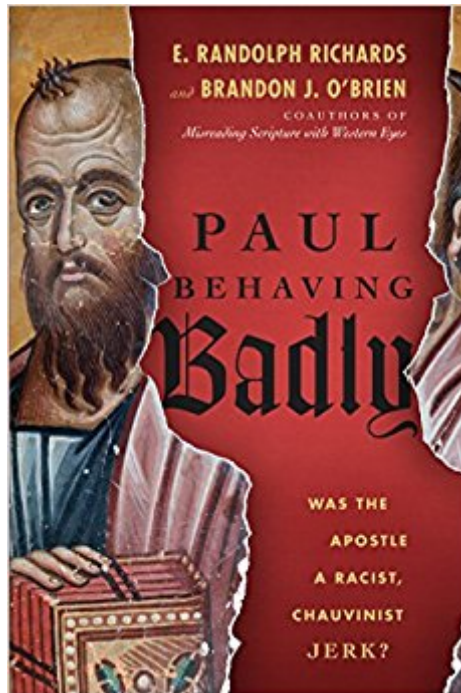


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# Paul Behaving Badly: Was The Apostle A Racist, Chauvinist Jerk?



## Synopsis

The apostle Paul was kind of a jerk. He was arrogant and stubborn. He called his opponents derogatory, racist names. He legitimized slavery and silenced women. He was a moralistic, homophobic killjoy who imposed his narrow religious views on others. Or was he? Randolph Richards and Brandon O'Brien explore the complicated persona and teachings of the apostle Paul. Unpacking his personal history and cultural context, they show how Paul both offended Roman perspectives and scandalized Jewish sensibilities. His vision of Christian faith was deeply disturbing to those in his day and remains so in ours. Paul behaved badly, but not just in the ways we might think. Take another look at Paul and see why this "worst of sinners" dares to say, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ."

## Book Information

Paperback: 224 pages

Publisher: IVP Books (November 1, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0830844724

ISBN-13: 978-0830844722

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.6 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.8 out of 5 stars 15 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #242,020 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #104 in [Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Bible Study & Reference > New Testament > Biography](#) #158 in [Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Bible Study & Reference > New Testament > Paul's Letters](#) #403 in [Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Bible Study & Reference > Criticism & Interpretation > New Testament](#)

## Customer Reviews

"Richards and O'Brien hold a high view of Scripture. They're also quite conversant and familiar with culture and worldview of Paul, leading to ample insights and understandings of Paul's teachings. For those curious about what Paul taught and for followers of Jesus and the Bible, Richards and O'Brien are able guides. Recommended." (Neil Bartlett, Christian Market, November 2016)"Responding to examinations of the apostle Paul that paint him as racist and sexist, Richards and O'Brien (Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes) admit Paul's writings can be hard to take, especially those letters ordering slaves to obey masters and women to remain silent. But the

authors maintain that Paul's actions must be understood through the prism of his intended audience: the letters were addressed to certain groups of people on singular, particular occasions. . . . Lay readers taking a closer look at Paul will find this book illuminating and learn a lot about a man who played an integral role in shaping Christianity. (Publishers Weekly, Sept. 12, 2016)"Paul spent much of his ministry under attack. Nearly two thousand years later, the arrows are still flying. Patriarchal, racist, braggadocious, mercurial, the dark genius who corrupted the pure message of Jesus— he's been accused of it all. Even Christians have a tendency to look askance at the brash apostle when his words grate on our modern sensibilities. Paul Behaving Badly is a defense of the apostle that strikes just the right tone. Richards and O'Brien account for the understandable objections people have to Paul's writings while gently correcting misunderstandings. This learned and readable work will resonate with fans and foes of the embattled apostle and illuminate Paul's passion for the gospel and the Christ it proclaims. I can't imagine a more needed book on a more important topic." (Drew Dyck, senior editor, CTpastors.com, author of Yawning at Tigers)"Richards and O'Brien offer the latest installment in IVP's Behaving Badly books. Unlike when God or Jesus seems to behave badly, we need not exonerate Paul of everything he did, even when it is narrated in Scripture. The stakes are higher with what he taught, however. Our authors show that Paul's teaching surpassed the quality of his peers, even if he didn't go all the way toward certain positions we might wish he held. This is an easy-to-read, judicious guide to responding to Paul's apparent misogyny, homophobia, Scripture-twisting, hypocrisy, and more. In some instances there are other credible options as well, but Richards and O'Brien always give us defensible options. Highly recommended for all who are troubled about these issues or who want to help those who are troubled about them." (Craig L. Blomberg, distinguished professor of New Testament, Denver Seminary)"For those who have been daunted, angered, confused, or shocked by the apostle Paul, this fine, honest, lucid book by Richards and O'Brien helps readers better understand Paul in his own first-century setting. The authors do not fully exonerate Paul (he too was finite and sinful), nor do they engage in chronological snobbery, as many of Paul's critics are wont to do ('It's a good thing we moderns know better than Paul'). Paul Behaving Badly gives a fresh glimpse into the life and thought of the controversial apostle— one that is both fair minded and charitable, at once challenging to staid assumptions while faithful to Christian orthodoxy." (Paul Copan, professor and Pledger Family Chair of Philosophy and Ethics, Palm Beach Atlantic University, West Palm Beach, Florida)"In Paul Behaving Badly, Richards and O'Brien take up modern charges of racism, sexism, bigotry, and hypocrisy against the apostle Paul. With humility, candor, and not a little wit, these authors present well-reasoned judgments about the apostle's character, ministry, and teachings. As

trustworthy guides, Richards and O'Brien show how Paul challenges the cultural and theological issues of his day – and our own. Readers beware: you will be uncomfortable at times, even offended, for Paul's gospel message challenges us all to reexamine our priorities and actions. A must-read for those who teach and preach on Paul, and for all who have questions about the complex apostle." (Lynn H. Cohick, professor of New Testament, Wheaton College)"Was Paul a racist? A sexist? A homophobe? Just kind of a jerk? Modern readers are often offended by the apostle's strong words and apparently politically incorrect views. Richards and O'Brien do not sugarcoat or shy away from these issues. Instead, they dig deep into the first-century world to understand Paul on his own terms and in terms of the cultures in which he lived. The result is a deeper understanding of the radical impact of the gospel that Paul preached. This is a great book, full of clarity, nuance, and insight." (Mark L. Strauss, university professor of New Testament, Bethel Seminary, San Diego)"Like Jesus Behaving Badly, this book helpfully responds to many of the misconceptions people have about a key figure in the forming of our faith. In easy-to-understand and engaging language, it explores how Paul related to the setting in which he lived and wrote." (Craig S. Keener, F. M. and Ada Thompson Professor of Biblical Studies, Asbury Seminary)"I often hear people say, 'The apostle Paul was a sexist, homophobic bigot, so who cares what he thinks?' Well, Randy Richards and Brandon O'Brien care what he thinks, and they want to make sure that we get a proper picture of Paul, warts and all! They show that while Paul is much maligned, he is little understood, and they act like an attorney cross-examining the controversial apostle on scintillating topics like slavery, women, and homosexuality to get to the bottom of the issues. This is an honest grappling with one of the most controversial figures of Western religious history. Whether you love Paul or despise him, you'll never see him the same way again after reading this book!" (Michael F. Bird, lecturer in theology, Ridley College, Melbourne)

E. Randolph Richards (PhD, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary) is dean and professor of biblical studies in the School of Ministry at Palm Beach Atlantic University. He is a popular speaker and has authored and coauthored dozens of books and articles, including *Paul Behaving Badly*, *A Little Book for New Bible Scholars*, *Rediscovering Jesus*, *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes*, *Rediscovering Paul*, *The Story of Israel*, and *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*. Early on in their ministry he and his wife Stacia were appointed as missionaries to east Indonesia, where he taught for eight years at an Indonesian seminary. Missions remain on the hearts of Randy and Stacia. Randy leads mission trips and conducts missionary training workshops and regularly leads tours of the Holy Land, Turkey, Greece, and Italy. He has served as interim pastor of numerous churches

and is currently a teaching pastor. He and Stacia reside in Palm Beach, Florida. Brandon J. O'Brien (PhD, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) is assistant professor of Christian theology at Ouachita Baptist University and director of OBU at New Life Church in Conway, Arkansas. He is coauthor, with E. Randolph Richards, of *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes* and *Paul Behaving Badly*, as well as the author of *The Strategically Small Church*. A senior editor for *Leadership Journal*, O'Brien has published in *Christianity Today*, *Relevant*, and the *Out of Ur* blog, and has been interviewed by and quoted in *USA Today* and other national newspapers.

Very well researched and written. I had a very negative view of Paul. This book taught me much about the man and his reasoning. I have a new respect for him.

Randy Richards and Brandon O'Brien team up once again to guide readers through a candid examination of the oft-controversial Apostle Paul, combining wit, accessibility and scholarly insights. The authors begin the book by pointing out that though the Apostle wrote divinely-inspired letters now preserved as Christian Scripture, he is not immune from critique. In response they present eight chapters detailing common charges made against Paul, followed by a defense for the Apostle on each account. The charges leveled include "Paul Was a Racist," "Paul Supported Slavery," "Paul Was a Chauvinist," "Paul Was Homophobic," etc. To their credit, Richards and O'Brien do not merely prop up straw men to attack; they give fair and thoughtful presentations of each charge within a reasonable space allotment. Though they do not acquit Paul of every charge, they provide an intelligent defense of Paul which considers both the historical context in which he lived as well as the contemporary context of the authors. Perhaps the most helpful feature of this book is the example it sets for readers as a contextually sensitive discussion that does not shy away from or gloss over the hot topics of the day. This book is a great resource for pastors, Bible study teachers, church members, collegiate and young adult ministries, and anyone who is not sure they like the Apostle Paul.

Paul can be a very polarizing figure today. Some Christians have the idea that Jesus is really awesome (And they're right), but we don't know about that Paul guy. He wasn't even one of the original twelve. He didn't meet Jesus in person. Why should we listen to him? Some skeptics will claim that it was Paul who really invented Christianity and took the good message of Jesus and turned Him into a deity and lost sight of His message. For those of us who do like Paul, we do have to admit there can be difficulties. As the authors ask "Was Paul a jerk?" Sometimes, it looks like he

was. They bring this up in a number of areas. First, the general question of if he was a jerk. Then they ask if he was a killjoy, a racist, a supporter of slavery, a chauvinist, a homophobe, a hypocrite, and finally a twister of Scripture. Each chapter starts with the charges against Paul and they do bring forward an excellent case. You can look at the claims and if you are not familiar with the debates it is easy to ask "How is Paul going to get out of this one?" The authors also grant that Paul is not one behaving according to 21st century Western standards, but he was still just as much behaving badly to his own culture as he was just as radical to them. Paul is kind of in an in-between spot sometimes. Many times he'll push the envelope further and leave it to us to keep pushing it. The question is are we going to do that. Many of these questions need to be addressed for the sake of many people you will encounter who raise these objections. (Why didn't Paul just demand the immediate release of slaves?) I enjoyed particularly the chapter on Paul being a killjoy. O'Brien gives his story in this one on how anything wasn't to be done because we are to abstain from the appearance of evil so let's make sure we all go see only G-rated movies and are teetotallers. (While I personally abstain from alcoholic beverages, I don't condemn those who drink and control their alcohol.) Some insights I thought were interesting and added perspective. Why did Paul seem to take contradictory stances on meat offered to idols? Why did he have Timothy circumcised when Timothy was from the area of Galatia and Paul had made it clear that if you let yourself be circumcised, then you are denying the Gospel. (If you want the answers to those questions, you know what you need to do.) I would have liked to have seen a little bit more on the honor and shame aspect of the culture of the time. There is some touching on this, such as talk also about the client/patron system, but a quick refresher would have been good for those who don't know it. Of course, I definitely recommend that anyone pick up their excellent book *Misreading Scripture With Western Eyes*. This book is a great blessing that we need today. Paul, like I said, is one of the most controversial figures even among Christians. To deal with his critics and to help those who would like to support him, you need to read this book. In Christ, Nick Peters

Deeper Waters Apologetics  
Randy Richards and Brandon O'Brien take up the charges against Paul of misbehavior. They approach these accusations as Christians with a high view of scripture, but they don't simply dismiss the charges against Paul. In fact, at the beginning of each chapter they do their best to build a case against him. Once they've built their best case against Paul, Richards and O'Brien come to his defense as biblical scholars. They bring the reader into Paul's context: not only the context of Paul's world but also the context of his ministry, his churches, his gospel, and

more. The result is not only that Paul is not guilty of these charges but often that in fact the opposite is true of Paul. Paul Behaving Badly has obvious apologetic value (however valuable you think apologetics is). But the greatest value of this book is for our understanding of Paul and his letters. By taking serious and critically engaging with the charges made against Paul for various misbehaviors, this book helps us to consider Paul in his context. After reading Paul Behaving Badly, you will have a better understanding of the Apostle Paul, his gospel, and his letters which are preserved for us as God-breathed scriptures – especially those passages that might at first seem problematic.

Authors Richards and O'Brien use their engaging and highly readable style to tackle confusing and controversial issues raised by Paul's letters in the Bible. Like any historical figure, rather than glibly judging Paul from our 21st-century context, we should first understand him in his 1st-century context. Richards and O'Brien try to present the objections to and complaints about Paul robustly and fairly, but answer them with solid scholarship, ultimately affirming Paul as a faithful follower of Christ that we should try to imitate who brought the radical notions of Jesus' new covenant to Gentile contexts.

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