Hausgemeinden und urbanes Christentum. In F.W. Horn (ed.), *Paulus Handbuch* (pp. 238-243). Mohr Siebeck.
- Towner, P.H. (2006). *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*. Eerdmans.
- Trummer, P. (2011). ἀσπάζομαι/ἀσπασμός. In H. Balz & G. Schneider (eds.), *Exegetisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament 1*. 3rd rev. edn. (cols. 416-417). Kohlhammer.
- Végh, Z., (n.d.). Receptio nominis. KP 4, 1345 (no further details available), quoted in Neudorfer, H.W. (2017). *Der zweite Brief des Paulus an Timotheus*. SCM R.Brockhaus, Brunnen, p. 280.
- Veit-Engelmann, M. (2022). *Die Briefe an Timotheus und Titus. Die Pastoralbriefe*. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Visser, L. & Mamula, G. (2018). An Introduction to Modern Conflict Management. In S. McKnight & G. Mamula (eds.), *Conflict Management and the Apostle Paul* (pp. xiii-xxv). Cascade Books.
- Wagner-Hasel, B. (2012). *Alter in der Antike. Eine Kulturgeschichte*. Böhlau.
- Wehde, C. (2022). *Autobiographische Argumentation und Selbstdarstellung im Galaterbrief. Gal 1,11-2,21 vor dem Hintergrund antiker Autobiographie und Epistolographie*. De Gruyter.
- Weißborn, T. (2012). *Apostel, Lehrer und Propheten. Einführung in der Neue Testament*. Francke.
- Wright, T. (2004). *Paul for Everyone. The pastoral letters. 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus*. 2nd edn. SPCK & Westminster John Knox.
- Yarbrough, R.W. (2018). *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*. Eerdmans.

Mathias Nell (born 1980) is an ordained Pastor in the Association of Pentecostal Churches in Germany and Head of the Theological Academy Stuttgart. He graduated with a Master of Theology in New Testament Studies from the University of South Africa in 2018. Currently he is pursuing a PhD in New Testament and Related Literature at the University of Pretoria on Paul's self-presentation in conflicts.

Prior publications:

- Nell, M. (2021). Die Funktionen von Leitung. In Bund Freikirchlicher Pfingstgemeinden (ed.), *Theologie heute. Pfingstkirchliche Beiträge zur Theologie 3. Leitung im Neuen Testament* (pp. 43-84). Adima.
- Nell, M. (2021). Kühne Übersetzungsleistung – Beobachtungen und Überlegungen zu Baumert Reihe »Paulus neu gelesen« und über die Kritik an derselben. In J. Peláez, S.E. Porter (eds.), *Filologia Neotestamentaria 54* (pp. 39-67). Herder.
- Nell, M. (2019). Military metaphors we lead by: Paul's self-enactment as a field commander. In S. Jung, V. Kessler, L. Kretzschmar & E. Meier (eds.), *Metaphors for Leading – Leading by Metaphors* (pp. 89-100). V&R unipress.
- Nell, M. (2019). "Women" or "Usurers" – Who rules in Is 3:12a? – Considerations for the translation of a tricky Bible verse. In E. Werner (ed.), *Yearbook on the Science of Bible Translation: 14th Bible Translation Forum 2018 – Missiology, Theology, Linguistics and Archaeology* (pp. 15-26). VTR.