

# Paul: The Stranger

Edgar Jones  
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A Prayer  
of Jesus

I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes; yea, Father, for such was thy gracious will.



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EDGAR  
JONES**

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# Paul: The Stranger

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A Prayer  
of Jesus

I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes; yea, Father, for such was thy gracious will.

# FOREWARD

## With Credits to Soren Kierkegaard

This has to be said again, now:

"This has to be said; so be it now said,

Whoever thou art, whatever in other respects thy life may be, my friend, by ceasing to take part (if ordinarily thou doest) in the public worship of God, as it now is (with the claim that it is the Christianity of the New Testament), thou hast constantly one guilt the less, and that a great one: thou dost not take part in treating God as a fool by calling that the Christianity of the New Testament which is not the Christianity of the New Testament."

S. Kierkegaard, 1854

When first I read these words, some forty years ago, I was enthralled. From that moment to this, S. K. has been my hero of the faith. What courage! What abandonment of all earthly care must he have had to proclaim them, for these words were published one hundred and forty-six years ago in a time when they could easily have cost him his life. Here was a man of integrity, a lonely witness to the Truth in the world, who loved God and the Truth and hated his life according to the Great Principle of Jesus.

Times have changed. Now religion is not taken that seriously. Anyone can say any radical thing publicly or otherwise and no one cares, or they make a joke of it, or they ignore it. So, I have perfect freedom to praise such words, words that I must admit I once envied – wishing I had been the one to say them first. Why then do I bother to praise them? It is the most one can do in an age that no longer cares about Truth.

My reader, you are to be praised also if you have read this far! Stay with me now and read what is really in my heart. You see, I have learned that S.K., courageous as he was and so fully dedicated to Jesus, was in error. Yes, in error! I required years to realize the error – so subtle that even such a religious genius as S.K. could overlook it. It is implicit – he assumed that the Christianity of the New Testament is the religion of Jesus and in this he was absolutely wrong. Yes! The Christianity of the New Testament is not the religion of Jesus. Whose religion is it if not that of Jesus?

The Christianity of the New Testament is the religion of Paul. It is the religion that emanates from what is called "The Church" and that was first identified at Antioch where "the disciples were first called Christians." Please listen carefully, now, for this is critical: the religion of Paul, which is the Christianity of the New Testament, is not the religion of Jesus. It is the religion of Christendom. It is the religion of the churchmen but . . . it is not the religion of Jesus.

By failing to recognize this important distinction between the religion of Paul and that of Jesus, S.K. erred in his statement but his heart was right, for the religion of Jesus is the religion of S.K. No, the churchmen were not and are not taking God for a fool by calling that the Christianity of the New Testament that is not the Christianity of the New

Testament. The churchmen were, and are, precisely correct in calling that the Christianity of the New Testament that is the religion of the church, of Paul and of Christendom, for it is indeed the Christianity of the New Testament. No, they were not and are not taking God for a fool; they are only making fools of themselves by believing that the Christianity of the New Testament is the religion of Jesus.

The Christianity of the New Testament, which is the Christianity of Christendom and of the churchmen to this day, is infinitely far removed from the religion of Jesus because of its powers of deception. It appropriates the name of Jesus. It honors and glorifies the name of Jesus. But it ignores precious words that he said in the world at so high a price. It takes its converts, young and old, and baptizes them. Then it teaches them the doctrine. Then it tells them, "Yes, it is true, you are now a Christian! You are a member of the church so you are partaker of the Christianity of the New Testament." And of course the power of the deception is just this . . . it is perfectly true. They are indeed partakers of the Christianity of the New Testament but, unlike S. K., they are not partakers of Jesus and his religion.

Yes! This has to be said so let it be said now but in a different way:

Whoever thou art, whatever in other respects thy life may be, my friend, by ceasing to take part (if ordinarily thou dost) in the public worship of God, as it now is (with the claim that it is the religion of Jesus), thou hast constantly one guilt the less, and that a great one: thou dost not take part in treating God as a fool by calling that the religion of Jesus that is not the religion of Jesus but is only the Christianity of the New Testament.

A Prayer  
of Jesus

I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes; yea, Father, for such was thy gracious will.

## PREFACE

The immediate task is to state why I am designating Paul by the descriptive term, "the stranger." supplemental to this task is to also identify the "strangers" who have followed Paul. Then the task of the volume that follows, in four books, is to justify this designation. The immediate task together with its supplement can be performed in few words; the second task will require more because of the two thousand years of false testimony that has molded and cemented Christendom's exaltation of the man to the status of "Saint Paul." It will require more than a few words to counter the false testimony of the two thousand years.

The immediate task begins here with the simple statement, which everyone knows and will not dispute, that Paul (or Saul) of Tarsus was a stranger to the small fellowship of Jesus' disciples that rallied around the Twelve after the Ascension. He was never a member of their fellowship, though he may have sometimes been in the crowds that gathered about Jesus. If he had been a disciple of the Pharisee, Gamaliel, as he claimed (Acts 22:3), he would have been in Jerusalem during Jesus' ministry in that city. I do not question this claim, as exposure to Pharisaism readily explains his early antagonism toward the little flock of disciples. He was surely aware of the activities of Jesus and of his resurrection. There is even a probability that he was in some way involved with the arrest and trial of the Lord. Perhaps it was about then that he signed on to the police force of the High Priest and, powered by the zealotry of extreme Pharisaism, began to persecute the little flock. Thereafter he was a stranger no more!

Nevertheless, he was a stranger on the day Jesus gathered his little flock about him and began to teach:

Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber; but he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens; the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers (John 10:1-5).

There is an intriguing change of number in the last sentence of this utterance. It begins in the singular, "A stranger," as though Jesus had a particular individual in mind. Then it continues in the singular, ". . . but they will flee from him," again as though he spoke of a particular person. Only then does he switch to the plural in emphasizing that the sheep not only will flee from this "stranger" but will not heed the voices of the many "strangers" they were certain to encounter. Now we back up to the beginning of the utterance and discover that the singular prevails there also as we hear Jesus saying, "he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs in by another way," he continues, "That man is a thief and a robber." Over against "that man" he then proceeds to point to another single person, himself, ". . . but he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep."

It is my position that Jesus foresaw the activities of Paul and here designated him "the stranger," "that man" who is "a thief and a robber." I do not mean that he knew the identity of this stranger and could have pointed to Paul in the crowd and said, "There is the man." (Although he was capable of that.) Anyone in his position would have known the terrible hostility that his disciples must face after his departure and the strength of the powers to oppose them – powers that would

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surely unite under an energetic and charismatic leader for the purpose of robbing him of his sheep. "That man" could oppose them in either of two ways: first, as a violent enemy intent on physically destroying them and second, as a non violent enemy coming to them in the guise of a shepherd and intent on leading them astray into spiritual destruction. Paul did both. First, violently and by his own testimony, he hounded them and hunted them to death and imprisonment. Second, non-violently, he changed his tactics, approached them in the guise of a true shepherd and led them astray from the Truth. It is certain that Jesus was not referring to some satanic spiritual power, because he clearly designated him, "That man."

Then who are the "strangers" of the last sentence of this utterance? These are the myriad clergymen who, following Paul, have throughout the two thousand years been climbing in "by another way" than the door and stealing the sheep. They are strangers to the Good Shepherd and his little flock. It is not only that Paul is "the stranger." No, he is only the first of a long line of strangers, a line that continues today to perform its terrible task.

Jesus allowed for only one flock of sheep, his "little flock," and he allowed for only one shepherd, saying,

And I have other sheep, that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice. So there shall be on flock, one shepherd (John 10:16).

Without a doubt he has only himself in mind as he points to himself as the "good shepherd." There is only one good shepherd. All the others, beginning with Paul, must, then, be included in the designation, "strangers."

We get a better view of this exclusion of all others as shepherds of his little flock by observing that the tasks of a shepherd are basically three: leader, feeder and protector. These three functions are clearly implicit in, for example, Psalm 23. "He *leads* me beside the still waters," and, "He *leads* me in paths of righteousness," define the first function. He is a feeder when "he makes me lie down in *green pastures*" and when "thou *preparest a table* before me in the presence of my enemies." He is a protector when "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for *thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.*"

Jesus surely had this Psalm in mind when he identified himself as the Good Shepherd, for it begins, "The Lord is my shepherd." We note here again the singular number. It likewise must have been fundamental in his attack on the fear of death. When he commanded his disciples, "Neither be ye called leaders" (Matthew 23:10) he was effectively eliminating "shepherd" from their job description.

Paul, however, provides for many shepherds, and himself he claims to be a feeder. His "shepherd" provision is stated in Ephesians 4:11:

And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some *pastors* and teachers . . .

The Greek for "pastors" here is precisely the same word translated "shepherd" in John 10. Then, of course, while never designating himself as a pastor or shepherd, he sees himself as a feeder:

I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. (I Corinthians 3:2)

When we look about us in Christendom, we can hardly see the sky for the horde of shepherds, or "pastors" that the church supplies to the world. It is my position that these are those whom Jesus designated "strangers," and that they bring themselves under condemnation by accepting the designation, pastor, all in total ignorance of the significance of their Lord's words. Be assured that I thoroughly understand the power of this deception because I was once one of them . . . and I was wrong. If there is hope for me, there must be hope for all.



## PROMINENT FEATURES OF JESUS' GOSPEL

I have stated above why I am designating Paul "the stranger." Therefore, the first and immediate task is finished. Now on to the second, that of justifying the first. We will see, among other things, that Paul's doctrine is very "strange." This will further justify his designation as a stranger together with all those other strangers out there eagerly following him, as I did, and heaping up condemnation for themselves.

A Prayer  
of Jesus

I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes; yea, Father, for such was thy gracious will.

# Paul

# THE STRANGER

## INTRODUCTION

Saul of Tarsus, or Paul to use his Greek name, is the primary focus of this study. It seeks to display the man in his true colors – a charlatan, a self-deceived deceiver of others, a self-called apostle, a wolf in sheep's clothing that misrepresented his apostleship as coming directly from the Lord Jesus.

The process of coming to see him in this light was excruciatingly difficult for me. Like most Baptists (or Christians of whatever stripe), I had been thoroughly indoctrinated with Paulinism and considered him to be among the godliest of men and the perfect witness to the gospel of Jesus. The key to my deliverance from this fraud was the eventual recognition and acknowledgment of the gospel as Jesus preached it, and I could not thereafter suppress the truth – that Paul's word was not God's word, that his gospel was a different gospel, his Jesus a different Jesus. I took a careful look at Paul as revealed in his epistles and the Acts, with my eyes at last opened, and I could come to no other conclusion.

When I speak of the gospel of Jesus, I mean the good news that Jesus proclaimed in the world. This finds expression in his utterances as recorded in the four canonical Gospels. From the beginning of my commitment to Jesus there was recognition of seeming contradictions when comparing the gospels with Paul. At the very least, it seemed to the young convert that Paul omitted significant portions of the message of Jesus. The church perpetuated his errors, for there I found nothing for Paul but unmixed admiration and adulation from both ministry and laity.

I remember so clearly one incident that illustrates this point. One sunny Sunday morning in the autumn of 1948, soon after I matriculated at Southern Baptist Seminary, I went with a small group to visit a large rural congregation a few miles from Louisville, Ky. We were to teach Sunday School classes there, but the thing etched on my memory is a single encounter with one of their aged laymen, a crusty old farmer who had long before given his life to the Lord through service to his church. We were gathered in the churchyard under a shady tree waiting for services to begin and he said to me of Paul, "He was surely the most godly man ever to live, apart from Jesus himself, and he was a genius to boot. What a man!" Here was a patriarch of the faith grasping an opportunity to make a proper impression on the young preacher, and it had its intended effect. Such influences contributed to the prolongation of my terrible frustration in the ministry during which I was seeking to do the impossible, that is, to reconcile Paul to Jesus. And so for many years I suppressed my reservations and trusted my mentors. It was a terrible mistake.

But Jesus would not let me go! I praise him for that as I consider the wonder of how he has been patient with me through all the years when I allowed dissident voices to cloud his image and

## PROMINENT FEATURES OF JESUS' GOSPEL

message. You will not be able to understand the significance of this unless you have likewise become truly acquainted with the Jesus of the gospels. Nor will you be able to correctly evaluate the character of Paul. Therefore it is necessary for us first to examine the gospel according to Jesus. Once you know Jesus as he has revealed himself in the gospels, you should be able to see Paul in his true character.

I say this from conviction grounded in personal experience. I was unable to know Paul well until I had experienced a complete reconstruction of my conceptions of Jesus and his doctrine. This getting to know Jesus required about twenty-five years, and many more years thereafter reconciling my views with this new vision of Jesus. It was a long, frustrating and tenuous process because I had at first accepted the false vision presented by the church. I had made a strong commitment to the Jesus of church doctrine, and had developed a strong bond of affection for the church and for my brothers and sisters who shared with me in the ministry of the church. The process of separation was exceedingly painful, fraught with disappointment, grief, and no little heartbreak. The impetus for this process was the growing conviction within me of sin, both in me and in the church, in the matters of war, nationalism, and racism. It was not, initially, a contention about the character of either Jesus or Paul. At the time I felt sustained in my convictions by both men and only later, free of the church, did I come to know Jesus and his Truth. This confirmed me in every way, and cleared my vision so that I could no longer accept Paul unqualifiedly. I published my book on Jesus in 1995 and then was compelled to study Paul to reconcile the growing dissension between Paul as I knew him and Jesus as I had finally learned to honor and love him.

I learned that the church has a terribly distorted view of Jesus and, without regard to sect or denomination, presents this faux Jesus to the world as the true one, as it did to me. Jesus and his gospel differ radically from that presented by the churches so that it will likely be necessary for you, my reader, to conduct a painful reappraisal of your view of Jesus before you can see Paul clearly. I have decided to devote the first part of this volume to Jesus, not only so that you can see Paul clearly, but also that you may be greatly blessed by our Lord.

I have come to believe that what has happened in Christendom, historically, is as follows:

- 1. Jesus and his gospel are exceedingly radical from any human point of view. The apostles and earliest disciples of Jesus therefore remained uncertain about the nature of the gospel and just what Jesus had accomplished in the world. Nevertheless they were intensely committed to him personally and therefore were exceedingly careful to see that his teachings were perpetuated as accurately as possible. In this they were carefully shepherded by the Holy Spirit. We have as a result a true repository of his words in the gospels, from which it is possible to recover both Jesus and his true gospel.
- 2. Paul and his associates stepped into the breach created by the uncertainty of the apostles. They had a great advantage because Paul's message was precise and certain and he preached it with great conviction. By blending portions of paganism, Judaism, and the unique doctrine of Jesus, Paul created a faith that had a powerful appeal to the gentile world. Not wanting a fight with the apostles, he shrewdly pitched his mission to the Gentiles, where he claimed apostolic support without admitting indebtedness to them. He was careful to see that his message was recorded for posterity in the writing of his epistles.
- 3. Generations and centuries passed during which the Pauline wing with its powerful appeal to the Roman world gained ascendancy over the apostolic wing. The apostolic wing with its primarily Jewish flavor lost influence and was caught between the dual jaws of history – the Gentile church and the increasing hostile Jewish synagogue. We may possibly see their record in the brief references of early writers to the Ebionites, Jewish Christians who persisted for maybe four hundred years

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- 4. Paul heavily influenced the resulting church due to the preservation of his writings, especially after the church canonized his epistles. Christianity became a Gentile religion that, following Paul, blended elements of paganism, Judaism, and Jesus. This constituted a vast deception in that the church came to see Jesus as Paul saw him, and it is Paul's Jesus that has come down to us through the church. The reformers reformed Paulinism, not the faith of Jesus.
- 5. Jesus of Nazareth therefore is to be carefully distinguished from the Jesus or Christ of Paul. The churchmen, while preserving Jesus of Nazareth in the gospels, have not noticed the distinction because, seeing Jesus through the eyes of Paul, the shadow of Paul's Jesus lies over the gospels and darkens their hearts and minds when they read. Nevertheless, through the centuries, there have been a few individuals who have known Jesus as he truly is, and their existence provides an unbroken chain of witnesses. This is the situation as it continues today.
- 6. Understanding this distinction is vital, as our eternal salvation depends upon it.

Book I  
Jesus

A Prayer  
of Jesus

I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes; yea, Father, for such was thy gracious will.

## CHAPTER I

# PROMINENT FEATURES OF JESUS' GOSPEL

### The Gospel is Simple

Yes! It is wonderfully simple. So don't be deceived by the intellectual contortions of the scholars and other ecclesiastics. A babe, a little child, a younger sibling, yes, even a prodigal son can understand it. In what follows I will use Jesus' very simple Parable of the Prodigal Son as our base. Most elements of Jesus' gospel are contained in this parable. They are the Father's house, the rebellious child, the loyal Son, the tempting world, the love of the Father, the Great Principle and the rebel's redemption. When we interpret these in the light of the Great Correlate enunciated by Jesus (to be defined below), they clearly reveal the fundamentals of his gospel. These include the will of God, the kingdom of God, the essence of righteousness and sin, the means of salvation, and the nature and purpose of the world and of human existence.

Many other otherwise dark mysteries also come under the light of the revelations of Jesus. Why was he so hostile to the Pharisees and they to him? What is the nature of good and evil? What is the character of God and of man and what are the ultimate causes of war, racism, disease and death? Why is the world as it is and why was it created? These mysteries all dissolve in the light of him who is the light of the world. The most astonishing thing is that it is all so simple, as implied by Jesus in thanking the Father that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes (Matthew. 11:25-27).

So, here immediately is a key, surely one of the most important keys: the churchmen have been looking for something complex in their attempts to understand ourselves, our world and our creator but the answers are simple – so simple that even a young child can understand. (Jesus seems to have applied the term "babes" to his disciples who were simple and unlearned young men and women.) How embarrassing it will be for the learned doctors and other academicians to admit that the answers they have spent their lives and energies seeking were right under their noses from the beginning, requiring no academic credentials to perceive and that they could have understood at a very early age. So, they turn down one fruitless blind alley after another. They follow each to its inevitable dead end and return without enlightenment. Then they marvel at the "unfathomable mysteries" of God when all they need do is listen carefully to a single voice speaking to them from the pages of the New Testament gospels that they might marvel at the brilliance of that light and the simplicity of that doctrine.

### The Gospel is Hard

It is hard for us in another way, however, and that is another key to its comprehension. When we hear it, we hear something that we don't want to hear because it challenges the values that we have spent our lives developing and nurturing and we say, "No, he couldn't be saying that." But he is saying just that – exactly what he is represented as saying. So it is simple – very, very

simple; and it is hard – very, very hard. So simple is it that we overlook it; so hard is it that we can't bear it and these two things work against our realizing it within ourselves. Jesus meant every word he said, especially that part about the way that leads to life being hard. It is very hard for us to conceive, even more difficult to accept once conceived, and when accepted issues in a life of hard experiences.

## The Source of Gospel Truth

There is one other thing that we must emphasize at this point, which is not well received in the world of New Testament scholarship. That is that, with rare exceptions, we must confine ourselves to the recorded utterances of Jesus of Nazareth as the source of the light. He said he is the light of the world – and so he is.

Many meet this thought with great resistance because they have convinced themselves that much of the gospels represent the words of later redactors and not of Jesus of Nazareth. If a redaction process was present, it was not extensive enough to mask his essential message. My greatest assurance of this comes from the perception of the message in all its hard simplicity. No Paulinist could provide these redactions, as is supposed by some scholars. No human agency would have created the message and written it back into the gospels, and it is much too profound and consistent to be a superficial extraction from the body of the message. All the “hard sayings” lose their mystery in its light and become the reasonable and necessary corollary to the message.

Others object to this because they want to include other New Testament authors as sources of the light. It is true that the New Testament writings outside the gospels (including Paul's letters), studied carefully and cautiously, can help us to understand Jesus. But these also contain erroneous doctrines, deceptive and misleading, which is why I emphasize that they must be read carefully and cautiously, always testing what is perceived there by the utterances of our Lord.

So we proceed on the basis of certain of the recorded sayings of the Lord, confident that his words are as he represented them. I firmly believe four things that he affirmed:

- 1. The source: For I have not spoken on my own authority; the Father who sent me has himself given me commandment what to say and what to speak, and I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has bidden me. (John 12:49,50)
- 2. The uniqueness: I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father but by me. (John 14:6)
- 3. The key: If you abide in my word, you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free. (John 8:32)
- 4. The finality and permanence: Heaven and earth will pass away, but my word will not pass away. (Matthew 24:35)

Jesus uniquely spoke the words of the Father in the world; Jesus alone is the way, the truth, and the life through whom all must come to the Father. If we continually abide in his words, we will know the truth and become free precisely as he promised; and his words have never passed away and will never pass away! So, Jesus of Nazareth is the sole and final source of the gospel.

## The Truth is Absolute

This also needs to be emphasized here. The Truth as enunciated by Jesus of Nazareth is absolute. That is, it is not relative to any earthly human condition. Humanity and life on the earth simply does not qualify it. This is part of the hardness of the thing, and explains why babes can

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see it before the wise and understanding. Babes have not become relativized, conditioned or conformed to this world, nation, state, race, culture, religion, family or whatever else may be claiming the loyalty and devotion of the person. Therefore, if we are to comprehend, we must enter the quest of Truth with a willingness to be stripped of every preconception and value judgment. We must not permit our thinking to be dominated by fundamental ideas having any source other than Jesus of Nazareth. Especially, we must not yield to the influences of a church or minister, of the culture, of patriotism or any other thing of this world. Those of mature age will almost certainly need to radically restructure their thought processes and values.



## CHAPTER II

# THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON AND THE ESSENCE OF SIN AND OF THE GOSPEL

The Parable of the Prodigal Son, though found only in Luke's Gospel, is one of the clearest and fullest expression of the Truth in so few words and provides the basic structure for what follows. This prompts me to state that all of the canonical gospels are important to understanding. Each makes its own contribution and each would leave gaps in our comprehension were it not available. This parable is one of the unique contributions of Luke. It is found in its entirety in Luke 15:11-32 and I ask you to refer it. It begins:

*There was a man who had two sons.*

## Family

Please mark this down immediately: the Truth, the Absolute Truth, has to do with a family – with a parent and children: *there was a man who had two sons*. Already, we have a clue as to why babes can understand, for this is the essence of their first experience in the world. They know two things – themselves and the parent – and that is really all any one needs to know! This will seem at first to relativize the Truth by drawing insights from the human family, and it would – except that the logic runs in the other direction. In the realm of the Eternal Absolute, the fundamental relationship is one of parent-child. By ordering our propagation as a family unit of parent-child relationships, the Father has enabled us to understand the absolutes. If, for example, our propagation were by means of asexual binary fission, we would have little if any ability to understand them.

## Gender

There are two other things that require comment here. First, Jesus has chosen to express this Truth in terms of a single parent. Second, with rare exception he has assigned male gender to all parties. The parent, therefore, is the father; the children are sons. This does not – I repeat for emphasis – does not indicate a gender bias on the part of Jesus. If it did so indicate, his Truth would be relativized immediately and therefore could not be absolute. The fact that spiritual parentage is singular rather than dual dictated his choice of gender because he spoke, and yet speaks, to a male dominated society. Because spiritual parentage is singular, he chose one parent. He chose the father because, had he chosen the mother, he would have raised distracting questions in a culture where the father is the head of the family. Opting to keep it both simple and applicable to his disciples who were mostly male, he also held to the male gender when defining the children (with one exception) so that they are sons, not daughters. This distinction, however, is irrelevant in applying the Truth, which is absolute. His Truth includes mothers and daughters on an equal basis with dads and sons. We could substitute the word 'parent' for 'father' and 'children' for 'sons' and do no damage to the Truth, but here we hold to the

terminology of Jesus.

## Parable and Allegory: Defining the Elements

A parable is a simple story told to express the essence of a wider truth, and this one about a prodigal son is no exception. When there are numerous elements in the parable that correspond to different aspects of the wider truth, we more accurately call it an allegory, which is appropriate to this parable. Every element of the story represents a wider and more ultimate reality.

There are a father and two sons, and it will be helpful if I identify them. The father represents God, the Father who is in heaven. The sons include a younger and an elder. We easily identify the elder son, for two things characterize him in the way the Father speaks of him later in the parable: *Son, you are ever with me, and all that is mine is yours*. Now, in John's Gospel, we find Jesus saying *All that the Father has is mine* (John 16:15), and *He who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him* (John 8:29). The elder son clearly represents Jesus. He has woven himself into the story! The younger son is any one of us and it is around him that the story revolves.

## Act I: Free Will

The younger son said to his father: Father, give me the share of property that falls to me. The father divided his living between the sons, and soon the younger son gathered all he had and took his journey into a far country. You will have noticed that the opening scene is the family home, characterized later as the Father's house, but now it changes to the far country. The Father's house, from which the son has just departed, represents heaven with its eternal glory, and the far country is our world. We have already learned something very important: in the ultimate and absolute sense, this world is far from the eternal glory; it is a far country. In addition, the parable suggests that we have our origins in the Father's House, that is, in heaven, just as did the prodigal. Furthermore, as in many families, there is an impatient, willful and assertive son who can't wait to realize his independence. He cannot wait for his inheritance – he wants it now.

Having received his inheritance, he is eager to invest it or to spend it in ways to his own liking and he must go out into the far country, away from the Father, in order to do all these things that his willfulness and independence demand. We have to notice something more: the father makes absolutely no effort to dissuade the young son from his intentions, nor does he seek to withhold his inheritance from him. This son is obviously old enough to be accountable – therefore he gets what he asks for, his inheritance and his freedom, without resistance.

We learn from this that we are creatures of free will, and to protect and preserve that freedom the Father does nothing to turn us from our errors. The father did not have to give the prodigal his inheritance, but he did, without objection. The father did not have to let him go into the far country, but he did, without dissuasion. The father surely knew the son was heading for heartache and despair, disappointment and desperation – yet he said nothing, did nothing, to stand in his way. This helps to explain why God seems so far off when, in the midst of our tribulations, we seek him and cannot find him. We are in a far country and we are on our own, and there is nothing he can do without compromising our freedom and integrity as personal entities having free will.

He has planned it this way! Free will is fundamental – it is why we are here. It is basic to almost everything. It is not evident at this point, but later you should realize that the younger son's inherent character compelled him to go into the far country to assert his free will. It was no more proper for him to assert himself in the Father's house than for an earthly adolescent to assert himself by taking charge of the parental home. He must leave to do it properly, and we will find that this world, our far country, was created for the purpose of providing a locale for the exercise

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of freedom of the will. That is why we are here now, and not in heaven.

### Act II: His Association

The scene changes to the far country, and the young son is having a ball! Loose living and all that! But, when he had spent everything, a great famine arose in that country and he began to be in want. Fast action characterizes this drama! But the time required is not important to the story or its message, and so the younger son squanders his inheritance in a land of famine in few words. Perhaps years have passed – no matter – this man is under a compulsion to do something to survive: *He went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed swine.*

There are two things to note here. First, examine the expression, *he went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country.* Jesus could have said that he “found employment” or used some similar expression, but this *joined himself to* expression implies that he became a part of the system that prevailed in the far country. He may have been an adopted son, an indentured servant, a slave, a junior partner, an employee or hired servant – all of these are details that do not matter. What is important is that he joined himself to a citizen, and this is precisely what we do here in our far country. We join ourselves to the citizens and become a part of the system, dedicated and committed. The Prodigal Son became of the far country, just as we have become of this world.

The second thing to note is his assignment. The citizen sent him into his fields to feed swine. Jesus carefully selected this occupation as one that, for a Jew, was among the most degrading. The hogs are unclean, and so the Prodigal became unclean, which symbolizes our unclean, sinful condition before our Father. It expresses unworthiness for our home of origin. Yet even though he has descended so low his problems are yet unsolved, for the famine is so great that there is insufficient food for him, and He would gladly have fed on the pods that the swine ate.

There is no mercy, for no one gave him anything. This statement characterizes the society of this far country, and of this world. It is true, of course, that in times of prosperity this world knows a good amount of giving to the poor and destitute. Remember, though, that the far country of the Prodigal is under a great famine, and it is every man for himself so that *no one gave him anything.* Of course this also includes his father, who likewise gave him nothing. We can expect similar experience should a great famine afflict this world.

But now something wonderful happens. In his desperate condition, he came to himself. Then he said, to himself, *How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, but I perish here with hunger. I will arise and go to my father and say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.*

I need add only these comments: His value set was radically transformed. The life of the far country that had seemed so precious to him was suddenly nothing. Here I perish with hunger! Then he remembered at last his father's house, and the well fed hired servants and he saw treasure in heaven! *Even my father's hired servants eat better than I.* Then, there was his confession: *I have sinned against heaven and before you.* Additionally, all his pride is gone. Humbled and contrite, he must express the bankruptcy of his soul: *I am no longer worthy to be called your son.* Finally, a ray of hope: *Make me as one of your hired servants.* The curtain falls on Act II.

### Act III: Unclean

This act opens on yet another scene. He has put his resolve into action. He has arisen to go to

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his father and is on the road home, nearing his destination and in great anxiety. He is much perturbed of mind. Will he be accepted? Will he be condemned? After all, he has absolutely no claim on his father or his father's house. He has squandered his inheritance in the far country. He doesn't deserve a moment's consideration, and he knows it. But he has had a change of heart. Whereas at first his heart and his treasure were in the far country, now his heart is in his father's house and all he treasures is there also. Will the father be merciful and accept him as a hired servant? That is surely the most he can hope for, and something gives him the faith to believe, in hope, that his father will accept him. We must remember that he has just left his job with the swine and is unclean in every way. His body is dirty, perhaps clothed in dirty rags, and he is ceremonially unclean due to his contact with the swine.

But before we raise the curtain on this act, let us take a moment for reflection. Let us recognize the two states of mind of the prodigal that have been described. First there is the proud, selfish, independent youngster itching to break free, then indulging himself fully in his freedom. Second, there is the humbled, repentant, bankrupt soul turning homeward in the conviction of sin and his own unworthiness. These are the states of mind that characterize us – some one, some the other. Either we are the independent, self assertive, self-willed individuals seeking earthly gain and squandering our heavenly heritage on trash or worse, with our minds set on earthly things, or we have experienced a conversion. Humbled, in recognition of the folly of our past pursuits in this world, we have, in our hearts, resolved and put into action the plan of the prodigal, with faith and in hope: I will arise and go to my father.

The curtain rises. There he is, sorrowfully but hopefully taking those painful steps – but look! There is someone on the road ahead of him! Who is this running towards him? *But while he was yet at a distance, his Father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.*

What an incomparably wonderful scene – the Father on the road running to meet the Prodigal! Have you ever considered what it means, this thought that God, your Father, could be running to meet you? Even though you are near naked and unclean, so very unclean.

This scene forces us to recognize that the father had been at the door, looking down that road for him all along, in love for him, in deep concern for him, hoping someday to see the errant son approaching. At this point the father doesn't even know about the change of heart, about his resolve, his brokenness – no, he only knows that he sees his beloved, errant son, coming home! And so his feet take flight, he runs with joy to meet him, takes him, in all his uncleanness, to his bosom and kisses him! Finally the astonished and confounded son blurts out his well rehearsed words: *Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son!*

His Father interrupts him. He doesn't want or need to hear any more. He can't bear to see his beloved younger son so distraught, dirty, robeless and barefooted. He cries out so that the servants at the house can hear: *Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet, and bring the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and make merry; for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found! And they began to make merry.* We are seeing here that of which Jesus elsewhere spoke, the *joy in heaven over one sinner who repents.*

## Act IV: The Elder Son

But there is yet one more actor to say his piece. From the field the elder son heard the sound of rejoicing, the music and the dancing. He called one of the servants and asked what it meant. And he said to him, *Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has received him safe and sound.* But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, but he answered his father, *Lo these many years I have served you, and I*

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*never disobeyed your command; yet you never gave me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your living with harlots, you killed for him the fatted calf! And he answered him, Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It is fitting to make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive, was lost and is found.* So Jesus, the elder brother, reveals in the telling of the parable how he is tempted to view us, his younger siblings, and so falls the curtain on the fourth and final act.

### The Essence of Sin and of the Gospel

When the Gospel of Jesus Christ is reduced to its simplest form, this is all that is left. It is all we need to know to find restoration to the Father's house. We, in our far country, are squandering our heritage while asserting the freedom of the will in opposition to the will of the Father precisely as did the prodigal. We do so for so long as we persist in seeking to find our lives, our gratification, our relationships, and our fulfillment in this world and in terms of worldly entities.

That is all that the prodigal intended. The Father wants absolutely only one thing from us, the same thing that the prodigal's father wanted: that we arise and go to Him. Apart from this we can never please Him and are forever mired in sin, for sin, in its essence, is this seeking, like the prodigal, to find a fulfillment in this life, in this world, on our own and according to our own desires. We are dead until we turn towards heaven. We are lost until we turn towards the Father. The parable emphasizes the importance of this by stating it twice, once in the Father's explanation to the servants and again in his explanation to the elder brother. *For this your brother was dead and is alive, was lost and is found.*

So Jesus of Nazareth came into the midst of the dead when he entered this world. To a young man who wanted to *go first and bury my father*, Jesus responded, *Follow me and let the dead bury their dead* (Matthew 8:22). Yet again, he said, *Truly, truly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live* (John 5:25). We are all dead – dead to the Father – unless and until we hear the voice of Jesus, the elder brother and the Son of God who came that we might have life (in the Father's house) and have it abundantly (John 10:10). We are lost until we turn to him who came to seek and to save that which was lost (Matthew 18:11). He is uniquely qualified to lead us to the Father's house.

The Father's will, the only thing he wants of us, is simply this: COME HOME!

## CHAPTER III

# THE GREAT PRINCIPLE AND THE GREAT CORRELATE

*I will arise and go to my father.* The Prodigal's words express a termination of any relationship he might have had with anything or anyone in and of the far country. This was his cross that terminated all his attachments to the far country. He had joined himself to a citizen of that country but now he had broken that relationship. He hated that life and wanted no more of it. Jesus expressed the crucial essence of this Prodigal experience when he said, *He who loves his life loses it, but he who hates his life in this world will keep it for life eternal.* (John 12:25). That, precisely, was the prodigal's decision. Without it he could never obtain salvation and could never rise to his father's house. This is the Great Principle enunciated and illustrated by Jesus, and only by Jesus, to which we all must conform if we are to participate in the resurrection at the last day.

We likewise see the Great Commandment at work here. The Prodigal turned to his father in love, loving him with all his heart, soul, mind and strength as demonstrated by his leaving everything that might have bound him to the far country, counting it no more than trash if only he might be reconciled to his father. These two things inevitably go together, the Great Commandment and the Great Principle, and together they comprise a Great Correlate by which all God's children must rise to Him. While we remain bound to life in the far country, which is this world, we have not loved God and we cannot arise and go to him. The Great Principle informs us that we, exactly like the Prodigal, must hate our lives in this world or we cannot be saved. The Great Correlate therefore correlates this love and this hate, and we must have both.

Putting it into yet other words: the love for God is like the love of a babe for its mother. The hatred of life in this world is like the hatred of the babe for the arms of a stranger as it cries and stretches little arms toward its mother and away from the stranger. This was the prodigal's decision on the day that he resolved to return, which he expressed by saying, *I will arise and go to my father.* The life of the far country, which he at first loved passionately and rushed to join, he had next to learn to hate. Then he was free to love his father and full of desire to join him again in his father's house. So, this Great Correlate is a love/hate correlate.

## The Choice

The Great Correlate mandates an absolute choice between life in this far country, with all its temporal values and relationships, and life in the Father's house, with its corresponding eternal values and relationships. The parable teaches us that the gospel is essentially a family matter as I specified above. We can be committed to the family of man on the earth, or to the family of God in his house, but we cannot commit to both at once.

A choice is mandatory. When we attempt to combine them, the Father cannot accept us. This accounts for all of Jesus' hard sayings about relationships. This is why he was careful to say, *If any one comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple* (Luke 14:26). This is

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why he was careful to say, *Call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven.* (Matthew . 23:9)

### The Absolute Either/Or

There is no compromise, no adaptation and no exception. Can a wise wife receive back into her bosom the husband who has violated the marriage bond while he yet maintains the violation? Will she forgive and accept him while he remains enthralled by the seductress? Neither does the Father accept us while our hearts remain attached to this world. *Where your treasure is, there shall your heart be also* (Matthew 6:21). With these words Jesus mandates an absolute disjunction. Our hearts, in love with this life, set on the things of this world and treasuring them, do not even want to arise and go to the Father. That necessarily includes all earthly relations, especially the familial and matrimonial ones. Had the Prodigal remained attached to any part of the far country he would have remained lost. Had he arisen to go to his father and there recited his repentance and confession with full fervor, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you and am no longer worthy to be called your son, and then added, "If I return to your house, will you permit me to go back now and again to the far country?" Could his father have accepted him? Absolutely not! His father had permitted him to go out into the far country with no strings attached; he could not and would not accept him back with strings. The choice is intrinsically either/or.

### The Absolute Truth

The above is the obvious explanation of my contention that Jesus, and only Jesus, represents the absolute Truth. All so-called truth that incorporates earthly values, bonds and influences has nothing to do with Jesus and is the negation of his Gospel of Truth. When the clerics teach or preach that following Jesus will heal family rifts and contribute to security in the life of this world or when they represent the 'life abundant' promised by Jesus as being fulfilled in this "far country," they are preaching what men love but what God hates. They are mired in the swamp of relativity and know nothing of the absolute issues set before us by our Elder Brother. Jesus' Gospel therefore requires an absolute disjunction from life in this world. He was not satisfied with teaching that we must deny earthly ties and treasures. In asserting his Great Principle, he chose hate, the strongest word possible to establish Truth in the absolute. *He who hates his life in this world will save it for life eternal.* Only the hatred of life can lead us to the absolute Truth, for everything else retains some affection or connection to that life, and is therefore relative. It can never represent absolute Truth, but Jesus manifested Truth in the absolute. He is the only one who does so, and is ipso facto the only one who can lead us to the Father. The prodigal finally learned through hard experience to hate his life in the far country so that when he arose to go to his father, he left everything behind yet he left nothing of value. His whole heart went with him, because all that he treasured lay in his father's house. He had learned by hard experience that personal fulfillment was not to be had in the 'far country.'

### The Absence of the Father

Hard times came to the far country. The famine enveloped him, and the prodigal son fell into a most unhappy state. He was hungry, dirty, naked and shoeless. He had condescended from the status of extravagant swinger to that of a starving serf and the agony was prolonged until he greatly despaired. His present was painful, his future bleak and a mood inspired by a sense of his own failure and seeming worthlessness enveloped him. The dismal days dragged on and there was no relief – and the hunger constantly gnawed at his gut.

Through it all, his father did absolutely nothing for him, nor did anyone else. As the parable expresses it, *no one gave him anything.* The parable leaves us to conclude that, no matter what

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petition he may have directed to his father, the response could only have been absolute silence. No prayer, petition or messenger could have prevailed upon the father to do anything for him until he had settled upon his resurrection, that is, his great resolution; *I will arise and go to my father*. And even then the best robe, the shoes and the banquet – all were realized by the astonished prodigal only after he arrived at the father's house.

It was not that the father was not interested in his prodigal nor that he ceased to love him, for these things never failed. In a human situation such as is depicted by the parable, the parent never ceases loving the child and never ceases to grieve for the errant offspring. The prodigal's father could be so joyfully happy on his return only because he had been so sorrowful in his absence. Yet he did nothing for him while he remained in the far country. Why didn't his father give aid? Why did he not send money to buy food? Why didn't the father use his influence with the 'citizen of that country' so as to prevail upon him to give the young man a raise, or a promotion, or a better job?

Why does God allow bad things to happen to people, even to good people? This question has occupied the greatest minds among the philosophers, not one of whom has supplied the race with a satisfactory answer. The true and final answer lies in this parable. The father did not help the prodigal because, to the father, he was dead and he was lost. *This, my son, was dead, and is alive, he was lost, and is found*. He was dead to his father and he was lost to his father. When the curtain of death drops between you and others, it is impossible that they can do anything for you. That is the ultimate consequence of death for it cuts off all recognition or communication or inter-relationship. There is nothing we can do for the dead, for those who, to us, have died. We may grieve that we did not do more while they lived in this world, but they died and left us with, perhaps, guilty consciences. It is an incontestable fact that we can do nothing for them now. The father could do nothing for the prodigal while he remained, lost and dead, in the far country.

So, in like manner, God does not intervene in the world. He does not intervene in this *far country*. He does not because he cannot. He cannot because we are in the realm of the dead. That is our habitat and for as long as we are here, the Father can do nothing for us but grieve. This fact of death before God also has a more fundamental explanation involving free will, which I return to below. But for now, we need only consider the fact of God's absence from the world, of his inactivity in the world and of his silence to the cries of pain from the children of this world. Remember that the prodigal received his relief only in the father's house, not immediately after his resolve to arise and go to his father, and not while he remained in the far country. God is aware of our need. He cares for us and, as we learn from the prodigal son, he grieves for us in our absence from him. Still, he does nothing in particular in response to any plea we may raise to him while we remain committed to this life and to this world.

## An Example

The situation of the prodigal son, and our situation in this world, can be likened to a more modern parent-child drama that focuses on an incorrigible teen-ager. He plays hooky, runs with a wild bunch, does drugs, refuses to do chores, stays out all night and in general causes the parent much grief. Finally, as a last resort, the parent casts the child out of the home, hoping by this radical action to get the child's attention and crack the incorrigibility. At this point the child is essentially dead with respect to the parent, and the grief of death is the grief experienced as the parent sadly contemplates the plight of the child. There is one gain for the parent in this all-too-often-repeated story: at last there is tranquility in the home. There is no more quarreling, no more bitter resentment from an offspring and no more long, sleepless nights of worry, wondering when the child might return. Yet, deep inside, the parent hurts more than ever. What could I have done differently? Where did I go wrong? Why could I not maintain a good relationship with my child? So the parent will grieve, the parent will pray, the parent will yearn – but one thing the parent cannot and must not do is go out into the world and give things to the child to assist him or her to live in the world. To the parent, the child is dead, and the child knows that nothing more



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can be expected from the parent for so long as the wild life continues. Tough love must prevail.

There is only one salvation for this relationship, which comes when the child, like the prodigal son, resolves to take wise action saying, I will arise and go to my parents. Even so, the parent cannot go into the world with aid for the repentant offspring but must wait to see the child coming up the road – hungry, ragged, penitent and sick. Then, at last, the parent can rush out to embrace and care for one who lives again. So, likewise, we are on our own in this world. Our Father cannot and does not intervene, however dire our straits or however much we like to think otherwise.

### Conclusion

The Parable of the Prodigal Son wonderfully illustrates both the Great Commandment and the Great Principle, and therefore also the Great Correlate. Yet it so easy to read the parable very carefully and see in it only repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation with no relevance to the either/or choice of this world or the next, of the father on earth or the Father in heaven or any of the many other implications that emanate from it. This testifies to the careful selectivity that the churchmen through the centuries have applied to the words of Jesus. They hear what they like and block out the rest. He said it. It is planted there in the heart of the gospels and it will not go away. You face it now and you will face it at the Judgment. Read it again:

He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life (John 12:25)

## CHAPTER IV

# SOME TROUBLESOME SAYINGS

### Matthew 6:5-8

Certain sayings of Jesus, primarily concerning the Father's care for us and instructions on prayer, do not at first glance correlate well with the implications of the Parable of the Prodigal Son as set forth above. Matthew 6:5-8, the instruction to pray in secret, concludes, *and your Father who sees in secret will reward you*. This suggests that the Father will answer such prayer by giving what we ask, but that is not what is said. With Jesus, reward comes in the Father's house as it did for the prodigal son, and it is there that we will be rewarded. He continues by warning against multiplying words, concluding, *for your Father knows what you need before you ask him*. This, of course, is perfectly consistent with the parable. God knows our needs as we can assume the prodigal's father knew the prodigal's needs.

The thinking here is similar to that of the segment on anxiety in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:25-34) and in Luke (12:22-31), which also closes with the assurance that *Your heavenly Father knows that you need them all*. Here, one of the metaphors is that of the birds of the air (Luke, ravens), of whom Jesus reminds us that *they neither sow nor reap, nor gather into barns, and yet your Heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?* He also calls on the birds to instruct us in his exhortation to fearless confession of our faith, in Matthew 10:36-23 (Luke 12:2-9). *Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground without your father's will. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows*. These exhortations are meant to assure us of God's love and concern and of the fact that God knows all about us and values us very highly. They are not meant to assure us that He will rush to supply our physical needs or protect us from injury if we are persecuted for our faith. Jesus intended that these words should encourage us to trust Him for the ultimate outcome, regardless of the circumstances.

His example was the birds of the air. The Father feeds them, but how does he do this? Does he come down and cover them with his hand, personally proffering seeds to each little beak? No, certainly not. He feeds them through the normal course of nature and according to his laws of nature, just as he provides for every other creature. As creator, He is the one who is ultimately responsible for the natural order that generates and sustains us; therefore it is in this capacity that He feeds us.

We should also note that the birds do not get fed apart from their own efforts; they must scratch for their food, seeking it diligently. It doesn't come to them ready prepared, on a platter – unless, of course, one supplies them with a bird feeder full of birdseed, but that is man, not God. This is precisely what God does not do! And while we are examining the birds and watching them in the trees, we are also very likely to see one or two squirrels. These creatures do, very definitely, gather into their "barns" the nuts and acorns they will need for the sparse season ahead. God feeds them, to be sure, according to the laws of nature and not by miracles of direct divine intervention, and not without some effort on their part. The same is true with us. God delights to see us praying to him and trusting him for the necessary things and he will, as Jesus has assured us, reward us.

## SOME TROUBLESOME SAYINGS

Nevertheless, when the famine comes, the birds and squirrels will die – and so will we if we have not prepared. My conclusion is that in these verses there is no promise or expectation that our needs will be met in any other than the normal ways. We are dependent upon God. All good things come from Him, according to the course of nature and the ways of creation, and we should give thanks to Him continually for them. He wants us to do this. He even wants us to pray to him that he will give us the necessary things because this acknowledges our recognition of our dependence upon him. So Jesus instructed his disciples, in the Lord's Prayer, to petition the Father saying, *Give us this day our daily bread* (Matthew 6:11). All this confirms and acknowledges our relationship to him as dependent children. But in no sense does it signify that God will intervene directly in the course of nature to supply our needs. His children have no privileged position and no special source of supply while they remain in this world.

### Prayer in the Sermon on the Mount

We must add the passage on prayer in the Sermon on the Mount, following the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 7:7-11, Luke 11:9-13): *Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For every one who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!* Luke's version follows the teaching of the Friend at Midnight (Luke 11:5-8), in which a man gives his friend what he wants, not because of the friendship, but because of his importunity – his persistent pounding on his door at midnight. In some respects this resembles the Parable of the Unjust Judge (Luke 18:1-8), in which a certain widow was continually petitioning the judge for vindication against her adversary. The judge honors her complaint, not because of justice, but because she was wearying him with her supplications. In conclusion Jesus says: *And will not God vindicate his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will vindicate them speedily* (Luke 18:7,8).

If your son asks for bread, will you give him a stone? If for a fish, a serpent? *Much more*, continued Jesus, . . . *will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!* The implication is that the Father will give us not less than we ask, nor what we ask, but much more than we ask. We ask for earthly things, our basic needs, our daily bread, but the Father gives us bread from heaven (John. 6:32f). Luke's version (11:8) has, instead of 'good things' as in Matthew, *the Holy Spirit*. This is the prime example of the good things Matthew version promises.

These sayings all have a central import. If men, being evil, know how to give good gifts to their children; if the judge, being unjust, nevertheless grants the widow's petition; if a friend's request is granted not on the basis of friendship, for the sleeper is very aggravated but nevertheless grants the friend's request because of his persistence, will not our Father, who dearly loves us, much more grant our petition and give us good things?

These are fine examples of the rabbinical *qal va-homer* argument, called in western culture the *argument a fortiori*, literally, light and heavy. As explained by Hyam Maccoby, (The Mythmaker, p 64-67) the argument goes like this: *If something is known about one thing, which has a certain quality in a relatively light form, then it must be true all the more so for some other thing that has the same quality in a relatively heavy form.* Thus, if a man, a judge, or a friend, who relates to petitioners in a relatively light form, grants good things to those who ask, then God, who possesses great love towards his children and therefore relates to them in a relatively heavy form, will all the more so grant good things in response to their requests. These verses are consistent with the Parable of the Prodigal Son, in which the 'citizen of that country,' who possessed a relation to the Prodigal in a relatively light form, had granted the prodigal's petition for a job to help meet his great need. All the more so, then, does the father of the prodigal, who relates to him in a heavy form, grant the petitions of his son for good things in his house. That is

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all these sayings tell us. They do not tell us that God will intervene in the world to smooth out our way if only we ask him. Yes, he will help us; he will hear us, and he will vindicate us. However, apart from his supply through natural means, this response of the Father is not realized in Truth until the Judgment at the Last Day. We must continue to scratch for our worms as long as we are here.

### Faith to Move Mountains

There is another set of sayings that does not conform so readily to the Parable of the Prodigal Son and its implications. This includes the saying in conclusion of the story of how Jesus healed an epileptic boy after the disciples had failed. Then the disciples said, *Why could we not cast it (the demon) out?* (Matthew 17:14-21, Mark 9:14-29). Jesus' answer, according to Matthew, was, *Because of your little faith. For truly, I say to you, if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, "Move hence to yonder place," and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you.* This saying is similar to Luke 17:6, where the Lord responded to the disciples petition, *Lord, increase our faith!* By saying, *If you had faith as a grain of mustard seed, you would say to this sycamine tree, 'Be rooted up, and be planted in the sea.' and it would obey you.* Similarly, in the incident of the Withered Fig Tree (Matthew 21:20-22, Mark 11:20-25), Jesus explained to the astonished disciples, *Truly, I say to you, if you have faith and never doubt, you will not only do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, "Be taken up and cast into the sea," it will be done. And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith. Mark's version is even more explicit: Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you receive it, and you will. And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against any one; so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses* (Mark 11:24,25).

### Conditions for Answered Prayer

*Believe that you receive it, and you will.* This saying, taken at face value, gives full discretionary power to the children of God concerning anything whatsoever they may want. All that is required is that they petition their Father in heaven believing they will get what they ask and, in the case of a petition for forgiveness, that they also forgive those that trespass against them. But surely there is something wrong in taking these words at face value? Note first that these astonishing results do not require great faith, only mustard seed faith. Surely, among all the persons of faith that have inhabited the earth since Jesus came and uttered these words, there must have been a few who had mustard seed faith? But no one has moved a mountain, or even a sycamine tree, and cast it into the sea with either the command or the prayer of faith – not even Jesus. Such an astounding event, like the eruption of Vesuvius, would be in recorded history. Jesus did do some astonishing things, including the healing of the epileptic boy, described as casting out a demon.

He is clear in teaching that the disciples, had they had even mustard seed faith, could have cast the demon out of the boy – therefore their problem was a lack of faith. Today we know that epilepsy is usually caused by some abnormality, such as a lesion, in the brain of the victim. The popular idea was that a demon was invading the body of the victim and needed to be cast out. Jesus did not take issue with the popular notion, though he may have known the real cause and removed it with a word; such was the power of his faith. The malady was surely a mountainous obstacle in the life of the epileptic boy, but that cannot be what Jesus intended to say. In specifying *this mountain* he was designating a nearby mount, or hill, towards which he could gesture to make his point. And neither did Jesus uproot trees and cast them into the sea. His experience with trees was limited to the fig tree that he blighted with a word – a pretty remarkable feat but yet not so much so as uprooting it and casting it into the sea.

These thoughts aside, we have yet to deal with his promise, a promise that is unreasonable on its face, and that, as near as we can tell, has not been fulfilled in any case. *Whatever you ask in*

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*prayer, believe that you receive it, and you will.* (Mark 11:24,25). Had the Prodigal Son known this, he could have solved his hunger problem, and any other problem, simply by petitioning his father for food, a nice home, a comfortable income – he would not have had to humble himself by returning home in abject humiliation. Could it be that this promise is a redaction product, words applied to Jesus by some later disciple who understood him in that way, but who was nevertheless mistaken? Redaction is to be considered, but I very much doubt that it applies in this case. These promises are too well attested in all the synoptic gospels and too much in accord with the character of Jesus and of the Father. So I have to confess that I do not understand this as well as I would like to, but I am nevertheless fairly content with the following explanation.

First, consider that this promise, made by Jesus, was nevertheless not good even for Jesus on at least one occasion. In Gethsemane, when he asked the Father in prayer, *Let this cup pass*, the cup did not pass. In spite of a prayer that was repeated three times according to Matthew and Mark, the cup did not pass. He asked something in prayer and he did not receive it. Was it because he did not really believe it would pass? Or could it have been that Jesus' death was a special case, one in which the promise of answered prayer did not and could not apply?

Certainly Jesus in Gethsemane is a special case to which normal rules might not apply, and therefore the promise may have been inapplicable to him for this reason. Lack of faith was not a consideration, for Jesus had never found it difficult to muster faith to accomplish whatever was needed. But I think that there is something else about the Gethsemane prayer that will help us resolve this difficult question. It is this: Jesus concluded his petition with the qualification, *Not my will, but yours be done*.

I believe that the will of the Father is always the determining factor, so that we must apply another qualification to the promise in addition to the two applied by Jesus. These two are, first, believe that you will receive it, and second, forgive if you have anything against any one. A third one is this: it must be the will of the Father. He cannot violate his will to answer our prayers, without regard to our faith and forgiveness. If we want what he does not want, even if we append the petition, as did Jesus, with, *Not my will, but yours be done*, we will not receive what we ask, even as Jesus did not receive what he asked in Gethsemane.

Isn't it God's will that his children be fed? Therefore, if anyone is in the position of the prodigal son, starving, surely our Father will want us to have food? Therefore, the hungry child need only pray to the Father, asking for food and believing the Father will supply it, and forgiving everyone who has transgressed against him, and the food will appear!

This is not convincing. It seems reasonable until we stop to consider that if this were the general rule with prayer, and if the children of God in this world applied it consistently (as they surely would) they would never go hungry regardless of conditions around them or their industry or lack thereof. This would not go unnoticed by the starving non-believers in a famine situation and we can assume that all of them would rush to convert. The same would apply in any other circumstance of need or desire, and would result in a world filled with believers for the wrong reasons – to get something for themselves in this world.

Remember that Jesus said, *Whatever you ask . . .* Let us ask, therefore, that our homes never burn, that we never suffer grief, that we never have an automobile accident, that our children never stray, that we never become ill – well, you see the problem. We are led to the reasonable conclusion that God's children in this world may sometimes starve, have accidents or become ill and die without regard to their prayers because it is God's will. God's children must deal with their human catastrophes on the same basis as others in this world. Otherwise, his plan for our salvation would become a contradiction. The prodigal's father did nothing to feed him until he came home. Then he slew the fatted calf! The famine in the far country gripped everyone there, the prodigal son and his employer, the good and the bad, the righteous and the unrighteous without discrimination. Yet apart from the famine the prodigal would not have returned to his

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father. So, we have added a third condition to Jesus' promise: what we ask must be the Father's will.

There other conditions, not stated in the immediate context of the promise but contained in the overall message of Jesus and which therefore must be assumed to apply to the promise. I can readily think of two more, the fourth and the fifth. The fourth is that one must be a true child of the Father. That is, when Jesus delivered the promise to his disciples, he was speaking to persons who truly qualified as children of God – to persons who are not, like the rebellious Prodigal, dead to the Father. This is a presumed condition for all Jesus' promises, as is indicated in the language of the promise from Mark: *And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against any one; so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses* (Mark 11:24,25). So we see that Jesus is assuming that those to whom he is issuing such a wonderful promise are the children of God who can rightly address him as 'Father.' This is then, surely, one of the essential qualifications of a promise-claimer. It pops up again and again in the gospels. We have referred to another such passage above, where it is assumed that the people to whom he is speaking are children of the Father: If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him! (Matthew 7:11). Note the clear comparison of the human father-child relation with the divine father-child relation.

The fifth qualification is that one must qualify as a disciple of Jesus to claim his promise. He was speaking to his own disciples when he issued his promise, using the second person pronoun, you. But he elsewhere defines the qualifications for discipleship and they are rigid and exacting. We find them, in the fewest words, in Luke 14:25-35): *Now great multitudes accompanied him; and he turned and said to them, If any one comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple . . . So therefore, whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.* We can be sure that the multitudes, after hearing this, began to thin remarkably. Who hates ones earthly family? Or one's own life? Who willingly takes up and bears anything resembling the cross of Jesus? Who renounces everything? Yet these are the precise qualifications for discipleship. The hatred of even his own life is the Great Principle to which I referred above, and is central to the whole conception of Jesus. Everything else, including the renunciation of all things in and of this world springs from this fundamental attitude that Jesus has established as basic to his whole message.

Why must one hate one's own father? In Matthew 23, Jesus says: *Call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father who is in heaven* (Matthew 23:9). Here is one statement of the reason: God does not accept us as his children, or count himself as our Father, while we are counting a man on earth as our father. We see then, that the qualifications for becoming children of God are integrally related to the qualifications for discipleship. At their root they are one and the same, and in their essence call upon us to cut our family ties with earth if we are to establish family ties with heaven. Is your treasure here or in heaven? Is your heart set on the earthly or the heavenly? Always with Jesus it is, between these two, earth and heaven, either/or. It is never both/and.

How does one qualify as a child of God? Recall that we are examining the necessary qualifications of those who would claim Jesus' promise, Whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you will receive it, and you will (Mark 11:24). Now we begin to see that those who would claim this promise must conform to some extremely difficult qualifications. Since becoming a true disciple is one qualification, and becoming a child of the Father is another, let us ask, as we did for discipleship, what one must do to be an assured child of God? I have already listed one requirement: renunciation of earthly parentage. *Call no man on earth father, for you have one Father who is in heaven.*

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A second one has to do with exhibiting the character of God. One who is a child of God has inherited His character. Jesus focused on this in the Sermon on the Mount, in the teaching on loving enemies: *You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you salute only your brethren, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You, therefore, must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect* (Matthew 43-48, Luke 27,28,32-36).

There is a statement in this saying that is central to all that I have said about the prodigal son and the implications of his father not having reached out to help him while he remained in the far country. Just this: *for he makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.* The Father in heaven treats us all alike, without discrimination – the evil and the good, the just and the unjust and his children and the children of this world. That is because he loves us all alike, even when we may be, like the prodigal in his early experience in the far country, both dead and lost to him. Furthermore, if we are his children in Truth, we imitate him in this respect by loving our enemies as well as our friends.

## A Contradiction

Do you see a seeming contradiction looming here? If he treats all alike, both his children and the children of this world, how is it that he promises to give his children whatever they ask of him? If he does not make this promise to everyone, then can he be free from discrimination?

It is a valid question, and the answer should also be apparent. Those who are truly his children are those who have learned to value only the heavenly, and therefore they will not ask him for earthly things. That is, not for things beyond forgiveness and one's daily bread. The prodigal son knew this inherently, and therefore he did not ask his father to send money over to the far country; he did not ask him to provide him with better living conditions or a better job. It was not in him to ask for those things because he had learned the hard way not to value such things, not even life itself as lived in the far country. He only hoped for something to be given him after he returned to the father's house; so Jesus' promises are always in terms of a reward in the Father's House. As God's children, if we are in Truth God's children, when we stand in prayer and ask whatever we will so as to receive it according to our faith, we will ask for nothing more than the status of a hired servant in the Father's house. If that is not where our hearts are, where our values and our treasures lie, we are not qualified to claim the promise of answered prayer. It is for this reason we have not seen, do not see, and will never see, mountains and trees rooted up and cast into the sea in answer to a prayer. Those who are not qualified to claim such a promise can't claim it, and those who are qualified won't claim it.

## Summary

It would be a distraction, for present purposes, to continue this discussion of Jesus' promise of answered prayer, though much more can be added to further enlighten our perceptions of what we can expect from the Father in heaven, and when we can expect it. Here I seek only to express the significance of the Parable of the Prodigal Son, believing that it contains, as in a nutshell, the essence of the message of Jesus. The Prodigal had transgressed against the will of the Father by asserting his independence and going to the far country to make a life for himself. There he failed, and soon found himself in dire straits. His father gave him no assistance and he was on the point of starvation when he came to his happy conclusion, which amounted to a hatred for his life in that country.

This is in perfect accord with Jesus' expression of what I have termed the Great Principle, *He*

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*who loves his life loses it, but he who hates his life in this world will keep it for life eternal* (John 12:25). The prodigal counted all his far country aspirations as nothing more than dung and, in a flash of insight, suddenly discovered that all that he treasured was in his father's house. There is where his heart suddenly resided! This is the import of Jesus' injunction about treasures, *Do not lay up treasure on the earth . . . but lay up treasure in heaven . . . for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also* (Matthew 6:21). All this is implicit in the words of the prodigal's resolve: *I will arise and go to my Father* (Luke 15:18).

The parable presents the father as having a great love and concern for the son, and a great grief while the son dwelt in the state of deadness and lostness. This all changed when the son learned to hate his life in the far country and resolved to go to his father's house, and we can see the father's love expressed in his great joy because the son who was dead is alive, who was lost is found. This perfectly illustrates the forgiving love of the Father in heaven, who gives us much more than we ask. We ask for earthly things; he gives us heavenly things!

I draw from this the conclusion that we cannot expect special treatment from the Father for so long as we remain in this world. The prodigal received nothing material from his father while he remained in the far country because this is not the will of the Father, who cannot give us what is contrary to his will for us. The Father treats all alike in this world through the operation of the normal processes of nature – that is, as Jesus elsewhere taught, *He causes the sun to shine and the rain to fall* (Matthew 5:45) on both the good and the evil. This at first appears to be contrary to certain sayings of Jesus on answered prayer, which I examined above and came to the following conclusions:

- 1. The promise of answered prayer is subject to certain conditions: (1) the petitioner must believe that what is asked will be received; (2) the petitioner must forgive others their debts and trespasses; (3) the request must be according to the will of the Father; (4) the petitioner must be a bona fide child of the Father, and (5) the petitioner must qualify as a disciple of Jesus, according to the strict qualifications listed in the gospels.
- 2. The Father gives good things to those qualified petitioners who ask, though not necessarily what is asked. What he gives will be better – heavenly things instead of earthly things.
- 3. Qualified petitioners do not ask for mountains to be cast into the sea. Like the prodigal son, they will ask only for a place in the Father's house. Nothing can be better than that! That is what Jesus himself received as a result of his faithfulness. Those who would literally move mountains do not qualify to claim the promise; those who qualify do not ask for mountains to move. Those who qualify for the abundant life of Eternal Glory do not petition the Father for life in this world.
- 4. The prayer promises of Jesus are therefore perfectly consistent with the Parable of the Prodigal Son and all its implications.



## CHAPTER V

# THE WILL OF GOD

There was nothing the prodigal son could have done, in the course of his life in the far country that would have pleased his father. Had he lived an exemplary life instead of a dissolute one; had he lived in peace with all his neighbors and promoted peace in his community; had he become very successful through honesty, hard work and persistence; had he lived an extraordinarily moral life to the point of perfection; had he become a faithful husband and parent and sired beautiful, well disposed sons and daughters; had he given all his wealth to the poor and provided for orphans and the homeless; had he become a great national leader who brought peace and prosperity to the far country – none of it would have pleased his father, to whom he was in any case dead. His father wanted absolutely only one thing of him. The one and only thing that he could do to please his father was . . . come home! He had immigrated to the land of the dead and the lost where he could do nothing and be nothing except dead and lost. When at last he arose and went to his father's house, he had done the one thing that pleased his father, whose great joy was precipitated by the sight of the returning prodigal.

Why? Because the dead had returned to life, the lost had been found! Furthermore, there was not a single word of rebuke concerning the dissolute life he had lived or the fact that he had squandered his inheritance. The very most he had dared hope was to be received as a hired servant. Imagine his shock when he began to realize, in the midst of all the joy and the great celebration, that he was again invested as a son with full privileges!

## The Father's Exclusive Will

This has to tell us something very profound about the will of God our Father – that, insofar as we are concerned, He wills one simple thing: come home! This and nothing more! But if our will, like that of the early Prodigal Son, is to pursue life in this world, our far country, we are dead to the Father and nothing we can do here either pleases or displeases Him. All attachments or devotions we have to this world – to its persons and its institutions – are bonds that secure us from turning to the Father's house. This includes our attachments to our earthly families – our parents, our spouses, our children. This includes our attachments to the state and nation. This includes our attachments to life itself. That is why Jesus couched his Great Principle in the strongest possible term: hate. It is only the one who hates parents, spouse, children, and one's own life, who can be a disciple (Luke 14:26). It is the one who hates life in this world who can receive life eternal (John 12:25). That results from the fact that the will of the Father is eternal life and has no fulfillment in terms of temporal life.

## Jesus' Use of the Expression, Will of God(The Father)

This is a supremely radical interpretation, and one cannot accept it on the sole basis of inferences from a single parable. Let us now investigate Jesus' use of the expression, "will of the Father," or equivalent expressions, to see whether he otherwise confirms this conclusion drawn from the Parable of the Prodigal Son. We will focus on the following utterances:

- For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent

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me (John 6:38).

- 2. Pray then like this: 'Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:9,10).
- 3. Not every one who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven (Matthew 7:21).
- 4. Father, if thou art willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but thine be done (Luke 22:42).
- 5. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life and I will raise him up at the last day (John 6:40).

I repeat for emphasis that the Father wants only one thing, absolutely one thing only – that we arise and go to him. So, Jesus defined the will of God:

This is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all he has given me, but raise it up at the last day. This is the will of my Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day (John 6:39,40).

This is the final, absolute and definitive expression of the will of God. The Father's will, therefore, pertains only to the resurrection when his children rise to be with him, in the Father's house, precisely as the prodigal son arose and went to his father. God's will has no direct relevance to this world. Thus, and only thus, could the Prodigal perform the Father's will while in the far country. He was outside his father's will until he resolved in his heart, I will arise and go to my Father. That arising – that resurrection – to go to the Father is the will of God in its totality. It is clear that the Father does not want his children to be in this world, and there is therefore nothing we can accomplish in this world that will please him except this arising to go to him. He wants us in his house with Him, in His Eternal Glory, just as the prodigal's father wanted the younger son to return to Him.

There was absolutely nothing the Prodigal could do, in the far country, to please his father – except to make that wonderful resolve to arise and go. So likewise, there is absolutely nothing we can do here in our far country to please the Father except to arise (in the resurrection) and go to him, or to do what contributes to this end. When Jesus taught the disciples to pray, "Father, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven", this is the only thing he had in mind. Jesus, in his last hours, precisely like any human being, was mightily tempted to avoid his terrible death and so maintain his bond to this world. It was this restraining bond that would have prevented his going to the Father that he struggled mightily against in Gethsemane when he prayed, "Father, not my will but thine be done."

His struggle was exactly the same as is ours – the struggle against the temptation to save his life in this world, and so to lose life eternal. So, the cross symbolizes the victory of the Son of God over the temptation to save his life, just as it symbolizes the commitment we also must make if we are to have eternal life with the Father. But, thanks be unto God that he claimed the victory and arose to be with his Father. That our struggle, and our temptation, is exactly the same as his he made perfectly clear when he said,

If any one would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me (Luke 9:23).

And,

Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple (Luke

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14:27).

Jesus did not die on the cross instead of us, but for us; not as our substitute but as our leader, showing the way. We each must bear his own cross and follow him.

Our Father in heaven loves his children and he wants all of them to be in his house with him, sharing with him in all good things. That is the only will of God to be considered by us, for that is all he has shown us in Jesus. That is the only thing he wants of us or for us. Then it follows that the only way we can be in his will, or do his will, is to want the same thing for ourselves. This puts us in the state of the prodigal son on the day he came to his wonderful resolve, "I will arise and go to my father."

The New Testament Greek word translated "arise" is *anastasis*, and comes from the same root as the word that is translated resurrection. Only by his resurrection, by arising to go to his father, could the prodigal son do the will of his father; in like manner, only by arising to go to the Father, in the Resurrection, can we do the will of the Father in heaven. Recognizing that we must nevertheless live out our time on earth, lest we be tempting God (Deuteronomy. 6:16, Matthew 4:7), the only way we can do the will of the Father while we remain here is by the maintenance of a commitment to the Resurrection.

This commitment to the Resurrection is contrary to any commitment to anything in this life or in this world. When this commitment is valid and complete, all our treasures are in the Father's house; all we value is in the Father's house; all our family relations are forged in the Father's house and we want only to go there. We therefore hate our lives in this world, as mandated by the Great Principle. Then, we want exactly the same things for ourselves that our Father in heaven wants for us. Our wills conform to his will and we are righteous in his sight. Indeed, unless and until we come to this state of mind and heart, loving the Father and wanting only to go to him, we are, like the prodigal son, both dead and lost. That is why he who loves his life loses it (John 12:25).

When Jesus said, ". . .for I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me" (John 6:38), it is this will of the Father that was in his mind. He proceeded immediately to define the Father's will, not once but twice, and in both cases the definition is completed by the statement, I will raise him (it) up at the last day. The Father's will is therefore completed by our arising to go to him, and by nothing except our arising to go to him. Here is Jesus' double definition in its totality:

For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me; and this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up at the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that every one who sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day (John 6:38-40).

Jesus could do the Father's will only by holding to the Way of the cross, the Way that led through his cross to the Resurrection to the Father in such a public manner as to demonstrate to the world that this is the only way to the Father. If we would have eternal life and share in the glorious realm of the Father's house, we must each take up his or her cross and follow in that way.

When we want for ourselves only what the Father wants for us, then and only then are we in his will, then and only then are we righteous before him. And he wants only one thing of us: come home!

## Satan's Temptations

Satan interceded early to prevent, if possible, Jesus doing the will of the Father on the earth. So

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he tempted him to give himself to the passions of his flesh: Command these stone to become loaves of bread (Matthew 4:3). Then he tempted him to cast himself down from the temple. This is the suicide temptation, and would have been tempting God, or putting God to the test. Finally, he offered him the kingdoms of the world. Again, Jesus was not interested, because he knew that the Father was not interested in building a kingdom on the earth. He resisted all these temptations because he knew that the Father was only interested in his returning to him and bringing with him, through the Resurrection, as many brothers and sisters as possible. So Jesus' only concerns were in losing none of the children the Father had given him and in bringing the children of God home to the Father through the Resurrection. To accomplish the Father's will, which he came to earth to do, he must teach us God's will; and since it is so unique, it was necessary that he demonstrate its significance to us through the cross and resurrection. Therefore any desire on his part to prolong or to save his life in this world was the opposite of the Father's will.

When his hour was nearing he announced to the gathered disciples what was afoot and that he was to be taken and crucified. Naturally, Jesus recognized the temptation of Satan again when Peter objected saying, "Lord, this shall never happen to you" (Matthew 16:22)! It was a simple temptation to save his life, and so to lose it, and he fired back, Get behind me, Satan (Matthew 16:23)! I was long puzzled by the severity of this rebuke. Peter was only expressing his concern for his Lord's welfare, or so it appears, and one is led to ponder why this identifies him with Satan until the realization comes as to the crucial issue that was at stake. Had Jesus been influenced to save his life by Peter's show of concern, he would have become but one more prodigal electing to pursue his fortune in the far country.

As the scriptures state, Jesus was subject to all the temptations that are common to man (Hebrews 4:15). To satisfy his flesh, to exalt himself among men as King or simply to save his life so as to live in this world a little longer – these worked to prevent his doing the will of the father on earth, which he had been sent to do. He must have prayed often and fervently for the Father's will to be done, which he had come to earth to do, and in addition, he instructed his disciple to also pray for the Father's will to be done on earth, even as it is done in heaven (Matthew 6:10). With Jesus' definition of the will of the Father in mind, we see that he could only have been asking them to pray for him, that he might prevail against all temptation so as to do the will of the Father in this world.

The most terrible temptation came during his agony in Gethsemane, when he was mightily tempted to seek his own will rather than the Father's by saving his life. Father, let this cup pass away from me (Matthew 26:39)! But he overcame Satan again in this final battle of the spirits so as not to save his life but only so as to endure the cross and go to the Father. He concluded each repetition of the petition with the overcoming request,

Nevertheless, Father, not my will but yours be done (Luke 22:42).

This is that will of the Father that he came to earth to do and that we are all put here to do. I say again, the will of the Father is this arising to go to him – this and nothing more.

The churchmen bear a heavy burden for having closed their ears and minds and hearts to the words of Jesus so as not to understand this will of my Father. They have persistently led us in the recitation of this Lord's Prayer, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven, defining the Father's will, either implicitly or explicitly, as something we can do in co-operation with the Father to alter human life on earth. This results in trapping the minds of men and women in this misconception. So they go about seeking to build a kingdom of God on the earth, to perfect individuals, government and society in the name of Jesus and of God, and so to bind themselves to the earth and earthly endeavors, all in direct opposition to the will of the Father.

In Christendom we have this multitude of churchmen vigorously endeavoring to build the kingdom of God on the earth, when all He wants us to do is to lay down our tools and come home! Or, we

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have this other multitude of churchmen who are eagerly awaiting the return of the Lord to set up his kingdom here on the earth, who are missing the kingdom that has already come on the earth.

Now I will say it once more in the hope that some one will hear and respond to the Father appropriately: the Father has absolutely no interest in our activities on the earth. He is not even concerned about who wins wars. He wants and wills only one thing, and absolutely one thing – come home! So it is that the prodigal's father wanted only one thing from him, the very same thing – come home! It's a family thing! A loving father wants his children safe in his house. He does not want them to do anything on earth, this far country, and nothing that we can do here pleases him, except for this one thing: resolving to arise and go to the Father and holding firm to that resolve. This is the will of God as Jesus did it, so fulfilling his purpose in coming to earth. This is the will of God as we must do it, and if we seek to do anything else as the will of God, we will never do it on earth as Jesus did it and as it is done in heaven.

I have emphasized the simplicity of Jesus' gospel throughout, and here it is in its simplest, clearest form such as children readily understand – a loving father wants his children to come home. We are willfully disobedient when we are in any way otherwise minded. It is this that the Father has revealed to children through Jesus but has hidden from the wise and understanding (Matthew 11:25)! We now are in a position to see clearly what Jesus meant when he uttered the following sayings:

Not everyone who says to me 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven (Matthew 7:21).

And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said,

Here are my mother and brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother (Matthew 12:49,50).

Nothing that we can say to him is of any account unless we want to go to him, which is to do the Father's will. We want to go to him out of love for him who is our Father (the Great Commandment), and to leave the earth to that end (the Great Principle), and so to be his children and the children of no one other than him. The Father then lovingly and joyfully embraces us as his children, and we are, among ourselves, but brothers and sisters and mothers (no fathers), all bound together in the family of the Father. So Jesus says,

For who ever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother.

Jesus came to do the will of the Father and to teach and demonstrate it so that we can also do the Father's will on earth. We do it by following Jesus in taking up our own crosses in the hatred of life and the love of the Father.

**That's it!**

A Prayer  
of Jesus

I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes; yea, Father, for such was thy gracious will.

## CHAPTER VI

# THE KINGDOM OF GOD

## Definition of the Kingdom and its Coming

I have deliberately refrained from mentioning the Kingdom because we cannot understand it apart from the foregoing conception of the will of the Father. But now, it is the simplest thing imaginable. A kingdom, any kingdom, can be defined as the realm where the will of the king is done. So it is here. The Kingdom of God is not come where God's will is not done, because he is not there the king. Before Jesus, no one knew or did the Father's will on the earth, and so the Kingdom of God did not exist on the earth and God did not reign on the earth. But when Jesus died on the cross so as to go to the Father, then arose and ascended to the Father (as did the prodigal son), he did the will of the Father on the earth. He did it in such a way as to provide a continuing following of prodigals who likewise arise to go to the Father. It is thus that the Father's will is being done on the earth and that his kingdom has come on the earth. The incipient moment was the moment of the death of Jesus according to his own free will, when he yielded up his spirit – he being the first one to do the will of God on the earth. It was at that point that the Kingdom of God was come.

## Connecting the Kingdom to the Great Corollary

The coming of the kingdom was one of Jesus' primary concerns. Mark presents it at the very beginning of Jesus' teaching ministry when, in Mark 1:14,15, we read: Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee preaching the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel." This refrain, of the time fulfilled and the Kingdom at hand, almost here but not quite, was a constant throughout his ministry. He sometimes spoke and prophesied specifically of the time of its coming. Mark 8:34-9:1 is the perfect example, in which his prophecy of the coming of the kingdom is tied to the Great Principle:

If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man, to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? For what can a man give in return for his life? For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of man also be ashamed, when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.

To this point he has emphasized the Great Principle in terms of saving and losing life in this world, and applied it to taking up our crosses and following him in this performance of the will of the Father as defined above. He is to be the first. All others are to follow him. He warns us of the consequences of an improper response to him and to his words when he comes in judgment, at the Parousia. But this reminds him of another, much more imminent coming, that of the Kingdom of God. Then he added:

Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power.

## Tasting of Death

Why did he couch his prophecy in terms of tasting of death? Was it that he knew that the kingdom was to come during their lifetimes? No, he knew that the kingdom was to come so soon that "the time is fulfilled." Telling them that it was to come during their lifetimes would stretch the time out too far into the future in a context in which he emphasized the nearness. So that is not likely his point. It is far more likely that he used this language because he knew, that of all those standing there, he, alone, must taste of death for the kingdom to come. The others, the some standing here, would not taste of death until they had seen the kingdom come with power at the death of Jesus, but he must. Therefore the tasting of death was inseparably related to the coming of the kingdom in his mind. This is obvious to us now, in the simplicity of Jesus' doctrine, and you who are able to receive it will be astonished, as I was, and wonder why you never understood it before. It must have been a statement born of irony and about as near as Jesus came to being humorous.

## The Two Comings

One reason that many have not understood is that he uttered the prophesy almost in the same breath as the statement concerning his coming in the glory of the Father with the holy angels (Mark 8:38). An erroneous inference results from associating the two comings as one, but he did not say such and in retrospect we can see clearly that he never intended such. His Parousia, the Second Coming, is far removed from the coming of the Kingdom. Indeed, the coming of the Kingdom is not associated with his Second Coming at all but with his going – to the Father, through death and resurrection. He was always careful never to specify the time of the Parousia, once saying, No man knows, neither the Son, but the Father only (Matthew 24:36).

This confusion is further assisted by the error of associating the two comings, of the Kingdom and the Parousia, by associating two "Lo, here, Lo, there" sayings. The saying specific to the Kingdom is found in Luke's special material only (17:20, 21):

Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, he answered them, 'The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, "Lo, here it is!" or "There!" for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.

Therefore we must understand that there are no signs to herald the Kingdom – none that men can recognize in any case and its coming must therefore be unobserved, as it was. Men did not say, "Lo, here!" or "Lo, there!" for the simple reason that there were no visible signs attending its coming. The other saying is in Luke 17:23, 24 (Matthew 24:24-26):

And they will say to you, "Lo, there!" or "Lo, here!" Do not go, do not follow them. For as the lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other, so will the Son of man be in his day.

This applies to the Parousia, not to the Kingdom, and it is clear that the reason no one will be heralding the event with a "Lo, here!" or a "Lo, there!" is that absolutely everyone will see it. Two different comings: one absolutely invisible, the other universally visible. They cannot possibly be the same, even though they share one thing in common: There will be no "Lo, there!" or "Lo, here!" for either!

## The Kingdom Already Present

He sometimes spoke of the kingdom as already present, as in the saying above: "the kingdom of God is in the midst of you." I understand these sayings to mean that the kingdom was come in his presence and through his authority in performing signs and wonders and in casting out

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demons. He was, in this world, an invading force from another space, a beachhead of the kingdom, such that the spiritual authority of the kingdom was present in him because the Father's will was performed in him and through him. (Remember the essential definition of any kingdom – it is the place, realm, person, etc., where the will of the king is done.) It was not secure, however, and not effective outside his presence. You see, he was standing there, in the midst of them, when he uttered this saying. The coming of the Kingdom was not secure because there yet remained the possibility that Jesus would yield to the temptation to save his life. In that case he would not have been effective in bringing the Kingdom to earth because he would not have finally done the will of the Father on earth.

The Greek New Testament expression, *entos humon* (Luke 17:21), translated above as "in the midst of you" and often translated elsewhere as "within you" is severely misread when the latter translation is applied. The Kingdom of God was surely not inside the persons he was addressing – the Pharisees who were filled with enmity for him. In other words, the will of the king (God) was not being done within any of them. Had he been addressing a single individual, "within you" would have been the only possible reading; but in addressing a group, it simply means "within the group," and Jesus was standing there, in the midst of them, as the immediate personal representative of the Kingdom of God.

## The Strategy of the Enemy – the Fear of Death

Jesus understood that the power over the world, into which he entered as an alien invader (I am not of this world – John 8:23), was vested in Satan, the name given to the spiritual entity that had rebelled against God and had in consequence been cast down to earth. It was this spirit that offered Jesus the rule of the kingdoms of the world if he would bow down to him and, tempted him to use his powers for the benefit of the flesh and that tempted him to commit suicide by leaping from the temple. The wilderness temptations were early skirmishes in the long battle between Jesus and Satan, which was concluded victoriously by Jesus' death. Satan's strategy never varied. It was simply to succeed in tempting Jesus to save his life, as other men would have done, and so to lose everything (Matthew 16:25).

This had always been a highly successful strategy because it resulted in inspiring in all men the fear of death. Since the Father's sole will for us is that we come to him, this had effectively frustrated the will of the Father and secured the kingdom over the world for Satan. Therefore Jesus rightly recognized the voice of Satan speaking through Peter when the latter protested the first prediction of his approaching passion, saying "God forbid, Lord! This shall never happen to you!" And Jesus replied:

Get behind me, Satan! For you are a hindrance to me! You are not on the side of God but of men (Matthew 16:23).

It was this same Satan who unleashed all the power at his command against the solitary Jesus sweating blood in Gethsemane, tempting him to save his life by avoiding the cross. Had Satan succeeded, Jesus would have been fully as lost to the Father as any other man; the Father's will would not have been done on earth and his Kingdom would not have come.

So Jesus recognized Peter's voice as that of Satan, tempting him to save his life. He also charged Peter with being allied with men when he accused him of being on the side of men rather than the side of God. Thus it is clear that Jesus understood that men had allied with Satan against him, and the entire issue was focused on whether or not Jesus would fear death and save his life rather than go to the Father. Satan had made all men captive to him through imposing the fear of death upon all, and they thus became subservient to him in all things, opposing the sole will of the Father. The author of the Letter to the Hebrews had the perfect insight into what transpired at Calvary when he wrote:



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Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same nature, that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage (Hebrews. 2:14,15).

All were bound to Satan through fear of death, but finally a single man broke the bonds by dying fearlessly so as to go to the Father. In that everlasting victory the power of Satan, and men subjected to him, was broken. Therefore the Kingdom was come and the risen Jesus could announce to the gathered disciples,

All authority, in heaven and on earth, has been given to me (Matthew 28:18).

The author of The Revelation likewise plumbed its mystery when he wrote,

And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death" (Rev. 12:10,11).

(this is one of the very few places outside the gospels where the Great Principle is in evidence.) This, after just writing,

Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, 'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever' (Rev. 11:15).

## The Time of the Coming Confirmed

Knowing that the coming of the kingdom was to be invisible, Jesus nevertheless wanted his disciples to be able to discern the time. Because Judaism generally understood the coming of the kingdom to be the visible restoration of the kingdom of David under a son of David who would wrest the kingly power from the Romans and establish Israel as the highest of the mountains (Isaiah 2:2), and because Jesus had not been able to shake their faith in this interpretation of the prophetic visions, he knew they were not ready for the Truth. Indeed they would at that time have been offended by it. Therefore he resolved to provide them with a clue that, in its immediate context, they would fail to comprehend, but would do so after the Holy Spirit had come upon them. So, at the Last Supper with his disciples, when he took up the cup, he said to them,

Take this and divide it among yourselves; for I tell you that from now on I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes (Luke 22:18).

Why would he say such a thing and why would the scriptures record it, if not to inform us of the exact time of the coming? The beverage in the cup was almost certainly *oinos*, the sweet wine in common use at meals but it was also a fruit of the vine, which occasioned his clue.

Now there was another beverage in common use, especially among the Roman soldiers, called *ochlos*, a sour wine, or vinegar, but which shared with *oinos* the valid description, fruit of the vine. Jesus knew that it would be this fruit of the vine that he would drink in conjunction with the coming of the Kingdom, which was to be coincident with his death on the cross as prophesied in Psalm 69:21: "And for his thirst they gave him vinegar to drink." This therefore became the clue to his disciples – to all disciples who would ever follow him -- as to the exact moment for the coming of the kingdom. He need only be careful to avoid drinking any fruit of the vine, either *oinos* or *ochlos*, until that moment – the moment of this death, when he must drink it to satisfy the clue.

And so, a few hours later, when they came to a place called Golgotha, which means the place of

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a skull, they offered him wine (*oinos*) to drink, mingled with gall; but when he tasted it, he would not drink it (Matthew 27:33,34; Mark 15:22,23). Now we know why he would not drink it. It was not because he was not thirsty, for he had had a sleepless night of agonizing in prayer, during which he won the most significant battle of all human history. He had been arrested and tried, brutally treated and condemned, all with no mention of anything to drink. The offer may have been a humanitarian gesture on the part of one of the soldiers charged with crucifying him. Yet in that state of extreme thirst, when he had tasted the beverage so as to identify it as a fruit of the vine, he would not drink it because the moment of the coming of the kingdom had not arrived.

Then they crucified him, it being about the third hour of the day (9 a.m.). For the next six hours of intense agony on the cross, he drank nothing and he asked for nothing. But then, at about the ninth hour (3 p.m.), John's gospel informs us,

After this Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the scripture), "I thirst."  
A bowl full of vinegar (*ochlos*) stood there; so they put a sponge full of the vinegar on hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the vinegar, he said, "It is finished" and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit (John 19:28-30).

As soon as he realized that his death was certain and imminent, as soon as he knew he had won the victory and would not save his life, he asked for the drink. We are told that he had at that moment the knowledge that all things were finished. The Kingdom of God was come. It was the pivotal event in the history of the world, and no one said, "Lo, here!" or "Lo, there!" because no one saw it. Jesus told us, if we can hear, that it is not coming with signs to be observed. What more could we ask? The Kingdom did not come with signs to be observed, nor will it. Nevertheless, Jesus, wanting us to know the exact moment so as to understand it, assayed to provide a sign coincident with its coming provided we are able to receive it. The Kingdom had come on earth in that the will of the Father was done on earth.

The churchmen – the learned doctors, the wise and understanding – cannot receive this simple truth primarily for the same reason that Jesus' immediate disciples were not prepared for it. They looked for the coming of the Kingdom of God in terms of a triumphant religio-political messiah who would cast out the Romans and restore Jewish independence under the prophetic Son of David so as to transform their world. When they had come together with the resurrected Jesus, their first question was, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). The churchmen are gripped by precisely the same error, insisting that the coming of the Kingdom accomplish the transformation of the world. It will never happen and it is so sad to see them, like the early prodigal son, vainly casting all their hopes for the Kingdom on the transformation and glorification of this far country

All are without excuse because he has done everything possible to bring the Truth to them. He has plainly stated that the Kingdom is not coming with signs to be observed, but they do not believe him. He has told them where their hearts are really set in saying, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." This hope for a glorified earth is their treasure, their earthly treasure on which they have set their hearts, in violation of the Great Principle and in disobedience to the Great Commandment.

## The Coming was Consummate

There is nothing more to come, and those who cannot believe will miss it. That this coming was final and complete is evident in Jesus' use of the Greek aorist tense in predicting it.

I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes (*elthe*, aorist tense of *erchomai*, Luke 22:18).

This tense is applied only in speaking of an action that is point like, or both instantaneous and

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complete like a rifle shot. Its completion is also evident in Jesus' post resurrection statement,

All authority, in heaven and on earth, has been given unto me. (Matthew 28:18).

The word 'all' applied to both heaven and earth leaves nothing out, does it? Therefore the Kingdom must have come in its completion. Nothing yet remains. All authority has been invested in Christ our king, and all things are done under his authority and according to the absolute will of the Father.

Since the crucifixion of Jesus, all authority to govern nature, supernature, men, the spirits and all things in heaven and on earth issues from the Father through his son Jesus Christ, the Lord of lords and King of kings. It does not issue either from the battlefield or the ballot box. This fact is exceedingly difficult for men to accept because they have their hearts set on a certain vision of righteousness on earth, and certain things, such as the Nazi Holocaust to take an extreme example, cannot be fitted into that vision. This is a mystery that, like all the others, has a simple solution, which I hope to declare in the discussion of free will below.

## The Essence of Sin

We are now in a position to define the essence of sin, and it will be convenient to go back to the prodigal son and recall some of the characteristics of that story. The son was in a far country according to his own will and desire; he had abandoned his father and his father's house in order to go out to that far country and pursue a life of his own, independently of his father. This self-willed action was all contrary to the will of the father, who only wished his son to be in his house enjoying the fruits of the father's domain.

Life in the far country turned sour, but it would not have altered the specifics of his case had it been otherwise. The fact was that, for so long as he abode in the far country, there was absolutely nothing he could do to please his father apart from desiring to go home to his father. This was because there was only one thing the prodigal's father wanted of him – come home!

Apart from a positive response to this one desire of his father, everything he might be and do in the far country was a transgression of the father's will. This was for the simple reason that it was conducted in the far country and in the pursuit of a self-willed existence in that country. His sin consisted in his transgression of his father's will, who only wanted him to come home to the father's house. Righteousness before the father was an impossibility while he devoted himself to the pursuit of his life in the far country. Was he a good and honest man, upright and of great integrity, who loved his neighbor as himself? Even this is of no consequence while he continued to set his heart on life in the far country. All was sin – even his righteousness was sin – when pursued in the context of his devotion to that life.

So, likewise, we are all ultimate sinners before God the Father while we devote ourselves to life in this world, which is our far country. This leads us directly to the Great Principle of Jesus: He who loves his life loses it, but he who hates his life in this world will keep it for life eternal! Jesus stated it numerous ways: Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it; whoever seeks to find his life will lose it. Or, Whoever finds his life loses it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will keep it. This is the core issue, the essence of sin, and until we have dealt with it, as did the Prodigal Son, all our righteousness is as filthy rags in God's sight. Absolutely nothing we can do within the context of love for life in this world pleases the Father, whose only desire is that we turn to His house, devoting ourselves from the heart to the eternal glory.

## Examples: The Rebellious Child

What parent among us cannot understand this simple conception? Let us say that one has a child who turns rebellious and in late adolescence ceases his family obligations, desiring only to

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be free of the parental yoke. He demands his inheritance, or whatever he can get. Then he leaves home to seek his own life in the world with no consideration for the wishes and desires of his parents, which include educating and equipping him for the life that is before him, but most especially the yearning for his love and companionship. Can any parent be happy with such a son, whatever the results of his life in the far country?

Whatever we do that hinders our devotion to the Father in heaven, and to the eternal life in his house, is sin. All earthly affections, including the affection for family and friends, that bind us to the earth, are sin. Every earthly object of devotion competes with God in our hearts so that every such devotion is sin. This applies especially to familial devotion, to close relatives and friends, because our relationship with God the Father, if it exists, is a family relationship. That is why Jesus stated so emphatically,

If any one comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple (Luke 14:26). Because God in heaven wants to be our Father, our only Father, he can brook no earthly, competing fatherhood. That is why Jesus said, also very emphatically, Call no man your father on earth, for you have one father, who is in heaven (Matthew 23:9).

## Patriotism

This also specifically includes devotion to the state or nation. Patriotism (literally, fatherism), defined in terms of devotion to ones earthly country, lies at the very root of sin because it is an offense to God, our only legitimate father. Jesus spoke specifically to this issue once, but once is enough. When asked if it was lawful (from the Jewish point of view) to pay tribute to Caesar, he replied by asking to be shown the tribute coinage. Then he displayed the coin and said, "Whose image and inscription is this?" They replied truthfully, "Caesar's." Then he responded,

Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's (Matthew 22:21).

Now they all understood him, for all were well aware of the Genesis creation story, according to which God created man in his own image. The message is astonishingly clear: devote to Caesar, to the government, the tax – for it bears his image; devote that which bears God's image only to God – never to Caesar or the state. Jesus not only answered their question, he also used the occasion to pronounce a profound truth about human relationships. Devotion to the Father alone is righteousness; devotion to anything other than Him, be it family, state, or any earthly cause is sin pure and simple.

## The Essence of the Kingdom

All that I have written above concerning the significance of the Kingdom of God will prove unconvincing to most people. They will continue to insist on seeing material results of the exercise of authority by the king. So powerful in the hearts of men and women is the vision of the transformation of the world that they will never relinquish it so as to be receptive to the Truth. I am hopeful, however, that some of you, some few, are at the point of conviction in this matter. For you there is another thing the Lord has revealed that I wish to share, and it is so basic that I think it can be described as the essence of the Kingdom. If this does not convince you, I do not know what would, and to those unconvinced I can only say, "God loves you; may he in his mercy help you!"

The essence of the Kingdom can be seen in the context of the tribute question discussed briefly above, where I showed that this discussion about the coin with Caesar's image clearly defines the

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limits of human devotion. It is an either/or matter, according to which we may devote ourselves either to Caesar or to God, but never to both. We human beings on earth are the images of God; this indicates clearly that only God has a legitimate claim upon us, so that we are to render only to God what is his. Let Caesar have that which bears his image; it is of no value to the Father.

### Comparison with the Roman Empire – a Province of Heaven

But now, let us look at that teaching from a different perspective. Let us look at it from the perspective of the Father in heaven, and let us interpret his Kingdom according to the pattern of the kingdom of the Caesars when Jesus was ministering in Israel. The kingdom with which they dealt was with them every day, and they understood it very well. It is a distant part of even our history, and we should also be able to understand it. According to this pattern, Caesar stands as the king, and the territory of the Jews was part of a province under his royal authority. The kingdom of the Caesars had come to Judea when Pompey conquered Jerusalem in 63 BC. It then became a province of Rome, or rather a part of the Roman province of Syria.

What difference did the coming of the kingdom of Caesar make in Judea? If we look at the details, there were many, but here we seek only the essence, where we see few significant differences. The people continued to suffer under unjust rulers as before but there was stability in the state, which made the new governance, if not acceptable, at least tolerable for the Jews.

There were three very significant changes that transpired with the coming of the kingdom of the Caesars:

- the quartering of Roman troops whenever the Romans thought it necessary,
- the calls to worship Caesar as divine that the Jews to their credit never ceased to resist,
- and the payment of tribute to Rome in coin of the realm, bearing the image of Caesar.

The first two of these were occasional issues during periods of political tension and were largely unenforced. While the Jews lived in a peaceful and orderly state, they had no fear of Roman troops and Caesar appears to have accommodated himself to the fact that the Jews would never worship him.

One thing never failed: the collection of tribute. One might say that, from the royal point of view, that is, of Caesar, he was very satisfied with his province while it continued to produce the tribute levied upon it. This, the collection of tribute, was the primary and constant difference imposed upon the Jews by the coming of the kingdom of the Caesars. Caesar looked to his province to produce, year by year, those little images of himself and was generally satisfied when they were transported to his house (to Rome). Their arrival confirmed that his authority was recognized in the province of Judea, that his kingdom ruled over all.

So likewise with the whole earth; with the coming of the Kingdom of God it became a province of heaven, and heaven is happy with earth only when it is producing the tribute levied upon it – those little images of God the Father that we call human beings. Of course, the royal expectation is that the people of earth will worship God as God, who seeks always to quarter his troops on the planet. These are the true disciples of Jesus who directly represent his government in the province.

Yet after all is considered, the coming of the Kingdom of God to earth has made one constant difference: year after year his tribute has continued to be levied upon it and somehow it must have been paid. Otherwise, he would have done to it something similar to what the Romans did to Jerusalem in AD 70. This, then, is the essence of the Kingdom of God on earth: He has

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established his authority to levy tribute, those images of himself, by means of the work of Jesus. By the power of his holy Word and the Holy Spirit he has consistently enforced his authority and collected his tribute. Indeed, Jesus was himself the first tribute rendered to heaven by earth, proving the coming of the Kingdom of God to the earth with his death and departure therefrom to the house of the Father. Every kingdom is the realm where the will of the king is done. So with the Kingdom of God, using the above definition of the will of the king.

## CHAPTER VII

# THE PLAN OF SALVATION

The Parable of the Prodigal Son is a perfect representation of the plan of salvation in action. The sin of the prodigal had been a contrary will, with the father wanting only that the son return to the father's house, and the son's contrary will set on his great aspirations for life in the far country – anything but the father's house! As a result, his relation with the father was ruptured and he was lost in the realm of the dead. There was never anything he could have done to deliver himself from this death and lostness – no penitence, no sacrifice, no confession, nothing whatever while his devotion to the far country endured. The only thing he could do, the only solution to his problem of deadness and lostness was to change his mind so as no longer to be devoted to life in the far country and genuinely to yearn for a restoration to the life in the father's house. He had to repent so as to bring his will into harmony with the single will of his father and he needed to confess the error of his way. And his father rejoiced and said, "My son was dead and is alive, was lost and is found!" He was *saved* and that's all there is to it!

## Atonement Not Required

The prodigal's father did not require atonement for sin – nor does God in heaven. This father did not remain behind the locked door of his house while the weeping son petitioned from outside. He did not call out, "Where is my sacrifice whereby I may be propitiated for your sins?" Nor does God in heaven. This father did not send the innocent elder brother out into the far country to seek the lost son by shedding his blood in an atoning sacrifice – nor did God in heaven. What sort of father is it who requires the death and the suffering of bloodshed by his loyal, devoted and innocent son before he would receive and forgive his willful, wayward and guilty son? Not the father of the prodigal son, neither God in heaven! And Jesus very emphatically stated this when he quoted the prophet Hosea who first uttered these words of the Father in the world: I desire mercy, and not sacrifice (Hosea 6:6, Matthew 9:13, 12:7).

## Jesus was No Sacrifice in his Death

The Father does not require a sacrifice for the expiation of sins; he never did. Our sins require no atonement or expiation. Somewhere, back near the beginning, perhaps Paul, other apostles or even John the Baptist was responsible for first uttering this reprehensible proclamation,

Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29)!

But Jesus was no sacrificial lamb. Search his words throughout the gospels and see that, whenever he resorted to this pastoral metaphor, he is always the shepherd. *We are the lambs* and the sheep of his pasture.

To be sure, he said he was "the good shepherd," and the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. That is clear enough. But there is not the remotest hint or suggestion that his death was an atoning sacrifice, a propitiation for sin or blood shed to appease an angry god. So, when Jesus came to his death, he died as the shepherd and not as a lamb. This metaphor, according to which Jesus identified himself as a shepherd in his death, absolutely annuls any thought of his

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being a sacrificial lamb. Had the latter been the case, with the central emphasis accorded to it throughout Christendom, he would never have confused the issue by identifying himself in his death with the shepherd! It is only lambs that were slaughtered on the blood altars of sacrifice – not shepherds. Far more likely is it that, knowing there would be an attempt to make of him a lamb of sacrifice, he took this occasion to absolutely rule out such ideas. As it is, the only way that Christians can preach and subscribe to this heinous doctrine of the substitutionary atoning sacrifice is by utterly ignoring the words of their Lord.

## The Purpose of the Crucifixion

Then why was he crucified? How was it that he died for us if not as a sin sacrifice?

Jesus answered this question in all four gospels, directly and straightforwardly, if you are able to receive it. Please refer to the parallel arrangement of gospel texts that includes the Great Principle. Here, according to every gospel witness, he explained his approaching death. This supremely important principle warranted Jesus' response to it – he laid down his life to demonstrate its full significance to the world. That is the primary reason for his death – it proved the seriousness of the thing. Even the Son of God had to hate his life on earth to save it for eternity! If it applied to him, then it must apply to every other person on earth for, as Jesus stated,

Who ever would save his life will lose it (Luke 9:24).

That is why it is of paramount importance for all that would be his disciples to realize that Jesus did not *lose* his life. No one took it from him, as he explained, but he laid it down because he wanted to return to the Father just as would any loyal son. He chose this way to do it to make a statement to the world, a statement that would brand the pages of holy writ with this expression of the Great Principle for all time.

## The Cross

The crucifixion of Jesus involved a cross – and coming as it did as the instrument of his passage from this world to the Father's house, it became symbolic of every such passage. So, whatever the details, every individual has his own cross to bear in imitation of Jesus. His cross was therefore not unique – except as the first, to show the Way so that we will know to follow. This is precisely as Jesus expressed it:

Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple (Luke 14:27, Matthew 10:38).

We cannot find salvation by trusting in the cross of Jesus while avoiding our own – this false doctrine of Christendom, which is nevertheless well nigh universal, is a delusion. We have no lesser authority for this conclusion than Jesus himself. Each one has to bear his or her own cross. Jesus set the example and showed the way, therefore his crucifixion was a demonstration to all men and women of the Way to the Father. We cannot slip through under the tails of his seamless robe!

Whatever the details of each individual's cross, it must inevitably incorporate renunciation of the life in this world, defined by Jesus as renunciation of all we have:

So, therefore, whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple (Luke 14:33).

He powerfully reinforced this statement by his injunction regarding treasure:



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...do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves cannot break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also (Matthew 6:19-21).

While the prodigal son's treasure was sited in the far country, there was his heart; when he came to himself and realized the truth of his situation, he repented of the far country's treasures and transferred his heart to his father's house. This turning from his life in the far country can be interpreted as his cross, for he had to go through it to come to his senses and turn his back on the far country and his heart away from it. But no one other than himself had to suffer for his redemption! Perhaps it was to avoid such a connection as Christendom has made – that Jesus purchased our redemption with his own blood on the cross – that Jesus' parable keeps the prodigal's elder brother in the father's house. He was not required to go to the far country and suffer for the sins of his young sibling nor did Jesus come into the world for that purpose.

### The Ransom

Additionally, Jesus considered his death on the cross to be a ransom payment, as in the following synoptic utterance:

For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom (Greek, *lutron*) for many (Mark 10:45, Matthew 20:28).

The Greek word applies to the price paid for redemption of captives, whether slaves or otherwise. In its ancient context, it applied to the price paid by a defeated party to the victorious party for the redemption of captives taken during war, and also to the price paid to purchase or redeem slaves. In the modern context, the closest parallel is the price paid to a kidnapper to redeem the person kidnapped, but in all cases it carries the same idea – the price of redemption of captives. This ransom utterance of Jesus was added to the end of an instruction to his disciples to become servants of each other. The thought was that he himself was paying the price of their redemption from their prior captivity so that they would be *free* to enter into the service of their brothers and sisters in the fellowship of Jesus.

This leads us inevitably to question the nature of the prior captivity of disciples, and how it is that the life of Jesus could reasonably serve as a ransom payment to secure their redemption. The passage from Hebrews, already cited, accurately reflects the answers to these questions. There the author writes,

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same nature, that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage (Hebrews 2:14,15).

Clearly, the captivity is to the devil. He secures it by imposing the fear of death. This effectively gives to the devil the "power of death" as stated here. The power of death is the fear of death. Thus, if the captives are to be delivered, it must be a deliverance from the bond that holds them, which is the fear of death. Such deliverance effectively 'destroys' the devil in so far as the captives are concerned, since he has no more power over them, keeping in mind that his only power is the power of death that is the fear of death. Therefore it was necessary that Jesus partake of the same 'flesh and blood' nature as the rest of mankind so that he might confront the devil and provide a deliverance that men can understand.

In reality, the power of death is only apparent and it was necessary that one demonstrate to mankind the powerlessness of death by experiencing it willingly, then rising to show its lack of power. That is what Jesus did through the giving of his earth-life. It was a price of redemption

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that he paid to deliver us from this bondage to the devil through the fear of death. Since the devil possessed the power of death, it is in some sense to the devil that he pays the ransom even though he defeated the devil through the collection of the ransom. Furthermore, it is the slaves of the devil who are active in the ransom collection, namely persons who are acting under the motivation of the fear of death. This is of course not the first or only time that a kidnapper has lost his power in the process of collecting his ransom!

Jesus had other things to say about the plan of salvation. Here we have shown that salvation as he conceived it is simply this: the children can be saved, or go home to the Father, whenever *they want to*. That is the key. The Father awaits us, grieving for us in our lost and dead state. There must then be "joy in heaven" over one sinner who repents! We will delve into the other details later, while comparing Jesus' salvation doctrine with that of Paul.

## CHAPTER VIII

# CONDUCT IN THE WORLD

## The Ethical Impact of the Gospel

What we do matters. Our conduct is extremely important as Jesus made known by the saying of Matthew. 7:21: Not every one who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who *does the will of my Father* who is in heaven. Now, recalling that the will of the Father is summed up in one thing only as explained above, that we turn our hearts heavenward and away from life in this world, doing his will must likewise be judged according to the ultimate motivation of our hearts. Do we seek treasure on earth or in heaven? What is our ultimate motive? Do we seek to gain something that will enhance the life of this world, or are we solely motivated by the unalloyed desire for life in the Father's house? That is the only issue; that is the only scale by which our deeds are weighed for good or evil.

Our responses to situations that threaten our lives will reveal the real character of our motivations and the treasure of our hearts. Therefore, Jesus defined the issue in these extreme cases by his hard commandments in the Sermon on the Mount and elsewhere:

- Do not resist one who is evil.
- Love your enemies.
- Of him who takes away your goods, do not ask them again.
- Do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself.
- Do not fear him who is able to destroy the body and after that has no more that he can do!

Ethics have to do with one's morality and integrity. The ethical, or rather the unethical, usually comes into the play where conduct, while legal and sometimes even apparently honorable, is nevertheless motivated by self-interest at the expense of others. It is essentially devoid of bad consequences and may even result in high honors for the perpetrator. For example, if I knowingly publish, as my own work, ideas I have gleaned from the writings of others, without giving due credit, I have been unethical. My work may receive high honors; I may be lauded for my wonderful insight, but I am involved in conduct where dishonesty prevails because I hope to add to my laurels in this life. We see therefore that the ultimate motivation for this unethical conduct, indeed for all unethical conduct, is the love of life, which is condemnation.

To use a specific example, Martin Luther King was accused of committing plagiarism by incorporating the work of others into his doctoral theses without giving credit. If true, this was an unethical action that nevertheless brought him honor, the awarding of a doctoral degree by a prominent institution of higher learning. Thus, unethical action always is motivated by a desire for gain in the context of this life, and it involves a breach of one's personal integrity. Therefore, who ever follows Jesus in taking up his own cross has not the slightest inclination to act in an unethical way; the usual motivations do not tempt.

## Freedom and the Fear of Death

The freedom that I have called to mind above, the freedom to love our enemies and freedom from anxiety for today's demands, all this is the freedom promised by Jesus in saying:

If you abide in my word, then are you truly my disciples and you will know the truth and the truth will make you free (John 8:31,32).

It is, at the most superficial level, the freedom to respond to any circumstance with integrity, honesty and love for our neighbors and for God without fear of consequences. At its deepest level it becomes complete freedom from the fear of death. Loss of life would be the most severe consequence of our actions, just as it was for Jesus. The thought here as to the significance of the work of Jesus has been most precisely stated by the author of the Letter to the Hebrews in the passage cited above in discussing the ransom (Hebrews. 2:14,15).

## The Great Anti-corollary

I find that the Great Corollary, defined as the Great Commandment/Great Principle, or love of God/hatred of life corollary, has its counterpart, a sort of Great Anti-corollary, the love of life/hatred of death corollary. These paired entities are soul mates and can never be parted the one from the other, and the devil rushes to take advantage of us by imposing his will on us through bondage to the fear of death. Being delivered from that fear by Jesus, we are liberated from the shackles of the devil and can approach the questions of our existence on our own terms, free of any bondage.

I am speaking here of that which men call death, which is the termination of our association with flesh and blood. But while we remain in bondage to this fear we are nevertheless victims of the most awful death. This is the death to the Father mentioned by Jesus in the Parable of the Prodigal Son, who was dead to the Father for so long as he remained devoted to life in the far country. This entire world is the realm of the dead, of whom Jesus spoke when he said,

The hour has come, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live (John 5:25).

## Conclusion

This discussion of conduct that is acceptable to the Father has been brief. It is only necessary to point to the essential principle. Apart from this Great Principle there is no point in discussing conduct that is pleasing to God. In its light there is again little need for discussion because of the simplicity of its application. There, in that light, all questions are resolved including those arising out of Jesus' hard sayings and his most difficult commandments. This includes all questions of conduct involving war, wealth, politics and family. Instead of saying, "Surely, he could not have meant for us to literally do that?" we respond, "Of course. It's obvious, isn't it?" Nevertheless, for you who insist on more discussion, I refer you to Chapter 12 of my earlier book, "Jesus: the Rock of Offense."

## CHAPTER IX

# MEN, THE CATEGORY OF ABOMINATIONS

We are naturally inclined to look with tolerance on our own category. Consequently, we have acquired a mindset that facilitates overlooking the significance of Jesus' use of this word, men, and the category it defines. The fact is that when he used this word in the course of his teaching, he generally defined a category that is utterly hostile to him and to the Father.

- Beware of men (Matthew 10:17)!
- Woe to you when all men speak well of you (Luke 6:26)!
- What ever is highly esteemed among men is an abomination to God (Luke 16:15)!
- I do not receive glory from men (John 5:41).
- Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you and revile you, and cast out your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets (Luke 6:22,23).

A consideration of these few selections from among his utterances quickly illustrates the point. He viewed men, the general category, as utterly hostile to himself and to God. As indicated by Luke 6:22 above, he viewed this hostility as inevitably directed at exceptional men and women, the disciples who took his name and bore witness to his gospel. He prophesied that his disciples would be cast out of the synagogue and, as one who was cast out of the church, I can vouch for the accuracy of this prophecy. I grieved at the time, for I did not understand how such a thing could happen when all I had done was to bear witness for him. Now, I understand and I rejoice!

## The Parable of Salt

Sometimes, when the implication as to the nature of mankind is not obvious in a particular utterance of Jesus, supplying it brings clarity to and otherwise difficult passage. The Parable of Salt is an example from the Sermon on the Mount, immediately following his utterance about being blessed when men revile us:

You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trodden under foot by men (Matthew 5:13).

He identifies his disciples as the salt. But they are salt that, to men, has lost its taste. Or rather, they have become unacceptable to men and are good only for persecution – to be trod under foot by men.

## The Hostility Explained

The innate hostility of men toward Jesus and all who bear witness to him in truth is easy to explain. Human beings love life. They love life more than anything else in all creation, and all their institutions are founded on the love of life. The state or the nation exists to protect and defend life and to glorify it so that words and acts of disloyalty are quickly branded as treason, with the severest penalties applied. How much greater the hostility, how much more rapid the conflagration of hatred, when the disloyalty is not directly to the nation but to the very principle that under girds the nation and the whole of civilization – life and the love of life?

Churchmen and churchwomen are seldom exceptions, for their institution, no less than others, is founded on the love of life. When the pastor delivers the funeral oration over the deceased sister and he wants to praise her memory in the most laudable fashion, he says of her, "She loved life!" So dark is his vision, so blind to the truth of Jesus is he, that in the very act of issuing what he considers to be the highest praise, he has condemned himself; and if the praise is appropriate, he has announced the eternal condemnation of the deceased person.

The conflagration is inevitable when the Truth meets this darkness that hovers over the world of men. It is like a lighted match meeting gasoline. To preach the Great Principle of Jesus in the hearing of men means rejection, exclusion, casting out, persecution and bitter hatred. One is seen as a traitor to life, which is the most precious possession of men, and one deserves the severest penalties. Such a one must be silenced ere his words infect the minds of others and they incline to his treason. So men sought to silence Jesus with a cross, not understanding that his words had already seeded the world. The words are there, in the heart of the gospels, so that no one can avoid them and there is no excuse for ignoring them.

## No Neutrals

There are no neutrals and there is no neutral ground. On the one hand there is only the little flock of disciples (the sheep who hear his voice, John 10:3,27) and on the other hand there is the one huge category, men (or men and women). Jesus expressed this sharp division in a very concise manner. The disciple, John, once said to him, "Teacher, we saw a man casting out demons in your name and we forbade him, because he was not following us." But Jesus said:

Do not forbid him; for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon after to speak evil of me. For he that is not against us is for us. For truly I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink, because you bear the name of Christ, will by no means lose his reward (Mark 9:38-41).

This leaves no place for undecided persons. The one who is not against Jesus and his disciples must be for them. This can be explained only if the issue is so offensive that no one can fail to take an active position. So Jesus gives an example, the giving of a cup of water to a disciple who bears the name of Jesus. This action is of such a decisive nature that no one can do it unless he or she has become a disciple. Only then can one take a positive stance for Jesus before a world of human beings that he offends and enrages. Remember this cup of water, as we will come back to it shortly.

So, He that is not against us is for us. That is clear enough, but Jesus was not content to say that only. To avoid any misunderstanding whatsoever, he also spoke the same word in reverse.

He who is not with me is against me and he who does not gather with me scatters (Matthew 9:30).

No, there are surely no neutrals, and that can only be because the message of Jesus is so utterly offensive to humans.

## Identification of Disciples

This matter has yet another dimension, which is that of identification. Here is the relevant utterance:

Truly, truly, I say to you, he who receives any one whom I send receives me; and he who receives me receives him who sent me (John 13:20).

Or again, we have this witness from the synoptics:

He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives him who sent me. He who receives a prophet because he is a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward, and he who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. And whoever gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he shall not lose his reward (Matthew 10:40-42).

Note again, that cup of water! But do you see how the identification runs? Whoever receives Jesus receives God who sent him, and whoever receives a disciple of his, anyone whom he sends, also receives Jesus and God the Father! So intimately identified are the disciples whom Jesus sends, and Jesus whom the Father sent, with the Father, that to receive a disciple is to receive the Father. And of course it works backwards just as well. Whoever rejects a disciple whom Jesus sends rejects Jesus, and also rejects the Father who sent him. Were it not so, there would be no basis for reward for one who receives a disciple, even so much as giving him a cup of cold water – or for the condemnation of one who refuses to receive the disciple or give him a cup of water. But the implication is unavoidable, that to give a disciple a cup of water qualifies one to receive the reward of a disciple, just as if he were a disciple, one whom Jesus has sent! A further implication is unavoidable – a person who has never had an association with the disciples of Jesus is challenged to either receive or reject by the request for a cup of water! On this basis the one who was not a disciple receives the reward of a disciple – salvation! As one who has received a disciple, he is judged as a disciple.

## The Significance of the Cup of Water

Jesus chose the cup of water very deliberately, for a single cup of water is of little value in the general scheme of things. Potable water was not abundant in Jesus' Israel, but wherever there was a good well or a cool, clear spring, there was good water to drink and people drank from it freely so it was not an expensive proposition. Of course, apart from its null monetary value it is of much value to a thirsty person. But like the water Jesus received from the Samaritan woman at the well, to provide it is no sacrifice. Therefore, one's great reward for giving the water does not arise from its direct cost to the giver, which is negligible. How is it possible that one can gain so much from a simple act that costs one nothing? Presumably, the one who gives the water and the disciple who receives the water thereafter part and everything is the same as if nothing has happened.

Or is it? No, nothing can ever be the same because people are watching. And when a neighbor sees what has happened – he has seen one whom he recognizes as a disciple of Jesus come into the house of his neighbor and leave refreshed – this cannot go unreported. So he rushes out into the street and begins an uproar, shouting up and down to all who can hear, "My neighbor here has just received one of those Jesus people!" Then a crowd gathers demanding to know if it is true, because this cannot pass. When the accused acknowledges what he has done, we can only guess what the penalty might be. Days, weeks, months in the stocks? Prison? Stoning? Ostracism? Crucifixion? Burning at the stake? All because of a cup of water? No, it is because the offender has received a disciple of Jesus, has refreshed him or her, has aided and abetted

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him or her, one of those abominable persons who go about preaching the hatred of life, how one cannot please God unless one hates life; how the love of life is condemnation before God. That is the issue rather than the giving of water to a thirsty person. But under the circumstances, the giving of the water identifies one with Jesus in the eyes of the world of men and also (interesting agreement) in the eyes of Jesus! Do you begin to see why Jesus characterized men as a category of abominations opposed to the Father.

### Identification by Hearing the Word

There is another key to identification with Jesus, one even less costly in monetary terms, if that is possible, than the cup of water. That is, one identifies with Jesus simply by hearing his words:

Whoever hears you hears me (Luke 10:16).

So we can presume that whoever has given a cup of water to a disciple of Jesus has also heard what he has to say. He has received the proclamation of the words of Jesus, including the Great Principle (John 12:25). Then he has given him a cup of water anyway! It is the words that are so offensive to the world that no man can be neutral to them. This is the litmus test of the Spirit in a person – can he or she hear, really listen and hear, the words of Jesus? If they can, then according to Jesus, they are his sheep, for his sheep hear his voice. What, then, according to Jesus, is the state of those who refuse to hear him, to really listen and absorb his message and rejoice therein? The issue is not only one of hearing the words of Jesus but also of *parentage*.

They (the Jews) answered him, "Abraham is our Father." Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would do what Abraham did, but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth which I heard from God; this is not what Abraham did. You do what your father did." They said to him, "We were not born of fornication, we have one Father, even God." Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I proceeded and came forth from God; I came not of my own accord, but he sent me. Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father, the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires" (John 8:39-44).

There you have it. The offense, the horrendous abomination to men, is the word of Jesus that he brought forth from God and that is therefore uniquely the word of God. Men cannot bear to hear this word that incorporates the Great Principle as its foundation. There was never any doubt in the mind of Jesus that men would kill him because of the inflammatory nature of the word he spoke. These are the things that must have been in his mind when he sent out the twelve to preach the kingdom in the cities that he was about to visit:

And whatever town or village you enter, find out who is worthy in it, and stay with him until you depart. As you enter the house, salute it. And if the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. And if any one will not receive you [or listen to your words](#), shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town. Truly, I say to you, it shall be more tolerable on the Day of Judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorra than for that town. Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves (Matthew 10:11-16).

Note the highlighted phrase. That is the issue that divides the sheep from the wolves. Again, Jesus has chosen metaphors that allow for no neutrals. In this world of human beings there are only two categories, the sheep and the wolves. As it is the nature of all wolves to devour sheep, so it is the nature of mankind to devour the disciples of Jesus. Between the sheep and the wolves there is no place for a neutral wolf that has no taste for sheep. Does this seem harsh to you? Remember that the metaphor is that of Jesus.



## The Cup of Water at the Judgment

We have established that Jesus identifies with his disciples in the world so that whoever receives a disciple receives Jesus. We have also established that whoever receives a disciple will receive the reward of a disciple, just as whoever receives a prophet will receive the reward of a prophet or whoever receives a righteous man will receive the reward of a righteous man. The one doing the receiving is therefore identified with the disciple whom he receives, for he receives the same reward – and by receiving the disciple, he or she has received Jesus who sent the disciple, and God the Father who sent Jesus. Also, it cannot have escaped your notice that these considerations are critical to preparation for the final judgment of the sheep.

Conversely, any one who rejects the disciples of Jesus also rejects Jesus; and whoever rejects Jesus rejects the Father who sent him. In Matthew 10:11-16, quoted above, we see that whoever rejects the disciple of Jesus and refuses to listen to his words has a dim prospect on that day, for Jesus plainly stated:

It shall be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorra than for that town!

Further, the other passages quoted above illustrate the reception of a disciple (or the rejection) by the example of giving to such a one a cup of water (or by refusing to give such a cup). Now, when Jesus came to describe the details of the judgment at the last day, we should expect him to have preserved a place for the cup of water, and we are not disappointed:

When the Son of man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left (Matthew 25:31-33).

With this introduction he has set the stage and described the scene as one in which all who come before him on that day will be divided into only two groups, the sheep and the goats. There is no third category, no intermediate group of felons who might be worthy of a lesser punishment, neither any intermediate group of innocents who might be worthy of a lesser reward. The sheep we have met before, for they are the same as those metaphorized earlier as sheep in the scenario that included only sheep and wolves. But on the Day of Judgment there are no wolves in addition to the sheep – only goats! Clearly, the persons are the same, for they belong to the only category other than the sheep.

The wolves have become goats! With but a little thought we can agree that this is a reasonable transition. We are seated in the Great Assize (or standing), where absolutely every individual is powerless before him who is Judge of all and Lord of all. In this picture, the wolves are no threat to anyone; they are utterly in His power. They have been defanged and declawed and can only tremble before him who is seated upon the glorious throne. Further, great numbers of these wolves, in their lifetimes when they were indeed wolves complete with fangs and claws, nevertheless masqueraded as sheep – being wolves in sheep's clothing. These are more accurately identified as the "reverends" and their disciples that, in the name of Jesus, have led multitudes astray by preaching another gospel so that their followers are tragically unprepared for the Great Day of Judgment. Therefore these wolves, who in sheep's clothing were indeed, in their lifetimes, by appearances, sheep-like, sort of, have become also sheep-like, sort of, on that Great Day – specifically, goats!

The great drama continues to unfold as the Judge speaks from his glorious throne:

Then the King will say to those at his right hand (the sheep), "Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was

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hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me" (Matthew 25:34-36).

This wonderful news is clearly a complete surprise to the sheep-like ones, which respond in amazement with the question,

Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee (Matthew 25:37-39)?

Then Jesus continues,

And the King will answer them, "Truly, I say unto you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (Matthew 25:40).

Did I not tell you we would see that cup of water again? "I was thirsty and you gave me drink." When? "As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me." That single cup of water identifies one as a disciple. Even though it was given to the least of the disciples, it nevertheless qualifies one to stand among the sheep – on the Last Day – and to receive the reward of the righteous for it was given to Jesus . . . "you did it to me!" Here Jesus shows that the drink of water is only one of many things one may do to aid and abet his disciples (and himself). Included are feeding him when he is hungry, welcoming him when he is a stranger, clothing him when he is naked, visiting him when he is sick or in prison. Indeed, if only giving him to drink a cup of cold water qualifies one for the eternal blessing, then anything else we can do to assist, aid, abet or minister to a disciple of Jesus likewise qualifies us to receive the eternal blessing.

What of the goats? Jesus immediately proceeded to address them (I will not quote him here, you doubtless know what he said), but they every one are cast into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. They are terribly astonished and are led to understand that it is all because, when he was thirsty, **they gave him no drink**, neither fed him, clothed him, welcomed him nor visited him. Doubtless these goats will come trotting into the Great Assize with confidence and great anticipation; they will leave in utter dismay.

Clearly, this eternal distinction between those who inherit the kingdom and those who are cast into the lake of fire has more behind it than a cup of water. We are not speaking here of having the preacher home for Sunday dinner. The reason can only be that feeding the preacher has no consequences. Who cares, apart from other families in the church who might have to do it if you don't? One even gets a little respect from one's fellow church members and from the community by thus taking an active part in supporting the church and ministering to the preacher. But when one really has Jesus home to dinner – in the person of a genuine disciple – there will be serious consequences. It will be like an American feeding a Communist during the Cold War or aiding and abetting a Nazi during the hot one. Therefore the mere preacher cannot be among the sheep, and the proof of it is that giving him a drink of water or food to eat, or whatever, has no consequences – EXCEPT ON THAT DAY!

## The Basis of These Acts of Charity

It is important to acknowledge here three things that are often misunderstood. First, these acts of charity Jesus set forth as the basis of judgment are not, as so many presume, general acts of charity. They are not such acts as giving a drink to a beggar, donating clothing to the poor, visiting inmates at the county jail or feeding disaster victims from a Red Cross Emergency Response Vehicle. Now, these are good things to do. Jesus would approve of them since they manifest love for neighbor and his disciples have faithfully performed them throughout the

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centuries. But there is no mention of them on Judgment Day.

The acts that are the focus of judgment are acts of ministry to Jesus himself, as he is identified with his disciples. "I was thirsty, and you gave me drink." Or, "you gave me no drink." Apart from this identification with Jesus, there is no Judgment Day benefit from any charitable act. Jesus is not to be identified with the general population of prisons, or hospitals, or streets, or poor houses or disaster victims. No, for his sheep, those who stand before him as the sheep on that day are only those who have heard his voice so as to receive him while they were in the world. One does not have to search only among Jesus' disciples to find people who are charitable towards their fellows. Wherever human beings exist in civil society, whatever the religion, nation, country, or type of government, there are many kindly persons who devote themselves to general good works. Christendom has no monopoly on such works, and they are not a factor on the Last Day.

### No Testimony to One's Faith

The second thing to acknowledge is that on Judgment Day there will be no verbal testimony to one's faith. We will neither be asked nor told what we believed in the world nor judged on the direct basis of faith. That does not imply that belief, or faith, is unimportant. To the contrary, it is because what we believed while in the world will be clear enough from what we did; and if we did not give him a drink for his thirst, it will have been because we were unwilling to receive his words. It is no matter what we may affirm as our faith. It will have been because we were in love with life and unwilling to accept the consequent threat to life. You say you believed in Jesus? Well, the demons also believed, and they trembled before him. No, according to Jesus himself, all will be judged solely by what we did while in this world. Baptism? Creed? Church membership? Confession of faith? They will never be mentioned. But did you give him that cup of water for his thirst or otherwise minister to him in his need? This is the only question we will have to face and the only judgment we will have to bear.

### Only One Judgment Day and One Judgment

The third and last thing to acknowledge is that this picture of Judgment Day is the only judgment. There is not some other judgment day when we will be judged by our faith, our church, or by our general good works. No, it is all done on one great day when all nations will be gathered before him. No one is to be omitted so there is no one else to judge on some other day; this is the only judgment that is needed by anyone, so that there is no other judgment for these, on some other day.

Finally, the basis of eternal judgment as described by Jesus can be seen to rest on the Great Commandment/Great Principle Correlate. Our attitudes to God and to life in this world will establish our eternal destiny. If we love God we will want to go to him and we will therefore hate life. If we love life we will want to hold onto it and will be threatened by every threat to life. And we will hate God, for we will not want to go to him. At bottom, we are speaking of the simplest thing imaginable. All who, like the repentant Prodigal Son, want to go to the Father to inherit and enter into his Kingdom and Glory will do so. And they will act consistent with that desire while in the world by manifesting the hatred of life. All who do not want to go the Father will not be compelled. Fair enough? And they will act consistent with that desire while in the world by manifesting the love of life.

The question for of us to consider is this: What do we want, right now? It will not be wise to put off the consideration of this desire for some later day because this may be the day that a thirsty Jesus appears before us. So, what Jesus said to all, I can only repeat to you:

Beware of men!

A Prayer  
of Jesus

I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes; yea, Father, for such was thy gracious will.

## CONCLUSION

The preceding survey has sought to establish the fundamental concepts of Jesus and his Gospel of the Kingdom. We have seen there the presence of certain essential ideas that are absent from church creeds and confessions and from the sermons of the preachers. These include his unique definition of the will of God, the Great Principle, the Great Correlate and the essence of his plan of salvation. It would appear that the ecclesiastics have completely overlooked the fundamentals of the message of Jesus because they have not listened carefully to his words, even though the Truth is simple and is presented in terms of family relationships that all can easily grasp. They are offended, together with the rest of humanity, instead of embracing him through careful attendance to his words. In this they reveal that they, no less than others, are devoted to life in this world and offended by the thought of positively responding to the hatred life.

I must emphasize to you my readers that the influence of the church has been powerful in the religious world, and so the church has undoubtedly influenced you. But the church is under the dominance of Pauline doctrine, therefore the fundamental malady of Christendom is the historic tendency to honor the words of Paul more than the words of Jesus. When we come to Jesus through the ministry of the church we inevitably acquire a false conception of Jesus and his work because the church has trapped us. We can only see Jesus through Paul's eyes because the church has convinced us that his epistles are the word of God. This is a great error, because Paul's words are clearly not the Word of God. Paul's word is a false word, and his Jesus is a false Jesus. When we thereafter turn to the gospels to seek the true and genuine Jesus, we can only see him through Paul's eyes. To question that vision then appears to be heresy, and we flee from the genuine Jesus of the gospels. We ignore much of his doctrine, then unconsciously force the rest into an unnatural conformity with Paul. What I have written above about Jesus may therefore seem heretical to you because it is in conflict with Paul's doctrine. It will also certainly be offensive to most people because it challenges a human beings greatest treasure – life in this world – and expounds the humanly hateful doctrine that the love of life comes from evil.

All Christendom reveres Paul as a saint and a genuine apostle of the Lord. We have all been literally brainwashed with this view due to a lifetime of exposure to the churchmen's adulation. You are therefore not likely to accept my vision of Jesus as defined above unless you are able to question the character of Paul. I urge you therefore to continue with Book II, following, where I trust you will be able to see the man in his true character. Book III will further define the vast difference between Jesus and Paul by examining and comparing a few of the basic doctrines of the two.

We will also have to deal with the question of how the church came to venerate a man of such perverse character. This means we will have to look carefully at the church to determine, if possible, how it came to be a witness to Paul and his vision of Jesus rather than to the genuine Jesus of Nazareth. This will be the subject of Book IV. In the meantime, if you are really serious about becoming acquainted with Jesus, you don't really need to read anything here. Just turn to the gospels, read his words, believe them and take them seriously. Above all, don't fail to give him that cup of water!

Book II  
**PAUL**

A Prayer  
of Jesus

I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes; yea, Father, for such was thy gracious will.

## BOOK II

# PAUL

## INTRODUCTION

It was a hot Sunday afternoon in July of 1947. I had placed my old Underwood on a small table in the front yard, under the shade of the hickory, with a chair on which I had seated myself. I was composing an essay, being inspired by my thoughts about the racial injustice of the land of my birth and nurture. I looked up toward the Whitworth's home to recognize the car approaching on the dirt road. It was The Rev. Russell Duffer, who was "preaching a revival" at Walnut Grove Baptist Church. I was not surprised to see him and I felt sure he was coming to see me, a young sinner, home from college for the summer and in need of conversion and salvation. Sure enough, he pulled into our yard and drove up to within a few feet. I invited him out and went inside to get another chair. I wanted to hear what he would say, for I had been giving much attention to Jesus for the last four years, though I had never made a decision to follow him nor would I that day. However, during the following week I decided to "accept Christ" and was baptized the next Sunday afternoon.

Brother Duffer did not pressure me; he only wanted to explain the Plan of Salvation and to encourage me to turn to Jesus for the forgiveness of my sins. He pointed to one passage of scripture as the key to salvation because it listed all the necessary steps to take, which were, in number, only two. It was from Paul's Epistle to the Romans, Chapter 10, verses 8-10:

But what does it say? The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart (that is, the word of faith which we preach); because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For man believes with his heart and so is justified, and he confesses with his lips and so is saved.

This simple two step formula, believe and confess, to be followed by baptism, is the foundation of Evangelical Christianity. Extrapolated into evangelical terms, it means that salvation is by faith alone, and not by works, as Paul was careful to state elsewhere in his letters. I believed Paul then, and this formula became the basis of my faith and of the faith of others who came to Jesus at my invitation during the following years. I came more and more to love and appreciate the "slave of Christ" who had done so much to spread a message about Jesus throughout the First Century Mediterranean world.

But there was a problem brewing behind the barrier of the subconscious. It required years to acknowledge it, and years more to define it, but it was there and would not disappear. Let us begin by focussing on it.

## CHAPTER I

# THE PROBLEM

I could never fully integrate the message of Paul with that of Jesus. I understood that to confess Jesus as Lord, as Paul urged, was the initiation of a radical commitment. I had been reading and pondering the gospels and I knew that Jesus had said,

Why do you call me "Lord, Lord" and not do what I tell you? (Luke 6:46).

Then Jesus followed with the Parable of the Two Builders, which clearly indicated that those who call Jesus "Lord," and who yet do not obey him, are in for a great surprise when the storm comes. The one who does not obey is the one who builds his house on the ground, without a foundation. Naturally, it collapses. So, in my heart I knew that a third step was essential: obey. The formula then becomes, "Believe, confess and obey." But when I sought confirmation from my brethren, both old and young, the answer was always the same: confession and faith are all the Lord requires for salvation; obedience enters in only as the basis of rewards in the hereafter. That was the way they had resolved the problem, but it never satisfied me. Evidence of my concern is the fact that my first sermon, delivered in June of 1948 at Toonigh Baptist Church a few miles north of Atlanta, Ga., was drawn from a text found not in Paul but in James:

What does it profit, my brethren, if a man says he has faith but has not works? Can his faith save him? If a brother or sister is ill clad and in lack of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead (James 2:14-17).

I entered Southern Seminary thinking that this issue would very soon find a resolution. It did not. It only became more intense and prominent as the seminary years progressed. The hard commandments of the Sermon on the Mount increasingly seemed tailor made to my central interests in the violence of Christendom that was World War II. But to my dismay, the Seminary faculty did nothing to relieve my growing concern. A typical response was to assure me that no one could keep those commandments. "They are only meant to convict us of sin so that we will trust in the blood of Jesus for forgiveness." I could never match those assurances with anything from the utterances of Jesus but found them contradicted on every hand.

## CHAPTER II

# THE SOURCES

I wrestled with the faith/works contradiction for the next twenty years with growing anxiety. It was as though Jesus and James were pulling me one way while Paul and the church were pulling the other and I was near tearing in the middle. Finally, I did tear. My breakdown came in the fall of 1967. It was both the most terrible and the most wonderful experience of my life. It was terrible because for many months I was in the shadow of hell. It was wonderful because from it and through it the Lord rescued me and I was at last set free of the church, free truly to follow Jesus, free to realize the true will of God, and free to begin to see Paul's true character. Martin Luther, inspired by Paul, concluded that the Epistle of James was "an epistle of straw." I, inspired by Jesus and James, have finally concluded that Paul was an *apostle of straw*. I still acknowledge Paul's great zeal for Christ, but it was zeal for a Christ misunderstood. Paul's suffering for Christ bespeaks his great love for him, but it was love for a Christ misconceived. His preaching of Christ was among the most effective the world has ever seen, but it was of a Christ mispreached. What follows is an effort to present Paul as I have come to know him, minus his halo but yet clothed with a kind of respect that seems at times contradictory, even to me. Seeing Paul, as he really is – warts and all – does not detract from my admiration of the work he performed.

## A Sampling of Views by Various Authors

Before delving into the details of how I have come to know Paul as a straw apostle, it will be helpful to show here a sampling of the views, both contrary and similar, that others have held. I show these primarily to clarify the basis of my own view and to reveal how it is the rule that scholarship, per se, is of limited value in getting at the truth about our man because the scholars tend to begin from a bias characteristic of their place in life. This dictates their ultimate conclusions without regard for their otherwise apparently open minded evaluations. These quotations suggest one of the universal defects of scholarship. It is no matter how sincere and honest one's quest of truth, or how thorough one's methods, the conclusions will be dictated by one's value system. The value system is nearly always consistent with one's social context and with what one has to gain or lose from publishing or preaching views contrary to those of one's fellows.

David Smith, writing early in the century before critical scholarship became so influential, and from the perspective of a professor in a Presbyterian Theological School, does so as one who would not understand what it means to question Paul's ministry. He simply assumed that the "Great Apostle" was all that the Christian Church has made him out to be. Speaking of the Church, he wrote,

Out of the very heart of Judaism came a man of large vision and courageous spirit who broke her (the church) fetters and led her forth on her worldwide enterprise. (The Life and Letters of Saint Paul, Harper Brothers, 1914, p. 14; this was one of my Southern Seminary textbooks).

David Wenham, of the Faculty of Theology of Oxford University, a modern Christian scholar, has been very thorough in his work of comparing Paul to Jesus and seeking to draw out a true picture of how Paul was indebted to Jesus. He writes in 1995,



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He maintained Jesus' perspective and priorities, and he could with justification claim that "we have the mind of Christ." His interpretation may justifiably be said to be a model in terms of method, and to have maintained the church in the faith of Jesus . . . . Paul saw himself as the slave of Jesus Christ, not the founder of Christianity. He was right to see himself in that way. (Paul, Follower of Jesus or Founder of Christianity?, Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1995, P 409).

Hyam Maccoby, a leading Talmudic scholar and fellow at Leo Baeck College, London, takes an adverse view, although his scholarship appears no less thorough than that of Wenham. He writes of Paul:

Paul, not Jesus, was the founder of Christianity as a new religion which developed away from both normal Judaism and the Nazarene variety of Judaism . . . . Paul derived this religion from Hellenistic sources, chiefly by a fusion of concepts taken from Gnosticism and of concepts from the mystery religions, particularly from that of Attis. The combination of these elements with features derived from Judaism, particularly the incorporation of Jewish scriptures, re-interpreted to provide a background of sacred history for the new myth, was unique; and Paul alone was the creator of this amalgam. Jesus himself had no idea of it, and would have been amazed and shocked at the role assigned to him by Paul as the suffering deity . . . . Paul, as the personal begetter of the Christian myth, has never been given sufficient credit for his originality. The reverence paid through the centuries to the great Saint Paul has quite obscured the more colorful features of his personality. Like many evangelical leaders, he was a compound of sincerity and charlatantry. Evangelical leaders of his kind were common in the Greco-Roman world. (The Mythmaker, Paul and the Invention of Christianity, Harper & Row, 1987, Pp. 16,17)

A. N. Wilson, British journalist, has his own unique view of Paul that gives to him the prime credit for the founding of Christianity:

One is not saying that Paul crudely invented a new religion, but that he was able to draw out of the mythological implications of an old religion, and the death of a particular practitioner of that religion, and to construct therefrom a myth with reverberations much wider than the confines of Palestinian Judaism. . . . And though this book has shown, there were many individuals involved in the evolution of Christianity, the aspects which distinguish it from Judaism, and indeed make it incompatible with Judaism, are Paul's unique contribution. It is for this reason that we can say that Paul, and not Jesus, was -- if any one was -- the "Founder of Christianity". (Paul, The Mind of the Apostle, W.W. Norton & Co., 1997, pp 72, 258)

Scholarship is indeed of value as a means of discovering and organizing facts, but fails when it begins to evaluate and interpret them, which it must inevitably do. The subconscious censor is always there, permitting or forbidding ideas according to their potential consequences. Thus, a professional Jewish scholar, Maccoby, must come down hard on Paul as the founder of an institution that has been party to a long history of anti-Semitism, culminating in the Holocaust, whereas a professional Christian scholar, Wenham, from the same knowledge base, honors and exalts him as the "slave of Christ." Wilson, with no ax to grind, takes a view somewhere between these. One should, therefore, give the greater heed to the views of scholars or other intellectuals who are not affiliated with partisan points of view, but these are in short supply because non-partisans seldom have enough interest in a subject to pursue it wholeheartedly. One therefore wonders how authentic a base the non-partisan has for his positions. The following quotations would seem to be of such nature:

The British playwright, G. B. Shaw wrote in the preface to *Androcles and the Lion*, in 1913: There has never been a more monstrous imposition perpetrated than the imposition of the limitations of Paul's soul upon the soul of Jesus (The Writings of St. Paul

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(WSP), Edited by Wayne Meeks, W, W, Norton & Co., 1972, P.300).

And Friedrich Nietzsche (1880) wrote in *The First Christian*:

But who, apart from a few learned men – know that it (the Bible) likewise records the history of one of the most ambitious and importunate souls that ever existed, of a mind full of superstition and cunning: the history of the Apostle Paul? That the ship of Christianity threw overboard no inconsiderable part of its Jewish ballast, that it was able to sail into the waters of the heathen and actually did do so: this is due to the history of one single man, this apostle who was so greatly troubled in mind and so worthy of pity; but who was also very disagreeable to himself and to others. (WSP, Pp. 288,289)

Yet what was the base for the assertions of Shaw and the (also much to be pitied) Nietzsche? Did they spend long hours, weeks, months, and years in the library, searching and pondering, investigating and evaluating, before arriving at their conclusions? Did they earnestly pray for divine guidance as they pondered what to write? I doubt it. These intellectuals had a beef with the church, which they recognized as the offspring of Paul and this bias undoubtedly inspired their negative opinions.

### Where to Turn?

Where, then, must we turn for guidance? If the reader has read Book I of this volume, or is familiar with my earlier book, *Jesus: the Rock of Offense*, you will know that I believe the only true base is to be sought and found in the utterances of Jesus as recorded in the four gospels. It was by a comparison with this Jesus that Maccoby and Wenham reached their very diverse conclusions concerning Paul; but they each had a problem in that neither perceived the true nature of Jesus' message. Neither has a clue as to what he was about. Knowing *this* Jesus, as I do, gives me a favored position from which to evaluate Paul and his work, as the reader should realize who has read Book I of this volume, which is a relatively brief treatment of the message of Jesus. And, since I discovered Jesus with some little help and much obstruction from the scholars, I am encouraged to undertake a similar study of Paul. That is, by examining Paul's words, to draw out of them a reasonable portrait of the man, his character, and the true significance of his work. Was he really the slave of Christ, as David Wenham makes him and he himself asserted, or was he the charlatan-mythmaker of Hyam Maccoby? The monstrous imposition of Shaw, or the ambitious and importunate soul of Nietzsche? Or is the truth of the man yet to be discovered? Since the man's words, and a brief history, The Acts of the Apostles, written by one of his disciples, Luke, are the only sources of information about him, it would seem to be necessary to find him somewhere in there.

Maccoby gives great credence to one other source, the opinion of Paul expressed by the Ebionite Christians as preserved in Epiphanius. According to this source, Paul was not only a citizen of Tarsus, as he himself admits and does not deny, but also of Greek origin, basing this on a passage in which Paul candidly says,

I am a Tarsan, a citizen of no mean city' (Acts 21:39). Then they declare that he was a Greek, child of a Greek mother and a Greek father. He went up to Jerusalem, they say, and when he had spent some time there, he was seized with a passion to marry a daughter of the priest. For this reason he became a proselyte and was circumcised. Then, after he failed to get the girl, he flew into a rage and wrote against circumcision and against Sabbath and Law (WSP, p. 177, 178).

Little can be said with confidence about these Ebionites, since none of their written works survive as such (unless we ascribe to them the *New Testament Epistle of James*), and we would not know of them apart from references such as those found in Epiphanius. It appears that they were Jewish disciples of Jesus who continued the practices of the law, including circumcision, which

## THE SOURCES

places them in the same tradition as the first disciples in the Jerusalem congregation of Christian Jews. These include Peter, James, and the original apostles with whom Paul struggled over questions of doctrine. Their core beliefs may be encapsulated in the Epistle of James, purportedly written by the brother of Jesus.

For this reason some have made them the successors and inheritors of the early ministry centered in Jerusalem about the apostles and James, the brother of Jesus, as distinct from the branch of Christianity that sprang from the work of Paul and his associates and which evolved to the Christianity of the modern world, but this cannot be substantiated. They maintained their testimony for several hundred years, then finally disappeared from the scene. In that their voices were long ago silenced and the only record of them comes from accounts of their detractors, writers such as Epiphanius, I will not, like Maccoby, accept the above depiction of Paul as basic to my views of him. I would be less than honest, though, if I failed to acknowledge that it might have some influence in my thinking.

It is surely significant that there existed, for hundreds of years after the early Christian experience in Jerusalem and among the Jews, a fellowship of disciples of Jesus who considered Paul an impostor and a false prophet. As to such details as his origin and his infatuation with the daughter of a priest, I am in no position to judge. Maccoby sees himself as qualified to make such judgments, and perhaps he is, but I nevertheless doubt that the evidence is adequate to serve as a base for firm conclusions. I will conclude, below, that Paul was a false prophet, but on the grounds of evidence in the New Testament and not on the grounds of the Ebionite testimony.

## A Summary of Sources of Information

The sources of reliable information about Paul are therefore limited. They are the New Testament and statements in the surviving writings of early Christians such as the Epiphanius, Clement of Rome and Eusebius.

David Smith, whom I quoted above, early in the Twentieth Century in his *The Life and Letters of St. Paul*, makes a relatively modern contribution by surveying all the available sources and using the results to weave a life of Paul together with a chronology that seems reasonable. In particular he has made a good case for Paul having made two journeys to Rome, not one as the New Testament record indicates by breaking off its history of Paul's journeys in the Acts with his imprisonment in Rome following his appeal to Caesar. Thereafter, perhaps some five years later and after a long delayed missionary journey to Spain, he may have returned once more to Rome where he was martyred late in the year 67. There is, however, no historical foundation for this tradition, and it is just as likely that Paul lived out his years preaching his Gospel and founding his churches.

In this chapter I will rely on the New Testament record as being the only source of information up to the time of the first Roman imprisonment. I shall accept the later evidence for a second imprisonment and martyrdom in Rome as the only additional source, since Acts obviously breaks off before completing the story. This exception seems justified because it provides for Paul having written the pastoral letters whereas his authorship has been questioned due to the difficulty of fitting them into the events in Paul's career as recounted in *The Acts*.

## The Source Problem

But there is a problem. The New Testament sources include only the Book of Acts, the letters of Paul, and one brief reference in II Peter. Luke, who also authored the gospel that bears his name, wrote Acts. It contains our only narrative of Paul's life and ministry. Now, this Luke was a protégé of Paul, probably one of his converts as I will suggest again below, and an almost constant companion during the last years.

## PAUL: THE STRANGER

If David Smith's suggestion is correct, Luke was a Greek of Psidian Antioch who was converted there during Paul's first missionary journey. Paul encountered him again during his second journey, when Luke joined the missionary team and was henceforth Paul's close companion (D. Smith, p. 125), except when left behind to strengthen newly established churches, such as the one at Philippi. Paul characterized Luke as the beloved physician (Colossians 4:14), suggesting that the latter traveled with him and ministered to him during his many illnesses. Luke assisted him again during his third journey and, as we glean from Luke's first person references in Acts, he also journeyed with him to Rome where he remained with him during his first Roman imprisonment. Then, based on Paul's Second Letter to Timothy, (possibly written during a later and second Roman imprisonment), Luke was again with him as he contemplated his imminent martyrdom. It seems that, of all Paul's helpers and disciples, only Luke remained, which we learn from Paul's plaintive statement, "Luke alone is with me." (II Timothy 4:11)

Therefore the problem mentioned above arises from the fact that almost all the information we have about Paul may have Paul as its source. This includes that recorded by Luke, who would certainly not have been unbiased when it came to relating the deeds, character and doctrines of his beloved mentor. Furthermore, the details of Paul's activities, given in Acts by Luke and which Luke did not personally witness, may also have been relayed to him by Paul. Of what did they speak during the period(s) of imprisonment in Rome, or during the long hours spent in their travels together, such as the ill fated ship journey to Rome prior to the first Roman imprisonment? It would be hard to over emphasize the closeness of the bond between these two. We must ever keep this in mind in evaluating Paul as Acts depicts him. It cannot be an unbiased story.

What of the brief reference in II Peter? This, again, is subject to doubts as to its authenticity and may have been inserted by someone who wanted to present Paul as being fully accepted in the fellowship of the Apostles. The reference reads, in full:

So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given to him, speaking of this as he does in all his letters. There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction as they do the other scriptures (II Peter 3:15,16).

This, standing alone outside the works of Paul/Luke, seems specifically designed to give Paul an honored place that he may not in fact have enjoyed. He is categorized as beloved brother, a man of wisdom, consistent in all his letters. Indeed, a man whose understanding is deep, hard even for the great apostle, Peter, to understand. If there are problems arising in the churches due to Paul's writings, they are caused by the ignorant and unstable who misunderstand them and twist them to their own destruction. But perhaps most tellingly, the letters of Paul are here categorized as scripture. This is the only time within the New Testament that the writings of the New Testament authors were so characterized and seemingly placed on a par with Moses and the Prophets who authored the ancient Hebrew texts of the Old Testament. It is very unlikely that any of the early disciples thought of their own writings as scripture, with the possible exception of Paul. I will explain this possible exception below. And would Peter have been one who characterized Paul's letters as scripture? Hardly! (This assumes that Peter authored the Petrine epistles, which many doubt. I have no problem with Peter's authorship, provided we allow for redactions such as this.)

## We Learn About Paul From What He Has Written.

Luke, and Paul himself, are therefore almost our only sources of information about Paul. This fact prompts us to be wary of bias, but does not preclude acceptance of the valid information contained in their writings, if only we can determine what is valid. Furthermore I believe we can learn much about the character of a man by examining what he has written. If, for example, one knew for a fact that what was written was untrue, then one must conclude that the writer was

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either mistaken or a liar. If one continued to read untruth from the same author, one might be justified in giving the heaviest weight to the liar option. Conversely, if one found everything to be confirmed in fact, one would be justified in concluding the author was both truthful and careful to avoid mistakes. These are the kind of conclusions we can glean about the character of Paul. We can profitably attend to three different and inter-related facets of Pauline studies: his office, his character, and his gospel. The latter will be evaluated by comparison with the teachings of Jesus that are recorded in the canonical gospels.

## CHAPTER III

# PAUL'S OFFICE

Paul had no direct contact with Jesus before his experience on the Damascus Road. For all we can tell, this man was a complete stranger to the fellowship that gathered around Jesus before the crucifixion. Who ordered him, and how came he to be acknowledged by churchmen as an apostle on par with the Twelve? There is absolutely no mention of him in the gospels, even in Luke's Gospel, though he may have been in Jerusalem during the periods of Jesus' ministry there. He must, as a student of Gamaliel the great Pharisee teacher, (or so Luke has him saying – Acts 22:3) have been informed of the events surrounding Jesus' arrest and execution. Our first knowledge of him is in the Acts when, during the martyrdom of Stephen, he stood by and held the garments of those who cast the stones. Paul (according to Luke) also confirms his participation in the event, in his defense before the Sanhedrin after being arrested in Jerusalem prior to his first imprisonment in Rome (Acts 22:30). But he was never in the company of Jesus (at least, there is no record of such), and had no association with the Twelve until after his experience on the Damascus Road. He was a complete stranger.

Jesus chose only twelve apostles and named them. Paul was not among them. Then he promised them that they should sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Their number therefore corresponds to the number of the tribes of Israel, and we have no indication that Jesus intended to add others. Of course, Judas' betrayal and demise left only eleven. Could Paul have seen himself as filling the vacancy? No, for he would surely have made that his claim. The fact is that the remaining eleven were instrumental in the selection of Matthias to fill this vacancy as even Luke informs us in The Acts, and had Paul seen himself as being Judas' replacement, Luke would certainly have seen him as such. I believe, nevertheless, that Paul was Judas's successor – as traitor! Judas betrayed him in his flesh; Paul betrayed him in his spirit.

## A Clue as to How Paul Viewed His Apostleship

Luke's account of the story of Paul's "revelation" in Acts 9 may give us our first clue as to how Paul conceived his apostleship and justified his claim to that high and exalted position in the fellowship of Jesus. Having been blinded by the brilliant light outside the city of Damascus, he was led into the city where for three days he was without sight and neither ate nor drank. Then the Lord appeared to a disciple at Damascus, Ananias by name, and sent him to Paul that he might regain his sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit. Ananias objected because he had heard of Paul's reputation as a persecutor of the followers of Jesus but the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel . . ." Now, since the twelve Apostles chosen by Jesus already occupied the ministry to the sons of Israel, Paul from the beginning must have seen his ministry as focused on the Gentiles, who were listed first in the heavenly vision to Ananias as recounted by Paul to Luke. Thus Paul, writing in the Galatian letter, recounts his version of a meeting with Peter, James and John in Jerusalem that concluded, according to Paul, with the agreement between them that they (Peter, James and John) would focus their ministry on the circumcised, whereas Paul and Barnabus would go to the Gentiles. Paul says of this meeting:

. . . when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as

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Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised (for he who worked through Peter for the mission to the circumcised worked through me also for the Gentiles (Galatians 2:7,8).

In writing thus, has he not clearly defined his apostleship, with himself being the apostle to the Gentiles, just as Peter and the others of the Twelve are the apostles to the twelve tribes of the circumcision?

## Luke's Background and Relation to Paul

If Luke was a native of Psidian Antioch as David Smith supposes, then the sermon Paul preached there, related by Luke in Acts 13, may have been the very sermon that resulted in Luke's conversion to Jesus. His detailed account of the sermon suggests that he may even have recorded it in short hand as Paul preached, and certainly suggests that he was there and gave careful attention to what was said.

Luke was an uncircumcised Greek and likely was also one of the Gentile "God fearers" attached to the synagogue in Antioch. He was careful to provide clues placing him in the congregation that heard Paul's sermon. He has Paul introducing the sermon with the words,

Men of Israel, and you that fear God, listen . . .

Then, at the conclusion of the sermon, Luke writes:

When the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who spoke to them and urged them to continue in the Grace of God.

We are then told that on the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered together to hear the word of God, but the sight of the multitude aroused the Jews to jealousy so that they contradicted what Paul said. Luke's narrative continues:

And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, "I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the uttermost parts of the earth" (Isaiah 49:6). And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of God; and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed (Acts 13:46-48).

A shiver moves down my spine as I realize that Luke may be describing his own conversion!

## The Biblical Source of Paul's Commission as Apostle:

Paul's speech to the Jews at Antioch gives intimation of the source of his conviction of his office as Apostle to the Gentiles. He claims a calling that antedates the call of Jesus to the Twelve, as the light for the Gentiles quotation comes from Isaiah 49:6 (this is applied to Jesus in Luke 2:32) and Paul saw it as a special commission directed to him, and perhaps also to Barnabas. A further indication of this comes in Paul's account of his calling in Galatians where we read:

But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles  
. . .

This is again a reference to Isaiah 49, v. 2, where the prophet says,

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The Lord called me from the womb, from the body of my mother he named my name, and  
v. 5, The Lord says, who formed me from the womb to be his servant . . .

Isaiah 49 further explains Paul's ambition to go to Spain, in its promise to send him to the uttermost parts of the earth, which, in Paul's time, with its Pillars of Hercules, represented the uttermost parts. (Acts 13:47, Isaiah 49:6, repeated below)

Paul surely understood that this was a source of his commission. This shows up in other passages such as Philippians 2:16, where Paul writes of his expectation of being proud of the Philippian Christians on the Day of Christ, when it will be shown that he did not "labor in vain." This expression harks back to Isaiah 49:4: But I said, "I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity; yet surely my right is with the Lord, and my recompense with my God." He seems to have taken this passage as a forewarning to do all in his power to see that his labors were not in vain.

We see this popping up again in I Corinthians, where he wrote:

Working together with him, then, we entreat you not to accept the grace of God in vain.  
For he says, "At the acceptable time I have listened to you, and helped you on the day of salvation."

This quotation being, again, from Isaiah 49:8. Paul sees himself as the one called from the womb of his mother and hidden away in the Lord's quiver like a polished arrow (Isaiah 49:2). It is reasonable to suppose that Luke, the young convert, was so powerfully impressed by the words of Paul as to accept this as the authorization of Paul's ministry from the very beginning of his (Luke's) experience with Jesus. There is no good reason to doubt that this was Paul's understanding of his office and apostleship. On this basis he surely saw his apostleship as antedating and therefore superior to that of the Twelve.

## Problems with This Conception:

There are a number of problems with this conception of his apostleship, which I list here:

- 1) Paul did not confine his ministry to the Gentiles. He seems rather to have gone first to the synagogue to preach the gospel in every city to which he journeyed, as in Antioch above. He turned to the Gentiles only after the Jews rejected him.
- 2) There is no source other than Paul to confirm this distribution of duties among the apostles. We must assume that what Luke wrote, he received from Paul. There is no record of any confirmation by Peter or any of the Twelve.
- 3) Peter and the others of the Twelve did not confine their mission to the Jews (the circumcision).
- 4) The first opening of the gospel to the Gentiles was made, not through Paul, but by the Holy Spirit working through Peter, as even Luke recounts in Acts when relating the story of the conversion of the centurion, Cornelius. If the calling of the Twelve confined their ministry exclusively to the Jews, why was Peter chosen to call this first Gentile?
- 5) According to Matthew's Gospel, Jesus had already, long before Paul's conversion, commissioned the twelve (eleven, after Judas' betrayal and prior to the ascension of Matthias) to go to the Gentiles. He said to them, Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and Lo! I am with you always to the close of the age (Matthew 28:19,20).
- 6. It requires a great stretch of credulity for us, in the Twenty-first Century, to agree that the Prophet Isaiah in Chapter 49 was speaking beforehand of Paul of Tarsus. It does not



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require a stretch to suspect that the man from Tarsus could see himself prophesied, exalted and identified in the words of the great Prophet, if he was possessed of an highly inflated sense of his own significance. Furthermore, had Paul been the one indicated by the prophet, could we believe that Jesus would not have sought him out in order to confirm and strengthen his mission to the Gentiles, just as he confirmed the Twelve? Paul was only slightly younger than Jesus, and as he said in his defense before the council (Acts 22): I was brought up in this city (Jerusalem), so that Jesus need not have gone far afield to find him.

- 7) Perhaps Luke, in writing The Acts, had forgotten that in his Gospel he has Simeon applying the Isaiah 49:6 prophecy to Jesus. If it applies to Jesus, can it also apply to Paul?
- 8) There is evidence in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians that others did not accept his apostleship. This may have included the Twelve. He writes: "Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord (I Corinthians 9:1,2)." Who are the "others" to whom he is not an apostle? Is it not most likely those whom he designates "the other apostles," Cephas, and the brothers of the Lord, with whom he immediately continues to compare his practices? At the very least, they would be identified with the other disciples at Corinth who, under the influence of Peter, James and the Twelve, were challenging Paul's claim to be an apostle.
- 9) Like a man who feels threatened and who operates from a position of weakness, Paul asserted his calling at the beginning of all his letters except those to the Philippians, the Thessalonians, and Philemon.

All of these factors, plus others that will come to light in the subsequent discussions of Paul's character and doctrine, have led me to the reluctant conclusion that Paul's apostleship was created by himself in spite of his assertions to the contrary.

One of the reviewers of this book makes the following very appropriate comment: "Most interesting to me is how Paul attempted to establish his office as the official emissary of God and Jesus by beginning all his letters with words to the effect, 'Greetings from Paul, God and Jesus,' as if they were a triumvirate."

Yet I cannot see him as an outright charlatan who set out consciously to deceive others and to elevate himself to the head of the Apostolate. He really believed his claims, and so had first deceived himself. I see him as one who was, at a certain level, a man of great integrity who could persuade and deceive others only because he had first persuaded himself, which contributed to the effectiveness of his ministry. He preached in all sincerity what he really believed. Furthermore, a portion of his doctrine is wonderfully and gloriously true, which renders it all the more deceptive as even Paul could have understood from the standpoint of one who could accuse other "apostles" of disguising themselves as "servants of righteousness" (II Corinthians 11:15).

A Prayer  
of Jesus

I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes; yea, Father, for such was thy gracious will.

## CHAPTER IV

# PAUL'S CHARACTER

The charge of blasphemy will be lodged at my door by erstwhile fellow churchmen because I have the audacity to find warts on the great Saint Paul. Yet the warts are not hard to find; indeed they stand out clearly once one has gained the freedom to cast a critical eye upon him so that I wonder that I was once so blind. I shall here find fault with him just as he found fault with his fellow disciples. It seems fitting to introduce this chapter by pointing to one character trait -- inconsistency and willingness to compromise on principle, that is prominent in the New Testament. In his angry letter to the Galatian church he wrote:

Now I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. I testify again to every man who receives circumcision that he is bound to keep the whole law. You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace (Galatians 5:2-4).

This is his unequivocal assertion of one of his most basic convictions. But look at what he did:

And he came to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer; but his father was a Greek. He was well spoken of by the brethren at Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him; and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews that were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek (Acts 16:1-3).

If this isn't inconsistency and compromise, I would not know how to define these things. Of course, one could defend Paul here by saying that the Galatian letter was written long after he had Timothy circumcised, and his views matured during the interval. Let us then say that is the case, and look at the implication: His views changed from one thing to another during the period when he was preaching his gospel throughout the world. The Truth, however, did not change during that period, for that is unchanging. He therefore could not have been preaching the Truth during this period of changing views, yet he claimed to be preaching the same gospel from beginning to end. This leaves us with no basis for believing that he ever preached the True Gospel!

I shall therefore question here many other character traits, such as his humility, his veracity, his integrity, his authenticity; and even his love for his brothers, and the questions begin at the very start of his discipleship -- that is, on the Damascus Road. I feel qualified to start there because I have much in common with him at that point, having had a similar experience. Paul interpreted his experience in a vastly different way, but I suspect his was no less a breakdown than mine. Even his description of it, including the appearance of a bright light that left him blind, shows all the marks of a characteristic hysteria or anxiety attack. His state of mind at the time and his interpretation of the results of the experience are related in Romans 7:14-8:1. These reveal the classic symptoms of hysteria -- of a driven, compulsive neurotic of a man under so much inner tension as to be unable to contain himself and who finally blew up. He was both bound and

drawn by simultaneous commitments to contrary forces and found release just short of insanity. He rendered his own account of this terrible tension in the following words:

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So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 7:21-25)!

## Was His Conversion Described Accurately?

Did he really see a bright light? And did he really hear a voice? I believe he did, although it is questionable that others saw or heard them. The contradictions in the accounts of his revelation are sufficient to cause us to question his objectivity at the moment and his veracity afterwards. In his defense before the Jerusalem crowd as Luke related in Acts 22:9 he said,

Now those who were with me saw the light but did not hear the voice of the one who was speaking to me.

But then Luke described Paul's experience in Chapter 9 thusly:

The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. (Acts 9:7)

How was it that Luke recorded so plain a contradiction in one book? Remember that Luke was Paul's frequent companion, his beloved physician and his protege. He may have been present when Paul delivered his defense in Jerusalem but he most certainly heard Paul's own description of the event delivered to him personally. Paul would not have permitted so close a friend and ally to remain ignorant of all the details of his conversion. Luke doubtless heard this story, not once, but many times as, in the company of his mentor, he listened while he related it to other converts and disciples.

This contradiction would seem to have one of at least three possible explanations. Either a later scribe adulterated the text to make a contradiction, or Luke simply erred in recording one or the other of the accounts, or Paul's descriptions of his conversion were contradictory and Luke left them as such, not knowing what else to do.

I favor the last of these because it seems to me most likely in view of what I now understand about Paul. I am not aware that there are any variants that would support the idea of adulterated texts at this point, and I believe Luke to have been too careful an historian to commit such a blatant error. This is not the only inconsistency in Paul's account of the Damascus Road experience and the events following. I will point out another very significant one below.

## Other Explanations for Paul's Experience

Perhaps, like Martin Luther, he was literally near-struck by a bolt of lightning. I could believe that he was so struck, and that it was the event that ruptured his psyche so that he interpreted it as he did, as a revelation of Christ. But this is not necessary; when a man is in such terrible inner tension as his, no external stimuli is necessary to spark his psychic explosion. Another thing that is worth noting about Paul's experience, or "conversion" as the churchmen are prone to call it, is that we have no witnesses to the event other than Paul. I have already emphasized this, and will continue to do so. It was conveniently far from the city of Jerusalem and far removed from the presence of any disciple of Jesus. We might cite Ananias of Damascus as a witness, if not of the event it self, then of its significance. But alas! There is no other mention of this man in the New Testament, either by Paul or others. Now, I don't doubt that there was such a man, or that he was a disciple in the fellowship of Jewish believers in Damascus; but if we could have heard his testimony, we would most likely have received a much different view than the one expressed by Paul. We might cite others among the disciples at Damascus. Alas, not one is named and Paul

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never again refers to this group in his epistles. So, we are free to question whether such disciples and such a man as Ananias really existed. However, there is nothing to be gained by pursuing this question since we have no way to provide a sure answer.

### The Character Questions

The contradictory descriptions of Paul's Damascus Road experience, together with other questionable considerations and the fact that we have no witnesses other than Paul himself are enough to lead us on to ask more penetrating questions about his character. I list here six such questions and proceed in the chapters to follow to show how each question is fully justified by the evidence before us.

1. Was he capable of errors in doctrine?
2. Was he capable of misquoting scripture to support his position? Did he tamper with God's word?
3. Was he capable of errors in logic?
4. Was he capable of disobeying commandments of Jesus?
5. Was he capable of lying?
6. Was he capable of self-aggrandizement?

## Chapter V

# DID PAUL ERR IN DOCTRINE?

If Paul was capable of such errors, and if this can be reasonably demonstrated, his position as a valid apostle and slave of Jesus becomes questionable. Here we will not pursue a general investigation of his doctrine; we only answer the question, "Could he err in doctrine?" It will be difficult to demonstrate conclusively that any doctrine is false on the basis of mere interpretation, since the errors of the interpreter may be dominant. There is only one doctrinal category that falls outside this qualification, that which relates directly to known history, so that we are forced to resort to interpretive tests of validity unless history can prove our case.

## The Lord is at Hand!

I will here demonstrate that he erred in a single doctrine as established by history. Neither was this an insignificant doctrine, for it clearly fueled much of his faith and belief and was the primary inspiration for many other teachings. A.N. Wilson has categorized it as the fundamental doctrine (Paul, the Mind of the Apostle, p 177). This was his doctrine of the Parousia, the eminent return of the Lord to the earth, which he expected at any moment. This doctrine appears repeatedly throughout his epistles. Here are some examples:

- The Lord is at hand (Phil. 4:5).
- . . . so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ; who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ (I Cor. 1:7).
- Lo, I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed (I Cor. 15:51).
- For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep . . . For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel's call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord (I Thes. 4:15-17).
- I think that in view of the impending distress it is well for a person to remain as he is. Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek marriage. Yet those who marry will have worldly troubles, and I would spare you that. I mean, brethren, the appointed time has grown very short; from now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the form of this world is passing away (I Cor. 7:26-31).
- Now these things happened to them as a warning, but they were written down for our

## PAUL: THE STRANGER

instruction, upon whom the end of the ages has come (I Cor. 10:11).

So, Paul's firm conviction was that the Lord was at hand, that we shall not all sleep, that the form of this world is passing away and that *we who are alive shall be caught up to meet the Lord in the air*. He also believed the appointed time has grown very short, and it was upon him and his disciples that the end of the ages had come. His use of the first person pronoun makes it certain that he understood he would be among those yet living on the day of the Lord, the day of Christ at the end of the age. Such errors as represented by the statement, "We shall not all sleep," are certainly correctly categorized as errors, for none of those to whom he wrote failed to sleep the sleep of death.

Yes, he was certainly in error; had such an event transpired in his lifetime or at any time since, history would surely have known of it and this world would have passed away long ago. We would not be here to discuss these things! Our existence, and the existence of a history that knows nothing of the end of an age, of a day of the Lord, or any other event associated with the Parousia proves conclusively that this was an erroneous doctrine. If this doctrine on which he placed so much weight was erroneous, then may not much more be erroneous?

## The Source

What was the source of this idea? It was a key point in his gospel, and he was very specific about the source of the whole:

The gospel which was preached by me is not man's gospel, for I did not receive it from man nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

Are we to believe that Jesus communicated directly to Paul the doctrine of his return to earth in Paul's lifetime? He said above, ". . . this I declare unto you by the word of the Lord." If so, Jesus was also mistaken. But in this case, Jesus can no more be identified with Truth.

I much prefer some other option, such as that Paul was the one mistaken; that he had visions during which he believed he was communicating with Jesus, when he actually was not. He therefore received his gospel, not from Jesus, but from whatever source it was that communicated with him during his visions. This is not the place to expand on the significance of this. Here it is only necessary to demonstrate that Paul could be in error in a case in which we can be certain he erred, for this alone is sufficient to justify our questioning everything he taught about Jesus Christ.

## Conclusion

Paul's belief in the imminent return of Christ was a primary conviction that motivated much of his teaching and was basic to his entire approach to life. Believing the form of this world was to end any day, he saw no need to deal with anything that anticipated a lengthy future. Therefore he counseled all to order their lives in the light of this imminent event. This accounts for such passages as I Cor. 7:26-31 listed above. Why seek a wife when the house is afire and the roof caving in? Why plan for tomorrow's meals when we will not be here to eat them? Why revolt against the Romans when the Lord was to deal with them any day? Why seek anything from this world in the future, when neither it, nor we, will be here? Under this conviction, one can only prepare for the expected event, keep oneself unspotted from the world, and, as Paul elsewhere counseled, seek those things that are above. The heavenly Glory becomes the only significant reality, the only consideration for planning today! So, Paul's doctrine of Jesus' soon coming was clearly erroneous, being falsified by two thousand years of history. There were many other doctrinal errors that we will bring to light when we come to Book III, where we will compare some of Paul's specific doctrines with that of Jesus.

## Chapter VI

# DID PAUL TAMPER WITH GOD'S WORD?

Was Paul capable of misquoting scripture to sustain his positions? Was he honest in his use of the scriptures, or did he tamper with God's word? We must ask this question because it is evident from his letters that his opponents from among the disciples of Jesus specifically accused him of doing this very thing. This compelled him to respond by means of denial:

We have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways; we refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God (II Corinthians 4:2).

Here, as in the case of the historical falsification of his erroneous doctrine of the imminent return of the Lord, we can with some ease show misquotes because we have the scriptures for comparison, just as we had history for comparison in the former case. But first it will be helpful to make a brief general survey of Paul's use of the scriptures.

## Brief Survey

I acknowledge again that Paul never claimed the Law and the Prophets as a source of his gospel. To the contrary, he was very clear in stating precisely that his gospel was not received from man or through man (Moses, the prophets, Jesus, the apostles or any other disciple), but by a direct revelation of the risen Christ. He only believed that the Law and the Prophets bore witness to his gospel (Romans 3:21), and he was honestly expressing that view. But surely he was in error in believing the Law and the Prophets bore witness to it, in view of the texts he selected to support it. In far too many cases, the thought of the Law and the Prophets manifestly contradicted his gospel!

He was thoroughly familiar with the Septuagint, the Greek Old Testament that was the primary scripture for the Greek speaking Jews in the First Century. This translation was prepared by a group of seventy Jewish scholars (hence the name) in the Second Century BC at Alexandria, Egypt. There can be no doubt that this was Paul's scripture, for it differs significantly from copies of the oldest Hebrew manuscripts and in his direct quotations he draws on the Septuagint rendition. Some of the differences in English versions of the New and Old Testaments, appearing in Paul's quotations of the Old, are the results of his use of the Septuagint.

Paul's references to the Old Testament appear predominately as either direct quotations or as allusions. In other cases, he utilizes expressions drawn from the Septuagint but that have no relationship with the contexts simply because of his familiarity with the texts and, like individual words, these expressions pop up as a means of expressing his ideas. When he quotes directly, he is likely to begin with the expression, "It is written," or some variation thereof. This manner of reference appears about thirty-two times in Romans, I and II Corinthians and Galatians. Altogether, he purports to quote from the Septuagint, sometimes designated as the Law and the Prophets, more than eighty times. There will not be agreement on the exact number because his

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quotations are very freely rendered, usually from memory as would be expected of one who was constantly on the move, without the convenience of a copy of the Septuagint always at hand. Holmes Rolston (*Consider Paul*, John Knox Press, 1951), has as good a study as can be expected from one of his Presbyterian bias, and he concludes:

- Paul quotes largely from memory and does not always quote accurately.
- Paul quotes at times without any regard to the context in which the passage is found in the Old Testament.
- Paul in a limited number of passages uses the language of the Old Testament to support ideas that are true, and are true to the thought of the Old Testament, but are not true to the meaning of the language in its original setting.

His first two findings and a portion of the third are concessions forced on him. All three are obvious to anyone who makes a serious and honest study of Paul and his use of the scriptures. Given these findings, the assertion contained within the third, that the ideas so supported are true and true to the thought of the Old Testament, is inevitably forced on him and on anyone who honors Paul as a true representative of Jesus. It is just another way of saying, "Well, so what if he does quote inaccurately, out of context and to support ideas not true to the original meaning of the quotations in their contexts? What he has said is nevertheless true!"

But it also follows that one cannot lean on Paul's use of the Old Testament in support of the conviction that what he wrote is true, or is true to the thought of the Old Testament. How can doctrine be true to the thought of the Old Testament when it is manifestly not true to the thought of the context containing the quotation used to support it? Surely, if an idea is true to the thought of the Old Testament, there must be contexts in which the idea is found in quotations that could be drawn to support the idea, and which are true to the meaning of the language in its original setting. Such quotations would be much more powerful in support of Paul's doctrine than the ones he used. Why didn't he find and use them? The defender of Paul is forced into unsavory options here, for either such quotations do not exist, or Paul was not aware of them for he surely would have used them in preference to the questionable ones that appear in his writings. In the first case, Rolston's contention that the ideas are true to the thought of the Old Testament is false. But in the case of the second option, that Paul was not aware of such quotations, we are forced to acknowledge two things most unsavory to Paul's defenders. First, Paul was not the expert on the scriptures that he is supported to be, and second and most devastating, his inspiration did not correct his inappropriate use of the scriptures.

Rolston seeks to sidestep this dilemma by suggesting that he (Paul) reads the deeper meaning of New Testament thought into the language of the Old Testament. "Cases in which his quotation is obviously inaccurate or his exegesis is not sound according to modern standards of exegesis, would fit into his own great assertion that the bearer of revelation must be understood as one who carries treasure in earthen vessels that the greatness of the power may be of God." Are we really to believe that quotations set forth inaccurately, or to support ideas not true to the setting of the quotation, only show that the greatness of the power is of God?

The above would be misleading unless I go on to state that Paul's use of the scriptures was often appropriate. An example of his appropriate use of scripture is his quotation of Isaiah 52:7 in Romans 10:15:

How beautiful the feet of those who preach good news.

He utilizes this consistent with Isaiah's prophecy to support the importance of preaching the gospel. In this case the reference is relatively trivial (as are numerous of his appropriate quotations and allusions), for it adds little to his position. Another example of appropriate use is his quotation of Leviticus 19:18 in Romans 13:8-10 and Galatians 5:14:



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You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

He uses it here properly to emphasize the great importance of the consideration of the needs of one's neighbor. (However, in both of these passages, his doctrine does not accord with that of Jesus.) But those cases in which he appears to have tampered with God's word are the most fundamental to his gospel. When he lays the groundwork for his gospel in Romans and Galatians he consistently abuses the Word of God so that one must concede that he does, indeed, tamper with God's word. What follows is perhaps the prime example.

### Justification by Faith

Justification by faith only and apart from works of the law can be said to be a major theme of Paul's gospel. Indeed, I suppose this could be said to be his gospel, his good news, in a nutshell. After stating his case in Romans 3, he goes on in Chapter 4 to call forth the example of Abraham to cement his case. A similar argument is also presented in the Galatian letter. Focusing on the statement in Genesis 15:6, "Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness" (or justification), Paul proceeds to set forth the idea that this justification came to Abraham before he was circumcised, and therefore is independent of circumcision so that the uncircumcised Gentiles are as qualified to receive it as are the Jews. Then, secondly, that it is independent of the law or of works of the law. Abraham believed God and had faith in his promise, even in the knowledge of the barrenness of Sarah's womb and his own advanced age. As Paul explained,

No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. That is why his faith was "reckoned to him as righteousness" (Rom. 4:20-22).

So it is on this basis that Paul seeks to establish Abraham as the prime example of justification by faith only, and not by works.

This, however, is not the entire story. If we examine the wider context of Genesis, we must conclude that Abraham's blessing came through both faith and works of law, and especially through the latter. God spoke to Abraham and said,

I will indeed bless you, and I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore. And your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies, and by your descendants shall all the nations of the earth bless themselves, *because you have obeyed my voice* (Genesis 22:17,18).

No mention here of faith, only that Abraham obeyed the voice of the Lord – a work of obedience to law! Then, later, when God extended the same blessing to Isaac, it was because Abraham had

. . . obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws. (Genesis 26:5).

So that when Paul wrote,

The promise to Abraham and his descendants, that they should inherit the world, did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith (Romans 4:13),

he chose to ignore the full explanation of the Genesis text. To cap it all off, nowhere in Genesis can I find that God promised Abraham that his descendants would inherit the world! He only promised them the Land of Canaan (Genesis 17:8).

The Epistle of James may have been written for the purpose, in part, of countering this "faith only"

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doctrine of Paul. James also appeals to Abraham, specifically to the offering of Isaac as sacrifice, and concludes,

Do you want to be shown, you foolish fellow, that faith apart from works is barren? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered his son Isaac upon the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works, and the scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness;" and he was called the friend of God. You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone. (James 2:20-24)

## No, Not One!

Another glaring example of tampering with the word of God is to be found in the same context of Romans. Beginning with verse 1:18, Paul points out that all men are without excuse in failing to honor God and obey him, for God has through the creation shown himself to them. But they refused to honor God and instead turned to idols and all kinds of abominable practices. Therefore, Paul says, three times for emphasis, "God gave them up." He gave them up to dishonoring their bodies among themselves, to dishonorable passions and to a base mind and improper conduct. In Chapter 2, Paul asserts that the wrath of God is coming on these sons of disobedience, for he will render to every man according to his works.

There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek (2:9,10).

He then goes on (with asides to emphasize God's lack of partiality toward the Jew and the Greek) to show that on this basis all men, both Jews and Gentiles, are condemned, for

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (3:23).

He advances a collection of six quotations from various contexts of the Old Testament to put this point, the universality of human sinfulness and depravity, to rest once for all. Let us list them all for closer examination, after which I will comment on each one briefly:

1. (3:10-12) None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands, no one seeks for God. All have turned aside, together they have gone wrong; no one does good, not even one (Psalm 14:1-3).
2. (3:13a) Their throat is an open grave, they use their tongues to deceive (Psalm 5:9).
3. (3:13b) The venom of asps is under their lips (Psalm 140:3).
4. (3:14) Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness (Psalm 10:7).
5. (3:15-17) Their feet are swift to shed blood, in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they do not know (Isaiah 59:7,8).
6. (3:18) There is no fear of God before their eyes (Psalm 36:1).

Psalm 14:1-3 appears on first reading to say exactly what Paul wishes it to say. But if we read the balance of the psalm, it becomes evident that the psalmist did not intend what Paul asserted, for in v. 4 we have the evildoers set apart from "my people" with a clear distinction made between them. Then in v. 5, these evildoers will be in great terror, for God will be with the generation of the righteous, who are then identified with the poor, but the Lord is his refuge. The Psalm closes with v. 7:

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O, that deliverance for Israel would come out of Zion! When the Lord restores the fortunes of his people, Jacob shall rejoice, Israel shall be glad.

Clearly, the Psalmist allows for two categories of human beings, the evildoers and the generation of the righteous, who are identified with Israel in the last verse. The "no, not one" must then refer only to the evildoers who eat up my people as they eat bread, and do not call upon the Lord, presumably Gentiles in contrast to Jacob and Israel. Paul, who seeks by this to prove his point, that all are under condemnation of sin without exception, has not properly regarded the context and has as a result drawn something out of it contrary to the intent of the Psalmist. He has tampered with God's word.

Psalm 5:9, applied immediately after Psalm 14:1-3 surely confirms his point until we trouble ourselves again to read the entire psalm. On doing this, we discover that the point Paul is making is no part of the psalmist's thinking. Verse 9 of the psalm is clearly spoken of the enemies of the psalmist, but then he moves immediately to speak of another category, those who take refuge in the Lord, who are the righteous. And then he closes with the words,

For thou dost bless the righteous, O Lord: thou dost cover him with favor as with a shield (v. 12).

I remind you that the point Paul is making allows for only one category of human beings, wicked, sinful evildoers, but the psalmist clearly provides two categories. Yet again, Paul has not properly regarded the context and has drawn from it support for an idea contrary to what is there. He has tampered with God's word.

Then he moves on to Psalm 140:3 to further reinforce his point, that there is not a single human being who is righteous before God – no not one. From this psalm:

Deliver me, O Lord, from evil men, who plan evil things in their heart, and stir up wars continually. They make their tongue sharp as a serpent's, and under their lips is the poison of vipers (Psalm 140:1-3).

The venom of asps us under their lips! This really hardens their case – all human beings are venomous snakes, for there is none righteous, no not even one!

Again, let us read the psalm and see how this thinking accords with the thought of the psalmist. Is it true, in his mind, that there is only one category of human beings, the unrighteous? Not at all! Verse 3 only applies to those whom the psalmist sees as the wicked (v.8), and he moves quickly to the concluding verses and writes:

I know that the Lord maintains the cause of the afflicted, and executes justice for the needy. Surely the righteous shall give thanks to thy name; the upright shall dwell in thy presence (vs. 12,13).

Again, he readily supplies two categories of human beings, the righteous (v.13) and the wicked (v. 4). Yet Paul has again drawn from the psalmist a select few words that, when applied as Paul applies them, seems to reinforce the thought that there is only one category of human beings. He has tampered with God's word.

But as if venom under their lips were not strong enough language to use of all human beings, he presses on to yet another quotation from yet another psalm, this time Psalm 10:7, and asserts:

Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness

Now please remember, my reader, that this is applied to every human being! But do we not all know persons from whose mouths we have never heard such things? Surely our own personal observations are sufficient to falsify the posturing of the man from Tarsus. But again, how does

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this accord with the thought of the psalmist? From verse 7 he moves on to add,

. . . under his tongue are mischief and iniquity. He sits in ambush in the villages; in hiding places he murders the innocent (v.7, 8).

But how does he murder the innocent if there are no innocents, if every human being is wicked? Just as before, the psalmist has provided for two disparate categories of human beings in a clear contradiction of the point Paul is seeing to call him to witness to. Paul has tampered with God's word.

Do we begin to see a pattern here? Never mind; let us press on. Paul next calls the great and venerable prophet of God, the renowned Isaiah, to the dock to witness to the universal depravity of the human being. In this case, it is to assert that

. . . their feet are swift to shed blood, ruin and misery are in their paths and they know not the way of peace. (59:7,8).

Now, indeed, if we confine ourselves to Chapter 59 of this prophet (Deutero-Isaiah), We can almost see Paul's case being made. The prophet unleashes a diatribe against the evils of his countrymen that seems to leave no one out -- except himself! And one exception is all one needs to falsify Paul's assertion of absolute and universal depravity. Yet even in that single chapter of utter condemnation for his fellows, the prophet lets slip a single statement that, again, falsifies Paul's assertion even if we do not consider the exception afforded by the prophet himself. For in verse 15 we read:

. . . he who departs from evil makes himself a prey.

This obviously defines a category of human beings that depart from evil, and therefore are evil no longer, but instead are prey for the evil ones. But it is unnecessary to confine our quest for multiple categories of human beings to a single chapter. There is a wider context of several chapters that sprang from the same pen and person and we have to ask ourselves if the universality of human evil was a part of the thinking of the prophet who wrote these chapters. When we are dealing with the Psalms, we are uncertain what individual may have authored any one of them, and so we confine our context to that psalm, it being reasonable to suppose that each psalm represented the thought of a single person. But with Deutero-Isaiah we can widen the context, understanding that we are still being exposed to the thought of a single person. When we widen it only a little, to include Chapter 57, we immediately run into other categories than the sinful.

The righteous man perishes, and no one lays it to heart; devout men are taken away, while no one understands. For the righteous man is taken away from calamity, he enters into peace; they rest in their beds who walk in their uprightness.

So! The prophet has a thought for the righteous, as well as for the wicked, whom he brings forth again in the last verse of the chapter to testify of him:

There is no peace, says my God, for the wicked (v. 21).

Don't stop now. There is only one more in this collection of six quotations that Paul has mustered in defense of his conviction that there is not a single righteous person to be found. It would be surprising if he did not focus at some point on the ungodliness of this universally wicked specie; that is, on it's attitude toward the person of God. So, in Romans 3:18, he returns to a psalm to describe all human beings without exception:

There is no fear of God before their eyes (Psalm 36:1).

But does the psalmist intend to apply this to every human being? Certainly not, for if we move to

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v. 10 of the same psalm we find him saying:

O continue thy steadfast love to those who know thee, and thy salvation to the upright of heart!

### Paul has tampered with God's word!

This is one of the fundamental premises of Paul's gospel, this assertion that all men, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin. This applies to every single human being without exception. Now, when he goes to set this premise before others, such as in the present instance the church at Rome, he is compelled to seek support from the ancient scriptures, the word of God. If it were only Paul's word, there would be few converts, for he is only another human being, one of those who are, without exception, under the power of sin. So, by carefully selecting statements from six separate locations in the scriptures and combining them under the statement of his premise, he makes it appear that the Word of God strongly supports this view.

If we place ourselves in the position of the Roman disciples, most of whom are Gentiles with no strong familiarity with those scriptures, we will be inclined to believe that Paul's position is fully supported by the Word. Indeed, we don't have to place ourselves back with the Romans; we only need to recall how deceptively he has spoken to us as we have read this letter in quest of Truth, for we ourselves, many of us at least, were fully convinced. We probably were convinced without even checking out the references for ourselves, just because the sound of it seems fully supportive.

There is no denying it. Paul has here used the Word deceptively. He has tampered with it to make it appear that his position is supported thereby. Not only is this premise not supported by the passages quoted as its support, but neither is it true to the thought of the Old Testament, as Holmes Rolston would have us believe. The thought of the Old Testament, beginning with Cain and Abel, consistently allows for two categories of human beings, the wicked and the righteous, in the manner I have demonstrated above. If Paul's premise is true, it cannot be established by reference to the Law, the Prophets, or the Psalms. Now we know why his opponents charged him with tampering with the Word of God, and why he was compelled to issue denials in his defense.

### Tampering with Habakkuk

We need to return now to Paul's doctrine of *justification by faith only* because there is another quotation from the Word that he draws on in its defense, in addition to the arguments centered on the person of Abraham. He has stated his most basic premise at the very outset of Romans. He writes:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith, as it is written, "He who through faith is righteous shall live" (Romans 1:16,17).

This "it is written" seems to come from the Prophet Habakkuk, writing in Judah in the Seventh Century BC, but otherwise unknown in the scriptures. Paul is quoting him from the Septuagint. The quotation together with its immediate context as translated into English from the Greek of the Septuagint is as follows:

For still the vision awaits its time; it hastens to its end -- it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay. Behold, he whose soul is not upright in him shall fail, but the righteous shall live by his faith (Habakkuk 2: 3,4).

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We focus on the Hebrew word that is here translated "faith." In this context it is properly rendered as faithfulness, for it clearly refers to him whose soul is upright and does not fail during a prolonged period of waiting for the fulfillment of the prophets vision of a future deliverance from foreign conquests. Faithfulness, then, applies to the steadfastness of those who patiently wait, and who will in consequence be rewarded at the time of the vision's fulfillment. It does not mean "faith" as belief.

It is not surprising to see Paul applying this prophecy to the coming of the Christ (Messiah) in the work of Jesus. This is a common application, but he interprets the word for faithfulness as faith, applying it to the conviction of the truth of the redemptive work of Christ, which is not justified when its context is considered. The Septuagint similarly errs in using the Greek, *pistis*, to translate the Hebrew word, for this *does* mean faith, as Paul understood it. Since Paul was using the Septuagint, this may explain how he came to misunderstand the word in its context. And he made it the cornerstone of his gospel. So, it looks suspiciously like he has again been found tampering with God's Word. This is only one more of the numerous incidents where it can be shown that Paul used the Word deceptively.

### The Curse

Another prominent feature of his gospel, related to the above postulate that all men are wicked without exception, is the idea of the curse of the law. Writing to the Galatian churches Paul asserted:

For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, and do them" (Deuteronomy 27:26, Galatians 3:10).

Then he goes on to say:

Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us – for it is written, "Cursed be every one who hangs on a tree" (Deuteronomy 21:23) – that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith (Galatians 3:13-14).

But when we turn to examine the passage cited from Deuteronomy 27:26, we find a much different thought – indeed, a thought that is the opposite of what Paul is attempting to demonstrate. Rather than being under a curse by relying on the works of the law, Moses is establishing only that the curse comes from not doing *the words* of the law:

Cursed be he who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them (Deuteronomy 26:27).

In fact, Deuteronomy 28:1 pronounces a blessing on all who are careful to do all the commandments of the law. The emphasis on the blessing is clear, for it is extended to cover everyone in all circumstances:

Blessed shall you be in the city and blessed shall you be in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of your body and the fruit of your ground and the fruit of your beasts, the increase of your cattle, and the young of your flock. Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading-trough. Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out.

And on and on goes the text, defining the blessing on those who keep the law, who live by it and do it. It is only those who do not obey the voice of the Lord on whom the curses fall (Deuteronomy. 28:15f). In this text, the law is not a curse within itself, nor are all that rely on the

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works of the law under a curse. Rather, those who obey it are under a manifold blessing!

### Is Obedience Possible?

Paul's defenders will object with the thought, also derived from Paul's description of his struggle with covetousness (Romans 7), that the law is of such a nature, and the human being is of such a nature, that it is not in practice possible for any one to obey it. But this will not do, for Paul himself has elsewhere assured us that, prior to becoming a disciple of Christ, he was, as to righteousness under the law, *blameless* (Philippians 3:6). So, I am forced to consider two options: either his gospel is here flawed by a radical contradiction within himself, or he has called on the word of God to support an idea that is the opposite of what the word of God in fact states.

There is more, for the Word goes on to assure us that the commandments of God are in fact *not too hard* to keep:

For the commandment which I command you this day is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, "Who will go up for us to heaven, and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?" Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, "Who will go over the sea for us, and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?" But the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, so *that you can do it*. (Deuteronomy 30:11-14).

Paul was very familiar with this passage. He must have mulled it over many times in efforts to decide what to do with it. What he finally did was modify it radically, as follows:

Moses writes that the man who practices the righteousness which is based on the law shall live by it. But the righteousness based on faith says, "Do not say in your heart, Who will ascend into heaven?" (that is, to bring Christ down) or "Who will descend in the abyss?" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart (that is, the word of faith which we preach); because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. (Romans 10:5-9)

Rather than seek to buttress his argument by the quotation from the Law and the Prophets, because the contradiction was too great even for him, he chose to deliberately contrast his conception of the righteousness based on faith with that based on law according to Moses. And he did it in a very neat way, simply by taking the language of Moses and substituting "Christ" for "the commandment" and "the abyss" for "the sea." But by taking the very language of the law and making a parody of it to support an idea that is the direct opposite of the substance of the law – this is surely tampering with the Word of God.

He is seeking to have it both ways. He seeks to affirm his gospel by reference to the scriptures, convinced that the law and the prophets bear witness to it. (Romans 3:21) But where the contradiction is too clear, he does not hesitate to set it aside in favor of his own view, doing so in the language of the law that he has just supplanted, expecting in this way to yet capitalize on his familiarity with the scriptures. "Moses writes . . .," or so he begins, then the other shoe falls: "but". Moses writes one thing, but the righteousness based on faith says otherwise. Even though he promotes a doctrine that is the opposite of the teaching of the scripture to which he refers, his language yet sounds impressive and scriptural to his readers. They will not even notice that he has just discarded one of Moses cardinal tenets – that the *doing of the law is not too hard*. Instead of questioning him, his converts will be admiringly saying among themselves (as I once did), "That Brother Paul! What a master of the scriptures! He surely knows the Word of God!" If this isn't using God's Word deceptively, how is it possible?

## Did Jesus become a Curse for Us?

Now, as to Jesus becoming a curse for us by hanging on a tree, yet again Paul comes forth with a supposed quotation from God's Word. Going back to the same context of Deuteronomy, only a few chapters earlier, he introduces the key text with his usual It is written:

Cursed be every one who hangs on a tree (Galatians 3:13).

This is very deceptive and misleading, for the actual language of the quotation is:

If a man has committed a crime punishable by death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain upon the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is accursed by God; you shall not defile your land which the Lord your God gives you for an inheritance (Deuteronomy 21:22-23).

Taken in context, the words do not say that every one who hangs on a tree is accursed, only those who have committed a corresponding crime. Paul probably means to imply that, although Jesus committed no crime, he nevertheless became a curse according to this passage because he took our crimes upon himself -- becoming a curse for us. But the statement with its context applies only to one guilty of a capital crime, not to everyone who hangs on a tree as Paul rendered the thought. Jesus was not guilty, and this mandate need not apply to him in any case, unless God chose to place a curse on him even though he was not guilty.

But why would God place a curse on an innocent man? Is it really so that He does not have to curse the guilty ones in whose stead the innocent man suffers? Under what compulsion is Almighty God that he must place a curse on anyone? Such an explanation ignores completely the emphasis of Jesus on God's infinite mercy, according to which he stands ready to forgive anyone whatsoever, contingent only on a valid repentance and subsequent mercy-driven life.

According to Paul in his use of this thought, any one who is hanged from a tree is accursed by God without consideration of guilt or innocence. Think of any of the many innocent people who have been hanged from a tree through the centuries. Are all accursed? Is the guilty party, who escaped punishment, totally free of consequences even if he has not repented, since some one has borne his penalty for him, has become a curse for him by hanging on a tree? No, this explanation will not do. Who is ready to believe the ridiculous -- a just deity who curses every hanged man without regard to guilt, simply because he has been hanged on a tree?

The usual response of the churchmen to this is to assert that sin and evil is so serious a matter that it cannot be set aside without consequences. "Without shedding of blood, there is no remission of sin" (Hebrews 9:22). God's perfect justice is such that, when a sin is committed, without exception his wrath must be sated -- if not on the guilty one, then on an innocent one who volunteers, out of love, to become the bearer of God's wrath -- that is, on Jesus. Is God really this vengeful?

What do the rabbi's say? Hyam Maccoby writes,

The idea that anyone hanged on a gibbet is under a curse was entirely alien to Pharisee thought, and the Pharisee teachers did not interpret the verse in Deuteronomy in this way. Many highly respected members of the Pharisee movement were crucified by the Romans, just like Jesus, and, far from being regarded as under a curse because of the manner of their death, they were regarded as martyrs. The idea that an innocent man would incur a curse from God just because he had been unfortunate enough to die an agonizing death on the cross was never part of Pharisee thinking, and only a deep contempt for the Judaism of the Pharisees has led so many scholars to assume that it was. The Pharisees never thought that God was either stupid or unjust, and he would



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have to be both to put a curse on an innocent victim (The Mythmaker, p 67).

Maccoby continues:

Even if the hanged person was guilty of a capital crime, he was not regarded as being under a curse, but, on the contrary, as having expiated his crime by undergoing execution. The verse in question was interpreted by the rabbis as follows: an executed criminal's corpse was to be suspended on a pole for a short period, but the corpse must then be taken down and not left to hang overnight, for to do this would incur a curse from God; in other words, the curse was placed not on the executed person, but on the people responsible for subjecting the corpse to indignity. One interpretation was: it is cursing God, or blasphemy, to allow the corpse of an executed criminal to hang, for the human body was made in the image of God. The New English Bible translates the verse, "When a man is convicted of a capital offense and is put to death, you shall hang him on a gibbet; but his body shall not remain on the gibbet overnight; you shall bury it on the same day, for a hanged man is offensive in the sight of God." This is in accord with the Pharisee interpretation of the passage, which was a correct reflection of the meaning of the original Hebrew (The Mythmaker, pp 67,68).

I conclude, therefore, in view of all this, that Paul's use of Deuteronomy 21:23 falls into the same category as the other examples listed above. Influenced by the faulty translation of the Septuagint and committed to a false premise, he has again, by mistaking the Word of God in its true meaning, been found to be tampering with the Word of God. Jesus was not placed under a curse due to his being hanged on the cross.

## Offspring or Offsprings?

We must look again at Abraham as we turn now to investigate yet another instance of tampering. Immediately following the teaching on the curse, in the Galatian letter, Paul sets out, he says,

. . . to give a human example, brethren. No one annuls even a man's will, or adds to it, once it has been ratified. Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, "And to offsprings," referring to many; but referring to one, "And to your offspring," which is Christ (Galatians 3:15,16).

The Greek for offspring, or seed, that Paul would have been reading from the Septuagint is sperma, which, though singular in form as Paul states, is and was generally understood as a collective term, just as 'seed' in English is a collective. The Genesis context places it clearly in the collective use, with Isaac, then Jacob and the twelve patriarchs being the successive "seeds" to whom the promise of God to Abraham is rendered. But Paul apparently followed a rabbinical interpretation of the seed that emphasizes its singular aspect and makes it point only to the messiah. Thus, Paul sees it pointing only to Jesus Christ. He understands its collective impact but chooses here to ignore it for all possible recipients of the promise prior to Christ. But beginning with Christ, he includes all who, through faith in Christ, become identified with him, and returns to the collective use in Galatians 3:29:

And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring (seed), heirs according to the promise.

Christ is then the singular "seed" through whom the promise to Abraham, that all nations should be blessed in him, is fulfilled. The importance to Paul of this is that it permits the Abrahamic promise to completely transcend the law that, Paul says, came four hundred and thirty years later. The objection to this is that he is not consistent, because if we turn to his reference to this promised inheritance in Romans 9:4f, he clearly applies the promise to his kinsmen according to the flesh – the Israelites – saying,

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. . . to *them* belong the promises.

Then, in verse 7, he makes a point of quoting Genesis 21:12,

. . . through Isaac shall your descendants (seed, singular) be named.

Therefore in Romans he takes the view that seed is plural and includes Isaac. It does not, in this context, refer only to one, which is Christ. To be consistent, he needed to write to the Romans, "Through Christ shall your descendants be named." Apparently this, while serving his purpose in Galatians, does not do so in Romans. It most certainly would not have suited his purpose to write to the Galatians, as he did to the Romans, "Through Isaac shall your descendants be named." Do you see what he has done with this Genesis text? In both cases, he has in mind a doctrine that he wishes to support, but in one case the traditional interpretation does not fit. His solution? Give it a meaning consistent with his doctrine and the argument he is presenting, with no reference to the context, or to his prior contrary interpretations. Logically, it looks something like this:

In one case,  $x = a$  (is singular)

In another case,  $x = b$  (is plural)

But  $a$  is not equal to  $b$  (singular is not plural)

Therefore  $x$  is not equal to  $x$ !

I cannot avoid the firm conclusion: he has tampered with God's word. This is also another rampant case of faulty logic.

I emphasize again that Paul is not attempting to prove that the Law and the Prophets are the source of his Gospel. It is his position entirely that the source is not the Law and the Prophets, but the risen Christ who has delivered it to him in a trance, vision, dream, revelation, or whatever, as I stated above. It is nevertheless very important to him that the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it, which is what he is attempting to show with these quotations.

Let us suppose, to get a better comprehension of what is going on, that Paul has been charged with deception, arrested, and hailed into court for trial. (Indeed, this is what his opponents were doing: charging him with deception in his use of the scriptures.) The judge has seated himself, the court is called to order and is in session, and the prosecution, Paul's opponents, has presented its case. Now Paul, who serves as his own counsel, has taken the floor in his defense. He begins to call his witnesses, including Witness A, Mr. Genesis. A comes to the stand and Paul solicits his testimony, after which he proceeds to interpret it for the court:

Witness A's testimony = X.

Soon the day nears its end and the court recess until the next morning. Next morning Paul continues his defense by again calling Witness A, the same Mr. Genesis, to the stand for a second time. Witness A repeats precisely the same testimony as during the previous session, after which Paul thanks him and proceeds to interpret the testimony for the court. But this day,

Witness A's testimony = Y, And, Y is not equal to X

Evidently, Y is necessary to the support of the different point he is seeking to sustain on the second day. He is counting on the members of the court having very short memories or none, or else his memory is very short and he has forgotten what he argued on the previous day. In the real case before us, he has either forgotten, in this testimony to the Romans, that he has given a contradictory testimony years earlier to the Galatians, or he has changed his view, or else he assumes that the two versions will never be compared, as they are here.

## Conclusion

The proceeding should be sufficient to establish that when Paul's opponents accused him of tampering with God's word, they did so with considerable justification.

I have not investigated all of his uses of the Old Testament, but I have looked only at the texts he brought forward to buttress his prime theses of justification by faith apart from works and the universal depravity of man. If these examples have not convinced you, my reader, of a lack of integrity in Paul's use of the scriptures, they should at least provide a basis for further questioning. The typical churchman will not be moved, however. He or she will simply respond with the conviction that Paul was fully justified in all this because he was writing under the direct revelation of the Holy Spirit and was only completing and/or correcting the incomplete revelations made to Moses and the Prophets.

Paul tampered with God's word? How can this be, seeing that whatever Paul wrote was and is God's word! Did he not himself make the claim that his words were really God's (or "the Lord's, I Thessalonians 2:13, I Corinthians 14:37)? Regarding those sharing this point of view, I can honestly say that my conscience is free. I have done my best to strip you of the church-applied shackles that bind your heart and soul, but if you persist in keeping your head immersed in the sand of Paul's baseless theological speculations, what more can I do?

I can do a great deal more. For one thing, I can provide additional support by demonstrating that Paul was capable of errors in logic. If his inspiration truly came from the Holy Spirit, if he wrote the Word of God in recording his epistles, he surely would not have written or said anything stupid – would he?

## Chapter VII

# DID PAUL ERR IN LOGIC?

Here I will point to only two examples of logical errors that seem incontrovertible. There are others, but these are sufficient to reveal the limitations of his inspiration.

## The Cretans

The first is his self-referential statement in the letter to Titus. Titus had been left in Crete to attend to missionary tasks, and Paul later wrote to him to more clearly define his duties. Early in this letter, referring to the Cretans, he came forth with this astonishing statement:

One of themselves, a prophet of their own said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." This testimony is true (Titus 1:12).

But, if Cretans are *always* liars, this statement by one of them must be false. Paul says it is true. Paul has surely fallen into a trap of his own making. If the illogic is not obvious to you, perhaps it will help if I present it as follows, keeping in mind that the Cretan whom Paul was quoting is Epimenides.

1. Paul writes that Epimenides says that Cretans are always liars.
2. Epimenides was a Cretan (a prophet of their own).
3. Therefore Epimenides always lies.
4. Paul says that what Epimenides said is true.

This is a pure conundrum. It is nonsense. Paul says that Epimenides' testimony is true, the very testimony that says that Epimenides is a liar! Surely this kind of puny logic must have a merely human origin, the mind of Paul.

## Who Must Die?

The second error in logic is just as obvious, and much more serious, as displayed in Romans 7:1-3:

Do you not know, brethren – I am speaking to those who know the law – that the law is binding on a person only during his life? Thus a married woman is bound by law to her husband as long as he lives, but if her husband dies she is discharged from the law concerning the husband. Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies she is free from that law, and if she marries another man she is not an adulteress.

To assist you with the perception of error in this logic, again I will break it down as follows:

1. The law is binding on a person only during his (or her) life.

## DID PAUL ERR IN LOGIC?

2. Therefore, the law binds a married woman to her husband as long as she lives.
3. Therefore, when she dies, she is free from the law concerning her husband.
4. But Paul sets her free when the husband dies, not when she dies!

By the premise, "the law is binding on a person only during his life," the married woman is yet bound to her husband, even though he is dead, and she will continue to be bound to him until she dies! It is, of course, true that the woman is bound to her husband only as long as he lives, but this is by a separate provision in the law. This fact is undoubtedly what tripped Paul here – this together with the gender distinction that made it difficult to see the woman as bound by the law, apart from her husband, in any case.

Paul next proceeds to compound the error by applying this principle to the spiritual experience of the disciples:

Likewise, my brethren, you have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead in order that we may bear fruit for God (Romans 7:4).

He seems to intend that the analogy be applied in this way:

1. You were married to the law.
2. Because Christ died, you are freed from the law.
3. Being free from the law, you may now marry Christ (may belong to another).

But according to the premise stated, you are the one who must die to be free from the law, not someone else, such as Christ. But we see how Paul must have intended to apply the principle: you are associated with Jesus in his death, therefore you have also died in some spiritual sense and through that death freed from the law that bound you to the law. But the fact is that Jesus is the only one who has died so as to conform to the principle, for you are yet walking around in your flesh.

To compound the faulty logic, if the lesson drawn from it is to conform to the marriage analogy that is given, then it is your husband, the law, that must have died to free you to marry Christ – but Paul's faulty analogy kills off both you and Christ (everybody but the law!) and allows the law to live. These failures in logic justify us in concluding, at the very least, that when he wrote these lines he was not writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, but was simply recording whatever came to the mind of the man. He was not particularly intelligent or he would have spotted the fallacies in his arguments, even without the aid of the Spirit.

## Chapter VIII

# DID PAUL DISOBEY HIS LORD?

One of the most revealing features of Paul's character, and one that surely challenges its integrity, is his response to the commandments of Jesus. He referred to Jesus as "Lord" or "our Lord" not once but many times, almost too many times to count. Typical is this quotation from Philippians:

Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord (3:8).

More than anything else, lordship means obedience to the commandments of the one who is lord; otherwise it has no meaning (Well, yes, there is hypocrisy). So Jesus posed this plaintive question to those who did not obey:

Why do you call me "Lord, Lord," and not do what I tell you (Luke 6:46)?

And in John's Gospel he issues this condition:

If you love me, you will keep my commandments (John 14:15).

So, Paul's obedience to the Lord will test not only the sincerity of his submission to the Lordship of Jesus, but also his love for him. Sad to say – when we apply this test to Paul, he fails.

## Call No Man Father

I have pointed above to an incident in which Paul calls God to witness to his truthfulness; he did this not once but repeatedly, all in direct disobedience to the commandment of Jesus: "Swear not at all." Here are more examples of disobedience:

Jesus said, Call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven (Matthew 23:9).

Paul committed several infractions of this commandment, not only continuing to refer to the Patriarchs as "father", but even establishing himself as the father of his converts. The most specific evidence of this comes from I Corinthians:

For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel (4:15).

Then, in Romans 4:16, he speaks of Abraham as the father of us all.

## You Are not to be Called "Teacher"

Jesus commanded, from the same context as above,

But you are not to be called rabbi (teacher), for you have one teacher (didaskalos), and

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you are all brethren (Matthew 23:8).

Ignoring this command completely, Paul wrote to the Corinthians, defining the different offices in the church:

And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers (didaskalos). (I Corinthians 12:28).

Then, in both letters to Timothy, he specified his own appointment as preacher, apostle, and teacher (I Timothy 2:7, II Timothy 1:11). This is actually a very good indicator that Paul authored these two letters, though the scholars do not generally accept this. But is God going to appoint anyone as teacher, when his spokesman, Jesus has expressly forbidden that we should be called such?

## Go Into Your Room and Shut Your Door

Jesus commanded,

But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. (Matthew 6:6)

Paul obviously ignored this command, as revealed in his instruction to the Corinthian church concerning public worship:

What am I to do? I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also; I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind also. Otherwise, if you bless with the spirit, how can any one in the position of an outsider say the "Amen" to your thanksgiving when he does not know what you are saying?

It is clear that Paul's disciples engaged in public prayer in their worship together, even as those whom Jesus called "hypocrites" loved to stand praying in the synagogue. Of course, we know of no church that pays any attention to Jesus in this matter, but that should not surprise us. They haven't given him much attention in anything crucial to their salvation. They are much distracted through listening to Paul!

## Love Your Neighbor as Yourself

In defining Paul's faulty logic above, I quoted his use of a line from Epimenides regarding the character of his fellow Cretans. According to Epimenides, Cretans are "always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." Then Paul follows with this conclusion:

This testimony is true (Titus 1:13).

Thus Paul has stereotyped, or labeled, all Cretans as poor characters. A white man does precisely the same when he says of blacks, "All niggers stink, are immoral and of low intelligence." I mention this coarse example because it is a line I have heard many times in the racially segregated culture of my youth. Just as the whites displayed their prejudice by such words, so Paul was displaying his prejudice – a fact thoroughly inconsistent with the commandment of Jesus to "love your neighbor as your self." Such generalizations are hurtful. They hurt the person who issues them and they hurt the person(s) so described. I would be hurt were they spoken of me, and such expressions about me would not be acts of love. No, these expressions are manifestations of hatred and are contrary to the commandments of Jesus. Paul is again found to be disobedient to his Lord!

These many infractions of the commandments of Jesus show conclusively that for Paul, Jesus

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was Lord in name only. He was in fact disobedient, therefore Jesus was not his Lord.



## Chapter IX

# WAS PAUL A LIAR?

If I tell you something for the truth and I am not simply mistaken, it is either a lie or the truth. If it is the truth, and you accuse me of lying, I have no need to deny, for the truth will, sooner or later, speak for itself; I can say nothing for it because you have already decided that I am a liar. A denial will only demean the truth, which will, as I said, speak for itself.

### A Witness Needed!

If it is a lie, and you accuse me of lying, I will be forced to respond with a denial because a lie cannot and will not speak for itself. The things that motivated me to lie will motivate me to deny my lie. Then, feeling the weakness of my position, I look for something more! What more can I do? I must call forth a witness, so that you have not only my testimony, but also that of another. The scripture plainly states that everything is established at the mouth of two or three witnesses. You may have me pegged for a liar, but perhaps you will believe someone else. But on whom can I call on such short notice? To be effective, I must have a witness now! Not only so, but my witness must be a person of undisputed veracity, for it will not do to call on a reputed liar. Whose testimony would you accept immediately without question? Who? Who? Who?

Ah! There is only one person right for my task . . . God in heaven! His veracity is beyond question and He carries the extra advantage of never having been known to testify. He would surely condemn me for a liar if He were to testify but, since he never has, I am safe in calling upon him and the very mention of his name may be persuasive.

**The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, he who is blessed forever, knows that I do not lie.** At Damascus, the governor under King Aretas guarded the city of Damascus in order to seize me, but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped his hands (II Corinthians. 11:31-33).

But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia; and again I returned to Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas, and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother. **In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie!** (Galatians 1:15-20)

For this I was appointed a preacher and apostle **(I am telling the truth, I am not lying)**, a teacher of the gentiles in faith and truth (I Timothy 2:7).

**I am speaking the truth in Christ, I am not lying;** my conscience bears witness in the Holy Spirit that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen by race (Romans 9:1-3).

I count four times here, in the New Testament epistles, that Paul denied that he was lying: to the

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Corinthians, the Galatians, Timothy, and the Romans. Once, to the Romans, he called the Holy Spirit to witness for him. Twice, to the Corinthians and to the Galatians, he called God to witness for him. Three times, to the Corinthians, Galatians, and to Timothy, the denials were issued concerning his assertions of his calling and apostleship.

### Was Paul an Apostle?

He wrote a large part of both the II Corinthian and Galatian letters to counter the work of opponents in the ministry who had been to these churches in his absence and had challenged his gospel, his doctrine, and his apostleship. It is clear that to both churches (or groups of churches) Paul has been accused of lying – of misrepresenting his calling and apostleship and of mispreaching the gospel. This has struck him particularly hard in the challenge to his apostleship, which is the focus of the first three denials listed above. It is natural that it would be so, for everything he preached and taught he presented as authorized on the grounds of apostleship – that is, of his direct appointment to the Apostolate by the risen Christ, as he surely related many times to his converts in all the churches. For those who opposed him, the strategy for attacking Paul was to attack his apostleship. If they could weaken or destroy his claim to be an apostle, they would destroy his influence and perhaps rescue his churches from error.

To be an apostle of Jesus Christ, it was necessary that one be appointed directly by Jesus Christ. The original twelve apostles received their appointment directly from him. The word apostle derives from a Greek verb that means “to send.” It follows that, to be an apostle of Christ, Christ must have sent one. It is clear from Acts when the eleven obtained a replacement for Judas, they understood that to qualify as an apostle one must have been in the company of the disciples during all “the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning at the baptism of John until the day he was taken up from us” (Acts 2:15f). This one qualification excludes those who were strangers to the fellowship. They found two candidates so qualified, Matthias and Joseph, but they would not themselves proceed to decide between them. If the one selected was to be a true apostle of Christ, Christ must select him. Therefore they prayed, “Lord, who knowest the hearts of all men, show which one of these two thou hast chosen to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside.” They then cast lots, and the lot fell on Matthias, who was enrolled with the eleven.

One of these qualifications Paul could never meet, for he had never been in the company of the disciples during the ministry of Jesus. He was a stranger to them. Nevertheless, if he could convince the disciples that the risen Christ had appeared to him and appointed him, then it would be clear to them that this qualification had been suspended in Paul's case. In his view this made his appointment superior to theirs because his gospel and appointment came from the risen Christ rather than from the earthly Jesus! Thus we have the story of his amazing conversion, or revelation, on the road to Damascus. He returned to Jerusalem, according to Acts, and found that they were all afraid of him except Barnabus, who sought to allay fears and who was himself quite taken in by Paul. The Twelve were not persuaded and Paul, after a time, took his leave and returned to his home city, Tarsus in Cilicia.

Twelve years later, it was again Barnabus who brought him to Antioch and from thence his fruitful ministry began. Paul was never accepted by the Twelve and he resolved to go his own way, yet claiming the same – nay, superior credentials. But he needed the favor of Jerusalem and the Twelve to strengthen his ministry and so he presented himself as having their favor and approval wherever he went. There were notorious differences that he could not ignore, but he always presented them as having a resolution favorable to himself and his ministry. When his presentation was not fully persuasive to his disciples, he had a simple response: his gospel was the only true gospel. If Paul himself, or an angel from heaven, preached any other gospel, let him be accursed (Galatians 1:8)! His gospel came directly from Christ, and to establish that origin, he presented his experience at Damascus and afterward in such a way as to convince others that he never conferred with flesh and blood after his “revelation” but began immediately to preach the

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gospel the risen Christ had communicated to him. Thus he asserted that he did not go to Jerusalem after his conversion, but first went away into Arabia, then returned to Damascus, then after three years went to Jerusalem for fifteen days where he saw only Peter and James. But, he said, "They added nothing to me!"

Paul lied. Clearly, his opponents had been working vigorously in his absence, both at Corinth and in Galatia. They were denying the validity of his apostleship, seeking to correct his work there by preaching "another gospel", and accusing him of lying about his trip to Jerusalem following his revelation in Damascus, which explains his compulsion to deny being a liar in his letters to these groups of disciples.

But why would he issue a similar denial to Timothy, also in relation to his calling and apostleship? We cannot know with certainty, but the answer that appears obvious comes to us when we realize that Timothy had been sent by Paul on at least one mission to Corinth, perhaps two (I Corinthians. 4:17, 16:10), and was there for a period while Paul was absent. Therefore young Timothy may have come under the influence of Paul's opponents while they were working at Corinth; he would have heard their charges of lying and may have shown signs of being influenced by them. Very likely it was through Timothy that Paul learned of his opponents' accusations. Therefore Paul, for whom denial is now a habit, issues another denial to his young protégé.

So Paul swore by heaven (called on God and the Holy Spirit to witness for him), and vigorously denied that he was a liar. The very fact that he was caught in the difficult situation of being compelled to repeatedly issue denials is strong evidence that the charges against him were true. I do not mean that accusation implies guilt -- but that repetitive denials of accusations imply or suggest guilt. His motivation is most certainly that which I have indicated above. The most damning thing about all this is that if there had been other witnesses on whom Paul could have called, brothers of good repute who could substantiate his claim, he certainly would have done so. The point of his denials would have been the point at which they were introduced. Why didn't he do this?

Because there were no such witnesses on whom he could call to verify his account of his itinerary following the Damascus revelation, certifying that he waited three years thereafter prior to going up to Jerusalem to see the apostles. Everyone on whom he might have called knew otherwise: that he returned to Jerusalem immediately, where he conferred with flesh and blood (Galatians 1:16), as Luke twice indicates in Acts (9:26, 22:17). The Jerusalem apostles could have confirmed the truth; some, probably all, of them were there, including Peter and James. They would have known whether he returned immediately. What of Ananias of Damascus, and the disciples he reported to have made there (Acts 9:25) during the three years he said he delayed returning to Jerusalem? No, everyone who might have testified for him knew the truth of the matter and so he did not dare cite them. No, there was only one, his silent witness.

## The Testimony of II Peter

Paul lied. Have you, my reader, adequately considered this simple fact, which I have already set forth: We have almost no information about Paul except that which issues from Paul? There is no one in all the New Testament or in extrabiblical literature of the time on whom he called for corroboration. We have the voice of Luke in Acts, but Paul was his mentor, who supplied him with much of the information related there. Outside of Acts and Paul's own epistles, there is only one brief mention of him in II Peter 3:15:

So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, speaking of this as he does in all his letters. There are some things in them hard to understand which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures.

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I don't agree, but many think the Petrine epistles were written by Pauline disciples, who included this accolade to Paul. What I suspect is that Paul or one of his disciples inserted it into a genuine letter from Peter or one of Peter's disciples. The signs of an insertion are clearly exposed, for such insertions often continue the writing with some repetition of the context immediately preceding it. As an example, I Corinthians 13, almost certainly an insertion, begins after 12:31:

"But earnestly desire the higher gifts."

Then Chapter 14 continues:

" Make love your aim, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy."

In the present case, II Peter 3:15 comes after v. 14, which begins:

"Therefore, beloved . . .,"

and v. 17 continues,

"You therefore, beloved . . ."

The indication is clear: this opinion originated in Paul or his supporters and is a clever attempt to call on the great Apostle Peter to witness for him. Indeed it goes further, by classifying Paul's letters as scripture!

## The Testimony of the Contradictions

Then there are the contradictions. Whenever anyone misrepresents himself and lies about the details of an important event that occurred many years earlier, it does not surprise us if the different accounts of the event that were later written down contain contradictions. One's compulsion to misrepresent the truth to others will simultaneously confuse the details in one's own mind, so that he is himself uncertain, and therefore inconsistent, in relating the event on different occasions and to different people. This would explain the presence of many contradictions in the five different accounts of Paul's Damascus experience and related events that are contained in the New Testament, three in The Acts, one in II Corinthians, and one in the Galatian letter. One contradiction from The Acts is seen in the following quotations:

The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. (Acts 9:7)

Now those who were with me saw the light, but did not hear the voice of the one who was speaking to me. (Acts 22:9)

So, did they hear the voice, or did they not hear the voice? Did they see the light, or did they see no one?

Second and third contradictions follow hard on the heels of this one:

When many days had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him, but their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night to kill him; but his disciples took him by night and let him down over the wall, lowering him in a basket. (Acts 9:23-25)

At Damascus, the governor under King Aretas guarded the city of Damascus in order to seize me, but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped his hands. (II Corinthians 11: 32,33)

## WAS PAUL A LIAR?

So, was it the Jews of Damascus from whom Paul fled, or was it from the governor under King Aretas? Further, did they lower him over the wall, or through a window in the wall?

Then comes the contradiction most directly relevant to his lie concerning his going up to Jerusalem from Damascus after his revelation:

And his disciples took him by night and let him down over the wall, lowering him in a basket. And when he had come to Jerusalem he attempted to join the disciples but they are all afraid of him for they did not believe he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus. So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. And he spoke and disputed against the Hellenists; but they were seeking to kill him. And when the brethren knew it, they brought him down to Caesarea and set him off to Tarsus. (Acts 9:25-30)

And (Ananias) . . . said, The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Just One and to hear a voice from his mouth; and you will be a witness for him to all men of what you have seen and heard. And now, why do you wait? Rise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on his name. When I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple I fell into a trance and saw him saying to me, 'Make haste and get quickly out of Jerusalem, because they will not accept your testimony about me. And I said, 'Lord, they themselves know that in very synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believed in thee. And when the blood of Stephen thy witness was shed, I also was standing by and approving, and keeping the garments of those who killed him.' And he said to me, 'Depart; for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.' (Acts 22:14-21)

But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia; and again I returned to Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas, and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother. (In what I am writing to you, before God I do not lie!) Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia; and I still was not known by sight to the churches of Christ in Judea; they only heard it said, "He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." (Galatians 1:15-23)

Clearly there are several problems when we seek to reconcile these accounts of the same period in Paul's life. If we confine ourselves to the two accounts from Acts, we would conclude without question that he went immediately to Jerusalem after escaping from Damascus – which the Galatian letter emphatically rebuts. In addition, there is a problem within the two stories from Acts concerning how he came to leave Jerusalem. We are told in the first that the Hellenists (Hellenistic Jews) were seeking to kill him, and when the brethren discovered this they carted him off to Tarsus (Cilicia). In the second, we are told that Paul, in the Temple and in a trance, saw the Lord saying to him that he should get quickly out of Jerusalem, as they would not receive his testimony there. In the third and last account listed, that of Paul in the Galatian letter, he simply departed into the regions of Syria and Cilicia, there being no mention of threats to his person. Assuming that he simply chose to omit this part of the story in recounting it for the Galatian church, we yet have the contradiction in the details of the other two, as to how he came to know of his danger and to escape from Jerusalem.

Yet again we have this: although Luke tells us that Barnabas took Paul to the apostles, Paul asserts to the Galatians that he saw none of the apostles except Cephas and James, the Lord's brother. Are we really to believe that Barnabas introduced Paul to the apostles after which he went in and out among them preaching, and yet saw none of them except Cephas (Peter) and

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James? We have every reason to believe that many of the apostles were at Jerusalem during this period, for Luke tells us that, due to the persecution that arose over Stephen, they (the disciples) were all scattered throughout the region of Judea and Samaria **except the apostles** (Acts 8:1).

And finally, we have two other questions aroused by the previous accounts. First, If Paul had to escape from Damascus either to save his life or to avoid arrest, and then spent a time in Arabia, why would he have returned to Damascus where his life would again have been endangered? This puzzle suggests that there was no foray into Arabia, and no return to Damascus. Once Luke picks up his journeying in Acts, he certainly never returned! He has him saying, in his defense before King Agrippa:

Wherefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those at Damascus, then at Jerusalem and throughout all the country of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God and perform deeds worthy of their repentance (Acts 26:19,20).

We would never guess, from this, that there was a foray into Arabia and then a return to Damascus, encompassing a period of three years! And he was not known by sight to the churches of Judea? (Gal. 1:22)

Secondly, who was it in Jerusalem who would not receive his testimony about the Lord, as the Lord informed him in his trance? His instruction was to make haste and get quickly out of Jerusalem. This strongly implies that he was in imminent danger of being killed. We assume that it was the unbelieving Jews, who are presented throughout Paul's letters as antagonistic to Paul in many places. But Luke, in The Acts, only identifies one group that was reluctant to believe Paul and accept his testimony following Barnabus' intervention: the Hellenists. These were Jews who had been reared outside of Palestine, among the Jews of the Dispersion and who, for whatever reason, like Paul, had returned to the ancestral home. They were Greek speaking Jews as distinguished from the native grown variety that spoke Aramaic, hence their designation as Hellenists. On this definition Paul was also a Hellenist. They were members of the fellowship of disciples in Jerusalem, Jewish believers in Jesus as the messiah, and the same party we were introduced to earlier in Acts in the story of the Hellenists who complained against the "Hebrews" because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution of food. This occasioned, you recall, the selection of the first deacons, seven in number, that included Stephen the martyr and Philip the Evangelist. All seven had Greek names, which may not be significant since Palestinian Jews also bore Greek names; (David Smith, p.21) however, that only Greek names were listed suggests that they were significant in this case involving Hellenists.

Now, why would Paul be disputing against his Hellenist brethren in the fellowship of disciples at Jerusalem, and why would they, of all people, purpose to kill him? The Hellenists with whom Paul disputed may, of course, have been the Hellenists among the Jews who had not believed in Jesus. Since they had much in common with Paul, including non Palestinian places of origin and a common language, they would have been natural targets for his evangelistic efforts. But then, why did Luke not clarify this question by specifying that these Hellenists were unconverted to Jesus, since they bear the same designation of those he earlier included among the disciples? It is conceivable that Luke was simply a sloppy historian, and that these were non-believers among the Jews. The internal contradictions in the Acts could be attributed to this sloppiness, but they are so obvious as to defy that explanation. It is more probable that, because Luke was a very careful historian, he recorded it exactly as he heard it, leaving it to us to decide who was sloppy – Luke or those, including Paul, on whom he relied for his data.

The most probable explanation for these contradictions is to accept the proposition that Paul was a liar. This is a proposition I have already affirmed. Then it was quite proper that the disciples of all kinds, including the Hebrews and the Hellenists under the leadership of the Twelve in Jerusalem, would not receive his testimony about the Lord, as his vision states. He responded by

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taking the precise same attitude as toward the Jews in Corinth: From now on, I go to the Gentiles (Acts 18:6). No one sought to kill him, but they rejected his testimony in no uncertain terms and he responded like a piqued child: I'm taking my toys and going home – that is, to the Gentiles. Later, unwilling to acknowledge that the Twelve rejected his gospel, he explained his hasty departure from Jerusalem to Luke as motivated by the hostility of the Hellenists. But if anyone were seeking to kill him, it would have been the agents of the High Priest, whom he had so recently betrayed at Damascus.

I realize that one can concoct a variety of explanations for some, but not all, of these contradictions. If we believe

- (1) that Luke wrote The Acts many years after the death of Paul, which is debatable, and
- (2) that Paul's letters and written records may not have been available to him, not having yet been canonized, and
- (3) that Luke's memory of what he heard Paul say during the many times Paul told of his Damascus experience in Luke's hearing may have been faulty, and
- (4) that Luke had available to him living survivors of the times who could recall exactly what happened at Jerusalem after Paul's "revelation",

the following explanation begins to emerge: Paul adhered mostly to the truth in relating details in Luke's hearing because he anticipated that Luke, his frequent companion on his travels, would sooner or later accompany him to Jerusalem where he would hear the truth from the apostles. Luke readily accepted Paul's apostleship and its source in the risen Lord, and there was no need to lie to him. Yet the details of what Paul told from time to time varied, simply because he had been careful to alter them to suit certain occasions, and this contributed to Luke's uncertain memory. When Luke sought clarification from those who, from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word . . . (Luke 1:2), he received the truth. That is what he recorded, both in his gospel and in The Acts, except for those words that he was certain of having heard directly from Paul. Even though these contradict the eyewitnesses, Luke recorded them as he had heard them, not willing to believe his beloved mentor had spoken falsely.

Paul lied. Other contradiction from Paul's letters, when placed together find him actually denying that he is a servant of Christ! In Galatians 1:10, we find him writing:

Am I seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still pleasing men, I should not be a servant of Christ.

This is a good statement, thoroughly consistent with the doctrine of Jesus, which places the desires of men over against those of God. I have pointed to this in Book I. Therefore, those who seek to please men cannot be the servants of Christ. But Paul had something more to say on this subject, from I Corinthians 10:32, 33:

Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please all men in everything I do.

Did he, or did he not, try to please men? His own testimony proves that he was not a servant of Christ! This is the kind of contradiction we would expect to find in letters written to different people on different subjects at widely different times, by an ordinary human being. But not by a man who maintained that Christ was in him and that his words were inspired by the Holy Spirit. Here is another example of a similar contradiction. From Romans 11:32 we have this firm statement:

For God has consigned all men to disobedience, that he may have mercy upon all.

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But just two chapters prior to this statement, in the same context, he has this statement from Rom. 9:18:

So then he has mercy upon whomever he wills, and he hardens the heart of whomever he wills.

So, does God work to the end that all men might receive his mercy, or does he arbitrarily harden the hearts of some men? Again, this is the kind of contradiction we expect an ordinary human being, me for example, to express. But for a man who, inspired by the Holy Spirit, speaks for God? I think not!

### His Many Denials

All these allegations raise disturbing questions, not only about Paul's character but also about his inspiration. Did the Holy Spirit inspire his written words as all Christendom believes? Did the Holy Spirit inspire all these contradictions? Did the Holy Spirit inspire his many denials of lying?

I don't ask you to decide on these questions now; there is more to come that will be relevant. If this were all, then I would not feel so free to write these things about a man who has claimed the admiration and devotion of untold millions for two thousand years. But there should have been others who could witness for him – Ananias of Damascus, his Damascus disciples, the men who were traveling to Damascus with him. He told others about these people, but he never called them forth. The Jerusalem apostles would have confirmed that he did not return to Jerusalem to see them for three years – where were they? So far as we can tell, they have not yet spoken a word in his behalf. Instead, he calls on the only witnesses he knows who will not contradict him – God and the Holy Spirit. But when he did that, he became disobedient to his Lord, as I described earlier.

Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God . . . Let what you say be simply yes or no; anything more than this comes from evil (Matthew 5:34-37).

Therefore I conclude that his denials, his swearing by heaven, all came from evil, and to conclude otherwise would be to ignore the words of my Lord. Set beside that, the accusation of lying is a small thing!

I understand that Paul's denials do not constitute proof that he was lying. Many have denied in an 'off the cuff' manner when accused of lying, even though they were truthful. Children react this way when they accuse one another, and they frequently call on some higher authority to witness for them: "If you don't believe me, ask my dad." They, being children, don't think of the implications of denial, although they would understand them if they paused to reflect before responding. They may even establish a habit of denial that persists into adulthood and there continue to deny through force of habit. Perhaps we have all done it. But we are not dealing here with children or with flippant responses in face-to-face encounters. Paul was writing letters under circumstances that should have provided opportunity for reflection. I visualize him in the home of some disciple, or in prison late at night after all others have retired, sitting before the dim light of a flickering oil lamp and carefully measuring his words.

Those who believe that the Holy Spirit inspired every word the "great apostle" wrote as though spoken directly by the Lord now have a dilemma to resolve. Is the Holy Spirit really so childish and immature? I think not.

### His Most Unfavorable Witness

Paul lied. But now I must tell you that Paul did have a witness as to his integrity, and it was not a favorable witness. This was Paul himself:



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For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews; to those under the law I became as one under the law – though not being myself under the law – that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law – not being without law toward God but under the law of Christ – that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings. (I Corinthians. 9:19-25).

What a marvelous expression of total commitment to winning souls! I once found this to be one of the most inspiring and motivating passages in the Bible. It made me just want to go out and win souls – to do anything or be anything to accomplish results.

But look closer – he openly acknowledged a practice that is utterly dishonest. To the Jews, he presented himself as a Jew. But to those outside the law, the Greeks and others, he presented himself as outside the law – as a Greek if we go by his Greek name. He became all things to all men! Whatever the occasion demands, that he is. Its begins more and more to appear as though the Ebionites may have been correct in their statements about Paul – that he was a Greek and never a Pharisee Jew. By his own firm statement, he was a human chameleon!

## What was His Origin?

To present himself as a Greek to the Greeks, he must have told them he was a Greek. To present himself as a Jew to the Jews, he must have told them he was a Jew. He lied in this way many, many times. Whatever the occasion demanded, it got. He literally became "all things to all men." For once, he told the truth! We can clearly perceive here that the man had a serious defect in his character, for he thought that by being dishonest, by lying, he could win men to Christ to whom lies are an abomination. Paul has often been called a man full of contradictions, and now we know why they say it. Yes, he really believed that he did it all for the sake of the gospel. Paul was highly dedicated to the preaching of his gospel; there can be no doubt about that, for he mightily invested all his resources in the endeavor to reach the ends of the earth before the Lord's return. It appears that his commitment was so thorough and complete that he considered lying a small thing if only he could advance the gospel thereby. Woe to me if I preach not the gospel! (I Corinthians 9:16)

We commonly praise a person's integrity by asserting that he or she is always the same. Not a hypocritical bone in that body! What you see is what you get! But here we have a man who is a hard alternative to this constancy. He one day is a Jew, the next a Gentile by his own assertion – and he is so uncomprehending of his own perfidy as not even to realize that this, which he regards with the pride of boasting, is and ought to be his shame! Our Lord had some plain words for this kind of play-acting:

But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market places and calling to their playmates, "We piped to you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn." For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, "He has a demon"; the Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, "Behold, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners." (Matthew 11:16-19)

Paul was like those children, only more successful; when he recognized dancers, he piped with joy, and they danced. When he recognized mourners, he wailed with them, and they mourned together! He was a master politician, truly successful in becoming all things to all men. He would not get away with this today, however, for worldwide communication capabilities of the electronic media would soon show him up for what he was: as I said above, a human chameleon.

There is biblical evidence that Paul was a Greek, as stated by the Ebionites. It isn't strong, but

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it's there, as though he sometimes made a slip that revealed his Greek origin contrary to his bold assertions of being a Pharisee Jew in his early career, an Hebrew of the Hebrews, of the tribe of Benjamin, as to the law, blameless.

The first evidence that he lied about his origins grows out of the fact that, in First Century Judaism, no one had accurate knowledge of his descent from Benjamin. Knowledge of the tribal origins of individual families had long since been lost. None could trace their lineage, with the exception of the priestly tribe of Levi and Aaron, which was maintained as required to sustain the priesthood. All others were presumed to be of the tribe of Judah, or simply, Jews. So, when Paul claimed to be a Benjamite, Jews would have known the claim was bogus. But it would have sounded good to members of his Gentile churches who could know no better. Probably Paul relied on his Jewish name, Saul, as indicating descent from King Saul from whom David wrested power and who was a Benjamite.

Other evidence includes the statement made to the Galatians,

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us – for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who hangs on a tree.” – that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. (Galatians 3:13,14).

It is clear that Paul, by use of the first person plural in the last line of this quotation, is classifying himself with the Gentiles, who receive the promise of the Spirit. Was this simply a slip, and inadvertent error, or has he revealed his true nationality? In either case, inadvertent error or inadvertent truth, he is revealing that his word is not inspired by the Spirit, who would surely not permit him to make such an association were it not true – but if it is true, Paul lied. We repeatedly come across those passages where, if we set out to make excuses for Paul to cover either his carelessness or dishonesty, we expose the true nature of his inspiration.

## Chapter X

# WAS PAUL A SELF PROMOTER?

Did he promote himself? Did he exalt himself above others? Did he have a high image of himself, thinking of himself more highly than he ought to think (Romans 12:3), and does it show in his letters? If he did exalt himself, we know that he would thereby find himself condemned by the word of the Lord, who said,

Whoever exalts himself will be humbled (Matthew 23:12).

Or, was he a humble man, meek and mild? It may, to many, seem not a little blasphemous – this continual questioning of the character of the great St. Paul! Nevertheless, we have gone so far already – we must press on.

## The Meek and Humble Man

Did he not, in every letter of his, point to his meek and humble character as an example to his disciples? Did he not denigrate himself repeatedly? Did he not extol the virtues of humility and lowliness and counsel his disciples to imitate these characteristics? Yes, he did:

I, Paul, myself entreat you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ -- I who am humble when face to face with you, but bold to you when I am away (II Corinthians 10:1)!

For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute. To the present hour we hunger and thirst; we are ill clad and buffeted and homeless, and we labor, working with our hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become, and are now, as the refuse of the world, the off scouring of all things (I Corinthians 4:9-13).

For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God (I Corinthians 15:9).

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law (Galatians 5:23).

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any incentive of love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves (Philippians 2:1-3).

Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and receive and heard and seen in me, do; and the God of peace will be with you (Philippians 4:8,9).

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But we were gentle among you, like a nurse taking care of her children; we worked night and day, that we might not burden any of you, while we preached to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our behavior to you believers; for you know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory (I Thessalonians 2:7-12).

For by the grace given to me I bid every one among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith which God has assigned to him . . . Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; never be conceited (Romans 12:3,16).

This is but a small sampling of the many texts we could draw from his undoubted works to witness to his personal humility and authentic character. But there is another way to interpret these words for undoubtedly they served Paul well through convincing his disciples that he was exactly what he represented himself to be. But if we interpret them as the words of a man **who could become all things to all men**, we open the door to the realization that such words do not necessarily display his real character.

## The Not So Meek and Humble Man

He was a master of using such sweet words when they served his purpose, but he was also capable of using harsh words and self justifying and self exalting expressions when they seemed appropriate, or when he was angry though not appropriate. When he was writing to and about his genuine friends, whose loyalty he had no reason to doubt, he was not under the compulsion of his baser instincts and so could relax and be sweet. However, if his anger was stirred, he tended to lose his composure and allow the real Paul to come to the surface. This did not show up often in his writings, so that we do not see so much of this and therefore what we do see of it does not make enough of an impression to disturb the positive impression imposed by the many words of kindness, gentleness, and humility.

He did sometimes write under the compulsion of his anger, notably in composing the opening lines of the Galatian letter, in which he literally exploded with sarcasm and harsh invective. Immediately after a brief introduction he launched not blessings, but curses:

But even if we or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed (Galatians 1:8,9).

Evidently the opponents of Paul, who had followed him to Galatia preaching a different gospel, had had much success and had altered the attitudes of the Galatian disciples toward Paul in a way he could not abide:

What had become of the satisfaction you felt? For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me. Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth? They make much of you, but for no good purpose; they want to shut you out, that you may make much of them. For a good purpose it is always good to be made much of, and not only when I am present with you. My little children, with whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you! I could wish to be present with you now and to change my tone, for I am perplexed about you. (Galatians 4:15-20).

Here we see nothing less than jealousy, the very jealousy of a suitor who has been informed that another man is replacing him in the affections of his beloved. It appears that wherever and whenever Paul's opponents appeared they generated this kind of anger and vituperative

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response. The same was true of the Corinthians, where his opponents had also had some success:

For if someone comes and preaches another Jesus than the one we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you submit to it readily enough. I think that I am not in the least inferior to these superlative apostles. Even if I am unskilled in speaking, I am not in knowledge; in every way we have made this plain to you in all things (II Corinthians 11:4-6).

And what I do I will continue to do, in order to undermine the claim of those who would like to claim that in their boasted mission they work on the same terms as we do. For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. For no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is not strange if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. (II Corinthians 11:12-15)

But whatever any one dares to boast of – I am speaking as a fool – I also dare to boast of that. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I. Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one – I am talking like a madman – with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death (II Corinthians 11:21b - 23).

I have been a fool! You forced me to it, for I ought to have been commended by you. For I am not at all inferior to these superlative apostles, even though I am nothing. The signs of a true apostle were performed among you in all patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works (II Corinthians 12:11,12).

He is not inferior to these superlative apostles. He is a better servant of Christ, one who has endured much more suffering in Christ's behalf. Paul has exhibited among them the signs of a true apostle, but these superlative apostles, who claim to work on the same terms as Paul and his associates, are false apostles, disguising themselves as apostles. It seems that, when he is cementing his association with his disciples and other converts, he takes a condescending attitude, like that of a father to his children, a favorite metaphor. With them and in the grips of their adulation he can be sweet and self denigrating. But when someone arrives as a competitor, one who claims to work on "the same terms as we do," Paul's hackles are up; he is suddenly the best there is and we see through the facade.

While forced to acknowledge his limited oratorical skills, he seeks to compensate by focusing on his great knowledge. He believes he knows more than others do, and this pride of knowledge has other scriptural commentary, even from Paul:

Knowledge puffs up. If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know (I Corinthians 8:1,2)!

Perhaps, in writing II Corinthians, he has forgotten what he wrote in the first letter. He knows what he is doing, and acknowledges it – "I am speaking like a madman" – but he does it anyway. "You forced me to it!"

## The Superlative Apostles

Who were the superlative apostles? They surely claimed to be apostles, which is the implication of Paul's acknowledgment that they claim to work "on the same terms as we do." Although he asserts at one point that they are false apostles, he nevertheless acknowledges that they are apostles, and superlative apostles at that. This is not altogether sarcasm, for if he did not

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recognize their apostleship in any case, he would not have called them any kind of apostles.

We cannot know their identity, since they are nowhere in the New Testament identified. But we can hazard an informed guess based on some of the things we know about them. We know they were Jews, as Paul acknowledges in saying, Are they Hebrews? So am I. They claimed to be apostles, and Paul does not exactly deny that they are such, even though he prefers to call them false apostles. But, whether true or false, they are yet apostles. They also preach a gospel, good news. Paul decrees that theirs is a different gospel, but it is still a gospel. And their gospel differs from Paul's in at least one very important point: they want all Paul's converts to become fully Jews by submitting to the law and circumcision. Finally, they appeared bearing letters of recommendation (II Corinthians 3:1).

Paul is careful not to identify the source of the letters, but who would be sending out Jewish apostles preaching the gospel and bearing letters of recommendation? We are speaking, then, of gospel preaching Jewish apostles who have followed after Paul and sought to correct what they consider the fallacious aspects of his gospel, and who come bearing letters of recommendation. I am going to suggest that Paul's opponents in all his churches, the opponents who are seeking to convince his converts that they must be circumcised and keep the law, and also that Paul is not a true apostle, are exactly what they profess and what Paul indirectly acknowledges them to be. They are Jews, they are apostles, or the representatives of the genuine apostles, who bear letters of recommendation issued by the apostles at Jerusalem under the leadership of James, the Lord's brother, and they are pursuing their calling to preach their gospel to the Gentiles.

I will even venture to suggest that their names can be selected from the following list: Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot (& the Cananaean), Judas the son of James, and Matthias. These, of course, are names applied to the Twelve whom Jesus named apostles, except for James the son of Zebedee who had been martyred, Judas Iscariot who betrayed Jesus and was replaced by Matthias, and Thomas, whom tradition credits with moving eastward with his ministry, all the way to India, and Peter and John who were foremost among the apostles. I may be in error in omitting their names from the list, for they surely disagreed with Paul on the same terms as his opponents in Corinth and Galatia. Especially John, for tradition parks him at Ephesus, on Paul's trail and in the midst of churches founded by Paul.

Of these "apostles," only Peter, James, Philip and John have any place in the proclamation of the gospel to the world as related in the New Testament. The gospels never mention the others except as included in collective terms 'apostles' and the "twelve." In the former they are mentioned only three times, once by Paul when he related the appearances of Jesus after his resurrection (I Corinthians 15:5), once by Luke (Acts 6:2), and once by John (Revelation 21:14). They are never singled out by name, as though they did nothing other than to appear in the group. Are we really to believe that these men, who shared the Great Commission to take the gospel to all nations, to the uttermost parts of the earth, never did anything except to act as a group in Jerusalem? Did they never go anywhere in response to their calling to go to the entire world?

I believe they went; they did go to the world and their work was effective for the Lord in many nations. But I also believe that the epistles of the New Testament canon were purged of all specific references to them by the later members of Paul's school of disciples, who came to dominate the movement after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 AD. Paul, in his letters, simply chose not to give a name to any of them, even though they were giving him a hard time.

Typical of his nameless references to them is, perhaps, his statement to the Galatians that, before "certain men" came from James (from Jerusalem), Peter (Cephus) ate with the Gentile converts at Antioch, but when they came, he drew back, fearing the circumcision party. These "certain men from James" may have been unnamed apostles who also shared the leadership of

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the circumcision party. Jesus' brother, James, had assumed their leadership. Since he was brother to the King and therefore a member of the royal family, they would have accepted the leadership of this Crown Prince in Jesus' absence, expecting the King himself to return at any time. In this expectation they were all in agreement with Paul. But they knew that Paul had not walked with them under the tutelage of the Lord, had not participated with them in their calling as apostles, and had not been with them when Jesus delivered their commission to preach the gospel to the ends of the earth. Therefore they did not believe he was an apostle, and their views were confirmed by the fact that Paul was not preaching the true gospel as they understood it. He preached a different gospel, and he did not share their calling. How could he be authentic? So we find Paul saying to the Corinthians,

If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you (1 Corinthians 9:2)!

### His Apostleship

Paul was a self promoter par excellence. He knew it would be of no use to claim to have been appointed to the Apostolate on the same terms as the others, because they knew better and would soon show him up as a fraud. It appears he decided to use this to his advantage by deliberately positing his apostleship on different terms from theirs.

The earthly Jesus appointed them, but he was appointed by the heavenly Christ, the sole person so appointed, therefore his appointment was superior to theirs. He was appointed last of all, and therefore his appointment was, again, superior to theirs. He was commissioned to go to all nations but, in his view, they only to the Jews even though the Great Commission sent them also to all nations. But Paul needed the aura of apostolic calling in common with theirs to strengthen his ministry among the gentiles, and he needed at least the appearance of their support. If it became known to those to whom he preached that the original apostles all rejected him as a false apostle, they would hardly have heeded him. So he presented himself as having the apostle's support. When it was impossible to avoid a public breach, he sought to minimize the rupture and always presented it as having an outcome favorable to his points of view, as in the case of his conflict with Peter at Antioch. (Galatians 2:11-21) And, with this one exception, he never named his opponents at such times so as not to be on record as being opposed by those whose credentials were beyond question.

If only we had copies of the many documents these men must have produced! How many mysteries would be resolved! But no such documents have survived, probably having been destroyed in the 70 AD catastrophe at Jerusalem, or perhaps they were suppressed and destroyed by the members of the Pauline School who came to dominate the Jesus Movement, or they were hidden away like the Dead Sea Scrolls so as never to have been found, or they were simply worn to shreds in the hands of early disciples.

The office of apostle of Christ, (one sent by Christ) is a high one, and only twelve persons (plus Matthias) were appointed to fill it by Jesus, as I have indicated above. But Paul, claiming to be an exception, then also accepts others of his friends as being apostles through their association with him. Only in Paul's letters and in the Acts, written by Luke who was Paul's protégé, is anyone other than the Twelve designated an apostle.

### More Than an Apostle

Paul postured not only as an apostle, the greatest of the apostles, but also as more than an apostle. In this he was not prone to subtle concealment of his posturing, but was most straightforward, apparently not realizing what he was doing, but nevertheless revealing the self-aggrandizing person he really was. That he could present himself as being the most lowly of apostles, then assert his superiority, betrays hypocrisy that was usually masterfully concealed. In

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every letter he was careful to affirm his apostolic calling and its divine origin, once emphatically denying that it came through men, but only through Christ by the will of God (Galatians 1: 11, 12). In all except the Thessalonian letters, the one to Philippi, and the personal letter to Philemon, he included this apostolic affirmation in the first line of the letters as I have stated above in the discussion of his office. I list these first lines here once more because they contribute to the conception of his self aggrandizement. Remember: Paul wrote all these lines; there is no one other than him on record as a witness to his high calling. The fact that now, after two millennia, untold millions around the world honor him as an apostle of the Lord only shows how effective a self promoter he really was!

He engaged in self-promotion at the beginning of most of his letters:

Paul, an apostle -- not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead -- and all the brethren who are with me, To the churches of Galatia: . . . (Galatians 1:1,2).

Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and our brother Sosthenes, To the church of God which is at Corinth . . . (I Corinthians 1:1,2).

Paul, and apostle to Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the church of God which is at Corinth: . . . (II Corinthians 1:1).

Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures . . . Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all nations . . . To all God's beloved in Rome: . . . (Romans 1:1-6).

The above are introductions to some of the undoubtedly authentic letters. In this group also belong I Thessalonians, Philippians, and Philemon, and Paul did not begin those letters thus, probably for reasons I have already suggested. The Philippian church was the only church that routinely provided financial aid in the course of his ministry. This fact shows that there was no challenge to his apostleship there and therefore no need to open his letters to this church with an assertion of his calling. I Thessalonians, probably the first written of all Paul's letters, was written prior to his having received so many challenges to his apostleship, and therefore before he realized the need, within himself, to assert his calling more positively. Nevertheless, to the Thessalonians he was careful to assert his calling in the body of the letter:

. . . but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please men, but to please God . . . nor did we seek glory from men, whether from you or from others, though we might have made demands as apostles of Christ (I Thessalonians 2:4-6).

It was in Corinth and Galatia that his apostleship received its most vigorous challenges; he not only began his letters to them by assertions of his high calling, but also returned to affirm it in the body of those letters. Note the following examples:

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God . . . (I Corinthians 2:12).

For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God which is with me (I Corinthians 15:9,10).

But it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has commissioned us; he has put



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his seal upon us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee (II Corinthians 1:21).

But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to (in) me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles . . . (Galatians 1:15,16).

He did the same to the Roman church, which had never seen him, although many of its members were known to Paul, having served with him elsewhere – persons such as Priscilla and Aquila.

But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder because of the grace given me by God to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:15,16).

The letters of which his authorship is challenged by some scholars – II Thessalonians, Colossians, Ephesians, and the pastorals, I Timothy, II Timothy and Titus, also carry this theme forward in a similar way, which is one reason to suppose them to be authentically Pauline. II Thessalonians begins with the same introduction as I Thessalonians, and if it was not copied from I Thessalonians, suggests that this is an authentic letter. On the other hand, II Thessalonians contains no assertions of divine sanctions of his ministry, which is a good reason for doubting its authenticity. Colossians and Ephesians are, however, no exceptions:

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ at Colossae: . . . (Colossians 1:1,2).

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are also faithful in Christ Jesus: . . . (Ephesians 1:1).

The pastorals are not exceptions either, as all begin with the apostolic assertion:

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by command of God our father and of Christ Jesus our hope, To Timothy, my true child in the faith (I Timothy 1:1,2).

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God according to the promise of the life which is in Christ Jesus, To Timothy, my beloved child: (II Timothy 1:1,2).

Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to further the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth which accords with godliness, in hope of eternal life which God, who never lies, promised ages ago and at the proper time manifested in his word through the preaching with which I have been entrusted by command of God our Savior, To Titus, my true child in a common faith (Titus 1:1-4).

It is unclear why Paul might have felt the need to affirm his calling and apostleship at the beginning of these personal letters. Both letters to Timothy also contain further affirmations in the body of the text. This could very well signify that Paul did not write them, but someone else who, aware of Paul's penchant for affirming his calling at every turn, included these affirmations as signs of authenticity.

As his ministry progressed, he not only asserted the superiority of his ministry on the grounds of having been the last called in a special vision of the heavenly Christ, but he also professed to have been the first called, having been designated an apostle before he was born. He did this by identifying himself with the prophecy of Isaiah 49, as I have demonstrated above, and it shows in his letters in several places, especially in Galatians 1:15:

But when he who had set me apart before I was born (from my mother's womb), and had called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to (in) me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with flesh and blood.

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Suppose, my reader, that you were fully assured that you, personally, were prophesied by the great prophets, Isaiah and Jeremiah, and that on you personally rested the responsibility for taking the light of God to the Gentiles, to all nations and to the end of the earth. Can you imagine what such a conviction would do to your head? Well, It did the same thing and more to Paul, convincing him of the divine status of his calling and causing him to compare himself with the greatest servants of God through the ages, and to feel that on his shoulders rested the sole task

of enlightening the nations. So we see in the following verses some of the manifestations of his delusion of grandeur:

1) He thought he was the very reincarnation of Christ: also, that he (and his followers) had the mind of Christ.

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; . . .  
(Galatians 2:20).

But we have the mind of Christ (I Corinthians 2:16).

If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit which dwells in you (Romans 8:11).

It first happened to Paul, this reincarnation of Christ in his body. The first evidence of what is justly called Paul's megalomania appears in his account of the Damascus Road experience. Hyam Maccoby, in *The Mythmaker: Paul and the Invention of Christianity*, has pointed to this. Maccoby asserts that Paul did not refer to this as his conversion, but as his revelation. He was not converting to a view of true religion previously shared by others such as Stephen, or the other apostles, but was having a new revelation, one superior to that given to Peter and the other apostles, as evident in his written words:

But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia; and again I returned to Damascus (Galatians 1:15-17).

One little word in the above quotation is highly significant, the "in" in the phrase, "in me." Paul is not saying that it pleased the Lord to reveal his Son *to* him, as some translations indicate. He was clearly stating his conviction that he, in his person, was a reincarnation of Jesus, who was thus revealed *in* him, that is, in his body of flesh. We should note that he often referred to himself as the slave of Christ, emphasizing an humbler status; yet he also thought of himself as Christ reincarnate, which is truly an exalted position!

Furthermore, as Jesus suffered in the flesh for us, so Paul thought of himself as suffering in exactly the same way, even as making up what was lacking in the suffering of Jesus, as though that was not sufficient apart from Paul. We find this tidbit in Colossians 1:24:

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's affliction for the sake of his body, that is, the church . . .

He not only thought of himself as foretold by Isaiah, together with his ministry, but he found that, apart from his afflictions, the afflictions of Jesus were not sufficient to save his church. Any one of us making such a claim today would become a laughing stock in the church, at best. Or, we would be accused of blasphemy (see Vernard Eller, *War and Peace*, p.141). But Paul made it and is honored for it by those who have comprised the church through the centuries. How easy it is to overlook the warts of a hero of the faith, even to make them into badges of honor! But they

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are still warts.

We do not often think of the principle of reincarnation as applied to any phase of Christianity, but here it is! Paul is the channel through whom the Spirit flows out to every nation of the world, for not only is he a reincarnation of Christ, but those who believe in his gospel also share in this marvelous transformation. It would have been transmitted to them by the laying on of Paul's hands, just as the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles hands in Acts 8:17, and as he indicated in II Timothy:

Hence I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; for God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love and self-control (II Timothy 1:6,7).

A. N. Wilson (Paul, p.184) writes that, had Paul been living in a Hindu or Buddhist culture, he might well have regarded himself as an avatar. He not only had the mind of Christ but, in his own body, he bore the wounds of Jesus; he had, like Jesus, ascended into heaven and come down again. Not only so, but if we can believe that Paul was the writer of at least a part of the Colossian letter, his sufferings made up what was lacking in the afflictions of Christ for the sake of his body (Colossians 1:24).

2) He thought that he could be in a variety of places, in spirit; or at least he wished to convince others that he could so transport himself. Like the Spirit of Jesus, his spirit was capable of transmigration to other bodies and places. This shows up in I Corinthians when he was instructing the church how to deal with the man who was living with his father's wife:

For though absent in body, I am present in spirit, and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment in the name of the Lord Jesus on the man who has done such a thing. When you are assembled, and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus (I Corinthians 5:3-5).

Was he commanding the church to execute the man? What else could be meant by this deliverance to Satan for the destruction of the flesh? Only through death does one destroy the flesh. But no, he probably did not mean that they were to put this man to death, because there is no evidence that Paul claimed such authority elsewhere, though the scholars have labored long and hard in efforts to otherwise bring light to this obscure passage. Nevertheless it is consistent with Paul's image of himself and his authority as the exalted emissary of God. It is also consistent with the conduct of Paul's successors in the church hundreds of years later who gave themselves the authority, in the name of God, to put heretics to death. This included burning them at the stake. Thus they at once delivered them to Satan and destroyed the flesh!

3) He was so bold as to claim to be the father of his converts, a status reserved by Jesus for God alone:

For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many Fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel (I Corinthians 4:15).

I appeal to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I have become in my imprisonment (Philemon 10).

I have already pointed to I Corinthians 4:15 as an example of how Paul disobeyed commandments of Jesus. Here we point to it as an example of his frequent self-promotion. Jesus reserved this term, and the unique relationship it defines, for the Father in heaven. We have not two fathers, the heavenly and the earthly. Jesus was very precise in asserting this exclusive relationship by saying that *You have one Father who is in heaven* (Matthew 23:9). So in this case Paul is aspiring to an office that can be legitimately occupied only by God. One

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cannot exalt oneself more than this!

4) He saw himself as manifesting the perfection of Christ and therefore urged his disciples to imitate him; this, again, is a role reserved by Jesus for the Father. There are many passages where Paul does this, one being I Corinthians 4:16, immediately following v. 15 listed above, which continues as follows:

I urge you then, be imitators of me (Corinthians 4:16).

Then we have the following a few chapters later:

Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ (I Corinthians 11:1).

How he intends for this to be applied is suggested in other passages, such as the following:

What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, do; and the God of peace will be with you (Philippians 4:9).

Even Jesus did not call on his disciples to imitate him. When pointing out to them the proper model for imitation, he always designated the Father. He indicated this directly in the following passages:

You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect (Matthew 5:48).

Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful (Luke 6:36).

Jesus called on his disciples to follow him, but he always pointed to the Father as the standard for imitation, though he did not use the word, imitate (*mimeomai*). This comes out repeatedly in many ways in his teaching, as for example, in the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant.

There, a master of many servants called them before him to settle their accounts. One came who owed an astronomical amount and could never pay. He implored the master, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay you everything. Out of pity the master forgave him the debt. But then this same servant confronted another servant who owed him a little, and he could not pay. When his creditor refused to show mercy and had him put in prison, other servants reported what had happened to the master, who rescinded the forgiveness of the unmerciful servant and delivered him to the jailers. Obviously, the master, or lord, of those servants represented the Father in this parable, and the servants were expected to imitate the master in the dispensation of mercy. Jesus had this in mind in delivering the beatitudes, especially the one regarding mercy:

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy (Matthew 5:7).

As God is merciful, so must his children be merciful. It is fitting that children should imitate their parents; those who do, qualify to be called the children of their Father. That is why Jesus did not call on us to imitate him, but only the Father in heaven, for only he is our Father, and we become his children through imitating him in all things. Therefore we find Jesus instructing us to love our enemies and to pray for those who persecute us so that we may be the children of our Father who is in heaven. Paul never began to understand the exclusiveness of the Fatherhood of God, and as a result he made himself the father of his disciples and called on them to imitate him, not God. This constituted the maximum possible self-exaltation, for he could not make himself greater than God!

I recognize, of course, that Paul did not claim to be God in person, or to be numbered among the Gods. After healing a man who had been a cripple from birth at Lystra, the people sought to worship Paul and Barnabus as gods, but they restrained the people, saying:

We also are men of like nature with you (Acts 14:15).

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Nevertheless the evidence is strong that he considered himself above others as regards his relationship to God, and especially as regards his calling and commission as apostle – this least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle (I Corinthians 15:9), who nevertheless thinks that I am not the least inferior to these superlative apostles. (II Corinthians 11:5)

5) He considered that his words were the very words of God, just as professed by Jesus, and may therefore have seen himself likewise foretold in the prophecy of Deuteronomy 18, which truly applies only to Jesus, who spoke the words of God in the world, a prophet like unto Moses. He also issued commands in the name of Christ, calling them commands of the Lord, while himself disobeying commandments of Christ. To the Corinthians he could write:

If any one thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord. If any one does not recognize this, he is not recognized (I Corinthians 14:37,38).

And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers (I Thessalonians 2:13).

This conviction is consistent with his lack of interest in the utterances of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels. These words must have been available to Paul in the Jesus Tradition, and the apostles and other disciples who heard Jesus surely recalled his words and repeated them to everyone who showed interest. This, presumably, included Paul. Yet in his letters, and in the speeches recorded in the Acts by Luke, Paul makes few references to the utterances of Jesus. Even when he makes such references, it is not in order to quote them and emphasize their importance as having been spoken by Jesus, but in an off-hand fashion, more like allusions. When, in the Galatian letter, he emphatically denied having received any portion of his gospel from man or through man, this would seem to have included the man Jesus:

From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view (after the flesh); even though we once regarded Christ from a human point of view, we regard him thus no longer (II Corinthians 5:16).

Paul's conviction that he had received his gospel directly from the heavenly, risen Christ in trances or other ecstatic experiences, as 'apocalypses' or revelations, appears to have left him with no curiosity about the teaching of Jesus the man. His revelation came directly from heaven and must in any case be far superior to anything transmitted by a man of flesh. The words of Jesus were presumably, even at this early time, written down in some form; but Paul had an aversion to written words, preferring to go directly to the source; that is, to God in the Spirit:

Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our sufficiency is from God, who has qualified us to be ministers of a new covenant, not in a written code, but in the Spirit; for the written code kills, but the Spirit gives life (II Corinthians 3:5,6).

His position, then, was to seek the words that came from the prompting of the divine Spirit that was in him, and whatever came forth in that manner was nothing less than the Word of God. On this basis there was no need to investigate the teaching of Jesus. But of course the teaching of Jesus did constitute one body of testimony with which Paul had to deal, and he did so in such a manner as not to offend others who may have had a higher estimate of their worth than did he. A prime example of his use of the teaching of Jesus in this way is in the discussion concerning divorce and marriage in I Corinthians:

To the married I give charge, not I but the Lord, that the wife should not separate from her husband but if she does, let her remain single or else be reconciled to her husband) - and that the husband should not divorce his wife. To the rest I say, not the Lord, that if

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any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her (I Corinthians 7:10-12).

He had found nothing in the Jesus tradition to guide him in the case of a mixed marriage, that is, one in which the brother has an unbelieving wife (as, indeed, there is nothing specific, nor need there be). So he presumed to make up his own command, and to be very clear in specifying that this was not of the Lord but was his alone. And we note that he places his command on par with that of the Lord, as though they carried equal authority, and he includes in this chapter the explanation:

Now concerning the unmarried, I have no command of the Lord, but I give my opinion as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy (I Corinthians 7:25).

Then he closes this series of marriage injunctions with the assertion:

And I think that I have the spirit of God (I Corinthians 7:40)!

## Conclusion

We must evaluate the character of Paul free from the shackles that the churchmen have clamped upon us. Then he comes through in his true colors. A truly meek and humble man would never boast of his lowliness as Paul often did; a truly meek and humble man would never boast of his superiority, as Paul sometimes did. What others cannot reveal about him because they were silenced long ago, he in his own words reveals about himself.

## CHAPTER XI

# THE PROOF'S OF HIS MINISTRY

Paul was a stranger who came out of nowhere, so to speak, and established himself as an apostle of Christ solely on the basis of trances and visions to which there are no witnesses. He previously had no association with the fellowship of disciples of Jesus, and indeed was a persecutor of the Way. Suddenly, in consequence of his apocalypse on the Damascus Road, everything changed. But I must remind you yet again that there were no testifying witnesses, and we have only his word for what had transpired inside his person. When he went forth to the nations to preach, some seventeen (Or fourteen) years later, he carried no letters of recommendation as did other apostles, and may even have been actively opposed by them, for his gospel was a different gospel, his Jesus another Jesus, his spirit another spirit. My reading of his character does not preclude an earnestness and sincere conviction concerning his calling. If he had not been so thoroughly convinced within himself, how could he have persevered through much opposition and suffering to preach his gospel to the Gentiles, and how could he have been so persuasive to so many people?

Still, had I been in his position, I must inevitably have been called on to confirm my calling, within myself and to my disciples. Did he not sometimes say to himself, sore from a beating and stoning, ill and imprisoned, "Am I after all mistaken?" Did he never have doubts when, after many long years, the Lord, whose return he had taught others would be soon, had nevertheless not appeared? That he persevered and continued to press on confirms that there were things in his experience that proved, to his satisfaction, that he was not deceived and that it was Jesus and not Satan who spoke to him on the way to Damascus. What were those things?

We do not have to look hard to find them, for he repeatedly points to certain experiences in his ministry as seals, guarantees or proofs of his ministry. Most of them are summarized in one verse, I Corinthians 9:1, 2:

Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are not you my workmanship in the Lord? If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

Here are listed four proofs in the form of questions that beg positive answers. His sense of freedom, of liberation, from the oppressive burden and bondage of the Mosaic Law gave him much assurance. How could his ministry not be genuine when it was involved in the proclamation of a faith that had done so much for him? Once he was in agony, crying out within himself, "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of Death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 7:24,25)! Now the spirit of thanksgiving overflowed within him as he experienced the liberation of his soul. This was real! It is no wonder he was assured by this freedom.

Next, there was what was to him his incontrovertible commission as Apostle to the Gentiles, given by Christ himself, and this was another seal of his ministry in the Lord. This worked together with the third proof, his vision of the risen Lord, leaving him with the conviction that he was the last to see the resurrected Messiah and to hear a voice from his mouth. It was this voice that sent him to the Gentiles and, somehow, tied him to the prophecy of Isaiah, that he should be a light to the

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Gentiles, and assured him that God had called from his mother's womb to carry the message forth to the world.

There was a man, a very devout man, bound and driven by forces within him to serve God by purging the ranks of Jews of any taint of heresy, including that of those who followed the man called Jesus, of Nazareth. It was on the Damascus road, in pursuit of the People of the Way, that it all finally came to a climax. Was it the unbearable pressures building in his psyche that exploded, sending him into a severe attack of hysteria that blinded his eyes and left him helpless? Was it a thunderstorm from which lightning suddenly shattered the ground in the midst of Paul and his companions and that had the effect of causing him to feel that it was meant especially for him? Was it the Lord Jesus himself speaking to him from heaven and saying, I am Jesus whom you are persecuting? (Acts 9:5). Was it some combination of these?

We can never know, but of one thing we can be certain: for Paul it was real, genuine, and the end of one life and the beginning of another. It was the climactic event that led to the profound conviction, expressed in the words, "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live" (Gal. 2:20). This was the new man who, as he related in II Corinthians 12, fourteen years earlier was caught up to the third heaven – whether in the body or out of the body he did not know, but he did know that this man was caught up into Paradise – whether in the body or out of the body he did not know, and who heard things that man cannot utter. He was so very elated by the abundance of revelations that a thorn in the flesh was given him to harass him and suppress his elation.

It is doubtful that this was the Damascus Road experience, for the chronology of "fourteen years" is difficult to relate to that event. This must therefore have been yet another astonishing revelation that came to him sometime during the years in Cilicia that intervened between Damascus and the beginning of his work as an Apostle. It was another one of the "revelations" that set him free from bondage to the law and bound him to his vision of the heavenly Christ. There, in Cilicia, the revelations continued and his faith finally assumed the final form, in which he was the man chosen by God to carry the message of salvation to the world as expressed in Isaiah 49.

Then, finally, comes the fourth seal of his ministry – his converts in all the churches that he founded throughout the Eastern Mediterranean. "You," he said to the Corinthians, "are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord." Everywhere he went he found people who believed and who cleaved to the Lord as preached by him. This was the icing on the cake! Think how you would be confirmed if, having received a message from the Lord, having seen the Lord and been given a commission as apostle to the Gentiles, and having learned from him through an abundance of revelations a most wonderful and liberating message that was confirmed in the ancient prophets of your people, you found everywhere men and women lining up to believe and to place their trust in the Lord and in your apostleship?

Other "apostles" appeared bearing letters of recommendation from the Mother Church, but Paul proudly pointed to the disciples at Corinth and said, "You yourselves are our letter of recommendation!" (II Corinthians 3:2)

But on this cake even the icing has icing. Not only did disciples appear everywhere, but also a special gift was given to all, the gift of the Spirit, which became another seal of his apostleship:

But it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has commissioned us; he has put his seal upon us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee (II Corinthians 1:21,22).

This "*arrabon*," this down payment, like earnest money, is proof that the calling is genuine and that it will be fulfilled in the divine glory according to the eternal promise. And so, everywhere Paul's churches arose, there arose these manifestations of the spirit, this certain feeling, this ecstasy, this prophesying, this speaking in tongues, and though Paul saw that it was a guarantee



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that could be abused, he nevertheless rejoiced that "I speak in tongues more than you all." He rejoiced that whether he was in his right mind, or whether he was "beside himself," it was for the Lord.

And yet there is more, for there were the signs and wonders to further seal the validity of his ministry:

The signs of a true apostle were performed among you in all patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works (II Corinthians 12:12).

We do not know what signs and wonders Paul performed at Corinth, but they were most probably the same as those Luke speaks of as having been performed later at Ephesus: And God did extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so that handkerchiefs or aprons were carried away from his body to the sick, and diseases left them and evil spirits came out of them (Acts 19:11).

We should not be surprised that so much assurance and so many infallible proofs have fueled the spiritual experience of much of the West for many centuries and even now continues to work its wonders. It is not for me to pass the final judgment on such a man or on the work he so mightily and heroically pursued against all odds. But I know this from the depths of my heart, knowledge with assurance no less strong than that of Paul as he spoke of the many seals of his ministry: he did not preach the Gospel that Jesus preached.

This is a grave and serious statement, and one I must hasten to support. What was the gospel of Paul, and how did it differ from that of Jesus? Toward an answer to these questions we turn now to present a brief summary of the gospel of Paul, as I have already developed the gospel of Jesus in Book I. The treatment of Paul's gospel can be brief because it is already understood throughout Christendom, although there are variations of interpretation. Jesus' gospel, on the other hand, is almost unknown in Christendom and its presentation has required much more consideration. This has been done prior to making a comparison of the two gospels, which addresses the question of how Paul's gospel differs from that of Jesus. You will then see more clearly why I classify Paul as a stranger to Jesus and his chosen apostles, and why I cannot but identify him with the "stranger" of John 10:5.

## CHAPTER XII

# THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO PAUL

## That Which is of First Importance

Within the context of Paul's gospel there are diverse opinions and practices as represented by the many churches that look to him for their spiritual guidance. Behind all the differences there is a certain unity within which most of the disciplines have built their basic theologies. This serves as a common ground of the gospel, and it is this common ground that we will examine and define here. Its event structure was most succinctly stated by Paul in I Corinthians 15, where we find his gospel summarized under five different headings that he presented "as of first importance."

- 1) Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures.
- 2) He was buried and raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures.
- 3) He now reigns from the right hand of God, and will reign until all his enemies have been destroyed.
- 4) Then comes the resurrection when he will return to the earth and raise the souls who sleep. Those who are in Christ will be raised with imperishable bodies, and all will be judged.
- 5) Then comes the end. He will deliver the kingdom of God to the Father after destroying every rule, authority, and power.

We will briefly examine each of these events as needed to understand how Paul incorporated each event into his gospel. First, however, we will seek out the essence of the word "gospel" and provide a concise definition, also derived from Paul's understanding of the term. The word literally means "good message" or "glad tidings" in its New Testament Greek original. By transliteration into English, it becomes "evangelist" or "bearer of good tidings." Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon summarizes the Christian Gospel (more or less derived from Paul) as follows: "It comprises the preaching of Jesus Christ as having suffered death on the cross to procure eternal salvation for men in the kingdom of God, but as restored to life and exalted to the right hand of God in heaven, thence to return in majesty to consummate the kingdom of God; so that it may be more briefly defined as the glad tidings of salvation through Christ; the proclamation of the grace of God manifested and pledged in Christ; the gospel."

With this as basic, let us now return to the five-member event structure. Before focussing upon each one, we should note that the five events encompass past, present, and future. The first two are from the past, the third is present, while the fourth and fifth belong to the future and to the substance of prophecy.

## 1) Christ Died for Our Sins According to the Scripture.

This refers directly to his crucifixion, and leads one who hears it for the first time to ask certain

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questions: How is it that he died for our sins? Why did he die for our sins? Why must any one die for sin, his own or other's? What is sin, anyway? If we acknowledge Paul's claim to be an "Hebrew of the Hebrews" and a "Pharisee of the Pharisees", (which many doubt), we can reasonably assume that he resolved these questions by reference to the Law, the Psalms, and the Prophets. This tends to be confirmed by his immediate qualification, "according to the scriptures." Keeping in mind that Paul's scripture was the Septuagint, the Greek translation from the Hebrew, we can reasonably suppose that he meant to be proclaiming concord between his gospel and the scriptures, and that he defined "sin" as a scriptural concept.

Now, in I John 3:4, we read that "sin is the transgression of the law." This seems to have been Paul's definition also, and is fully illustrated by the notorious passage in Romans 7, where he deals specifically with the single illustrative law, "Thou shalt not covet." This is the tenth of the Ten Commandments, the one that Paul found impossible to obey. It was impossible for him and therefore for all men. He struggled mightily against the power of covetousness, but was helpless against it, and, in the power of the conviction of his sin, he could only cry out helplessly,

Wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death (Romans 7:24)?

But the law also informed him that

The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23).

He interpreted this to mean that he, Paul the sinner, was therefore spiritually dead, dead to God in heaven, and therefore his body, the body of his habitation, was a body of death. He had been a proud man, thinking of himself to that certain point as a morally strong individual but when the truth of his own sinfulness came crashing in upon him, he could only conclude that he was no exception. His must be an experience common to all men; therefore,

All have sinned and fallen short of the Glory of God (Romans 3:23).

Then from his experience with the risen Christ he immediately expressed the resolution of his problem, indeed, for him the resolution of the same problem for all men,

Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (I Corinthians 15:57, Romans 7:25)!

So, strive as he might, he could not keep the Law perfectly (elsewhere he contradicts this, Philippians 3:6), therefore he was dead in sin through transgression of the Law. Then, from interpretation of the Septuagint, the "scriptures", he understood that God had set forth a specific way to save men from sin and secure their forgiveness. This consisted of the sacrifice system centered in the temple worship, according to which, and "according to the scriptures" the blood of bulls and goats could atone for or wash away sin (Hebrews 10:4). Paul had found these things futile in that they did not cleanse his conscience or give him a sense of forgiveness and he concluded,

By the works of the law shall no flesh be justified (Romans 3:20) .

He then reinterpreted this aspect of the scriptures to be only a

. . . shadow of what is to come, but the substance belongs to Christ (Colossians 2:17).

Thus, the scriptures are still valid, only they are the "shadow" only. Furthermore, to his great joy, he was also able to find this substance in the scriptures, so that everything continued to be "according to the scriptures." By recourse to the suffering servant passages of Isaiah, most pointedly Chapter 53, he understood that Jesus Christ had become the Lamb of God who sacrificed himself and atoned for our sins through crucifixion. The Prophet pointedly expressed it as follows:

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Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all (Isaiah 53:4-6).

Christ Jesus became our sacrifice; by spilling his blood as the Lamb of God, he has atoned for and expiated our sins.

So, summarizing our original question, What is sin? It is the transgression of the law. Why did Christ die for our sins? Because we were helpless, and without shedding of blood there is no remission of sin. How did he die for our sins? By becoming the Lamb of God, a human sacrifice laying his life down at Calvary in our behalf, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God. And, wonder of wonders, it was all “according to the scriptures.” Therefore we have Event No. 1 in our event structure above, that which is of first importance,

Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures.

## 2) The Burial and Resurrection

For Paul, the burial was incorporated only because one must be buried to be resurrected, and it is that resurrection that forms, after the death, the central element in Paul's gospel. People simply do not rise from the dead, yet he was convinced by his vision on the Damascus Road that he had confronted Jesus raised from the dead, and this quickly persuaded him that Jesus Christ lives. This was certainly a miracle, and could only have been accomplished by God. Therefore Paul concluded that Jesus was

designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord . . . (Romans 1:4).

So central was the event of the resurrection that Paul could say to the Corinthians,

. . . if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain (I Corinthians 15:14).

Then he proceeded immediately to hammer down this conviction with the further statement,

If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins (I Corinthians 15:17).

Recalling the appearance of Jesus to him on the Damascus Road, Paul interpreted this to be an appearance of like nature as the appearances to the apostles and other disciples, and the last of the appearances.

Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me (I Corinthians 15:8).

That the resurrection came on the third day, “in accordance with the scriptures” can only confirm our conviction that Paul was thoroughly familiar with the Jesus Tradition. It was Jesus who said to the Jews,

An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign; but no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so will the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth (Matthew 12:39,40).

I have found only one other passage of Old Testament scripture that could possibly refer to

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Jesus' third day resurrection, other than this one by Jesus. This is Hosea 6:1,2:

Come, let us return to the Lord; for he has torn, that he may heal us; he has stricken, and he will bind us up. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him.

Jesus was certainly familiar with the context of this passage, for it contains the "I desire not sacrifice" quotation that he twice used in Matthew. Yet it is difficult to see how this works into Jesus' resurrection, while it is clear that Jesus took Jonah as an allegory pointing to himself. As God had commissioned Jonah to preach repentance to Nineveh, so also He had commissioned Jesus to preach repentance to Israel, which sets the stage for a comparison of Jonah's three days in the belly of the whale with Jesus' resurrection on the third day. This idea would have appealed to Paul, and so he found the resurrection of Jesus to be "on the third day, in accordance with the scriptures."

The resurrection of Jesus was the supreme event in Paul's gospel. His vision of the risen Christ is what convinced him of the resurrection of Jesus, and he concluded that this was proof of the power of the Christ to raise his followers from the dead. Christ was only the first fruits; his followers are to follow him in a second, general resurrection of those who have died in Christ. Paul compared the risen Christ with Adam. Adam was the first man, the man of flesh. Christ is the new man, the man of spirit. As in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive! Adam was a man of earth, of dust; Christ is the man of heaven, of spirit (I Corinthians 15:22,45f).

### 3) The Present Reign of Christ

He now reigns from the right hand of God, and will reign until all his enemies have been destroyed (I Corinthians 15:24-26). This is more evidence of his acquaintance with the Jesus Tradition, for we find Jesus saying,

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me (Matthew 28:18).

Therefore it seems strange that Paul places very little emphasis on the kingdom, whereas to Jesus, the gospel was best described as "The gospel of the kingdom." This is a phrase Paul never used in the epistles. In all his undoubted epistles he only referred to the kingdom six times: once in Romans, four times in I Corinthians and once in I Thessalonians. He makes no direct references to the coming of the kingdom, a theme that is prominent in the gospels, and three of his seven references to the kingdom are to the inheritance of the kingdom by the saints. There is no evidence of a kingdom doctrine as such, but all seven of his references are consistent with the kingdom being a present reality on the earth. While the paucity of references in his epistles show no kingdom emphasis, this may not have been true in his preaching for Luke in the Acts generally describes Paul's message in terms of the kingdom. He has him saying to the elders of the church at Ephesus,

And now, behold, I know that all you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will see my face no more (Acts 20:25).

It was also at Ephesus that he entered the synagogue and

. . . for three months spoke boldly, arguing and pleading about the kingdom of God . . . (Acts 19:8).

There also can be no doubt but that Paul believed Jesus to be the promised anointed one (Messiah, Christ) who was descended from David according to the flesh (Romans 1:3). When we see that he was also focused on "inheriting the kingdom" according to the promise of Jesus (Matthew 25:34), we draw this conclusion: Jesus was the fulfillment of the messianic prophecy

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and Paul's gospel was a gospel of the kingdom because it consisted of the good news that Jesus had been exalted to God's right hand in kingly power and glory. Many of his enemies, however, were not yet subdued and his present reign consisted primarily of his activity in subduing or destroying the enemies. Paul believed that, when the last enemy has been destroyed (death, I Corinthians 15:26), the end would follow (I Corinthians 15:24). Paul therefore believed that we are now under the rule of God in Christ, in his kingdom, and that we will "inherit the kingdom" at the judgment, precisely as Jesus had taught. As to the exact details of the victory by which Jesus overcame so as to ascend to the throne, Paul is not enlightening, at least in his epistles. He does come very close to the truth of the matter, however, when he writes to the Philippians of the humility of Jesus, and then concludes,

. . . and being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name . . . (Philippians 2:8,9).

Clearly, Paul sees the crucifixion as being an act of obedience to the Father, one of extreme humiliation that could only be rewarded with extreme exaltation. The operative word here is "obedient." Christ became obedient unto death wherefore, because of that obedience and in virtue thereof, he was exalted to the right hand of God.

The nation of the Jews had rejected Jesus. Had they accepted him as their messiah-king, I speculate that Jerusalem and Judaism would have played a central role in the manifestation of the kingdom. Their failure resulted in two things in Paul's view: their nation was to be destroyed (which it was in AD 70) and it was necessary to reinterpret the kingdom. Since the promise was not fulfilled in a worldly sense, with Jesus ruling from the throne of God in Jerusalem, it was spiritualized and became a mystery in which the throne was at God's right hand. The king also rules in a mysterious fashion.

The messianic promise was for a king to reign on the throne of David. When the Jews rejected Jesus as the promised messiah, it was necessary for the apostles, including Paul, to reinterpret the kingdom in order to keep their faith in Jesus as the anointed one. It is very likely that all the apostles were in agreement with Paul in this new, spiritualized interpretation of the kingdom, for there is no hint of any disagreement with them on this matter in his epistles, or in the other New Testament epistles. As we have seen, however, they did disagree on other matters. According to Paul's gospel, the good news is that Christ Jesus is reigning over the kingdom from the right hand of God from whence he will continue to reign until all his enemies have, one by one, been destroyed – the last of these being Death.

### 4) The Parousia and Resurrection Followed by Judgment.

I have shown above how he erred grievously in teaching and preaching that this would occur within his own lifetime. It was nevertheless the sure promise of Jesus, a fact that demonstrates once again Paul's familiarity with the Jesus Tradition. Because of the simple fact that Jesus has not yet returned to receive those who are eagerly awaiting him, this event yet comprises a key element in the prophetic ministry of the churchmen. I shall not dwell on this event because, with the exception of the timing, Paul's doctrine seems well in accord with the teaching of Jesus. Paul did not teach that Jesus was returning to rule over the earth in a millennial restoration of the kingdom on earth. From his teaching of the Thessalonians we see clearly that he anticipated that in the resurrection at the return of Christ, the saints will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and so shall ever be with the Lord (I Thessalonians 4:17). This was entirely in accord with the doctrine of Jesus, who taught that he was going to prepare a place for the disciples and that he would return to

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. . . take you to myself, that where I am there you may be also (John 14:1-3).

In the synoptics he expressed himself similarly:

Then he will send out his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven (Mark 13:27).

Yet again he has been attending to the Jesus Tradition, which includes a judgment in which the Lord says to those at his right hand,

Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world (Matthew 25:34).

Paul surely understood that the saints are to inherit the kingdom, precisely as Jesus had taught. And just as Jesus described God's vengeance on the wicked on that day, so also Paul. He wrote that

. . . when the Lord Jesus is to be revealed from heaven in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance upon those who do not know God and upon those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus (II Thessalonians 1:7, 8).

The mystery here is why, since so much of his Gospel is in accord with the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth, he failed to give credit! I believe this mystery is dispersed when we see Paul as I have portrayed him above.

### 5) The Last Event in Paul's Gospel – the End

This final event in Paul's gospel will come after Christ has destroyed "every rule and every authority and every power." This doubtless includes, but is not confined to, the sentence of everlasting destruction on the wicked at the judgment. But after he has destroyed every other power, he will then deliver the kingdom to God the Father, and will himself become submissive to him.

This fanciful portrayal of a mysterious change of administration in the very highest place has always been a problem in my thinking. It suggests that the risen Christ is not now subject to the Father, and therefore the kingdom is as yet only the kingdom of Christ and not yet the kingdom of God. I believe that here Paul is involved in a confusion of complex ideas based on his understanding of Psalms 8 and 110. He must reign, says Paul,

. . . until he puts all his enemies under his feet (I Corinthians 15:25).

This may be drawn from Psalms 8:6 (thou hast put all things under his feet) and Psalm 110:1 (The Lord says to my lord, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool"). Psalm 110 is certainly a prophecy of the enthronement of the Messiah. But Psalm 8, the only one that speaks of putting all things "under his feet," as the context clearly shows, refers to the giving of dominion over all creatures to the first man, Adam, and to Adam's descendants, collectively described as "the son of man" (Genesis 1:28). Some (see Hebrews 2:5f) draw support for Jesus' designation of himself as "son of man" from this text. Paul understood it in that fashion, and found it necessary to go on to explain that "it is plain that he is excepted who put all things under him." In other words, God did not subject himself to the Son. It does not follow, however, that the Son will be subjected to the Father only after all things are put under him.

### Paul's Great Failure

I define now the substance of Paul's great failure to adequately comprehend the Gospel. You

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note how he started by saying that he had delivered to the Corinthians as of first importance what he also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures. His gospel therefore began with the death of Jesus, and did not draw substantively on anything prior to that. It did not draw on the life of Jesus, or on the gospel that Jesus preached. It did not openly draw on the utterances of Jesus. It was "in accordance with the scriptures" but it was not in accordance with the words of the Lord. If he were standing before me at this moment, he might quickly direct my attention to his assertion that this gospel, which is of first importance, is what "I also received." But this must be read in the light of his statement in Galatians,

. . . the gospel, which was preached by me, is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from man nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ (Galatians 1:11,12).

Therefore it did not come from the man, Jesus, but came only from the visions that appeared to Paul and that he identified with the risen Christ. He therefore saw no need of reliance on the utterances of Jesus of Nazareth, and gave little heed to them. Did the risen Christ then repeat the words of Jesus to Paul in his visions? No, for in that case, Paul's gospel would have conformed in every point to that of Jesus. Would the risen Christ have delivered a different message to Paul than he delivered to the disciples as Jesus of Nazareth? No, for Jesus assured us that, though heaven and earth pass away, his word will not pass away. It is therefore, according to Jesus, the permanent and final word from God to men.

I have been careful to note above, many times, that Paul was familiar with the Jesus Tradition, the early record of Jesus' words and deeds. But he drew specifically on this tradition very few times. Indeed, as near as I can tell, he only once drew on words of the Lord that could be definitive of his gospel, but he utilized it to instruct the church in eating and observing the Lords Supper. Since Paul wrote prior to the writing of the gospels, he must have derived these words from the Jesus Tradition, but he claimed that he received them from the Lord (I Corinthians 11:23). As explained above, he meant to be understood as receiving it from the risen Christ, and so in this case failed to credit Jesus of Nazareth.

## The Law

The above survey of Paul's gospel draws primarily from I Corinthians 15 and presents the structure of five major events that form the basis of the good news. It remains to state how the individual person can receive the blessings of this gospel, that include forgiveness of sin, a new birth of the Spirit, the gift of eternal life, and the inheritance of the kingdom. Paul first found it necessary to deal with the Mosaic Code, "the law," which had formerly been the basis for receiving the divine blessing. His experience in Judaism convinced him that neither he nor anyone else could be justified before God through the law. He continued to consider the law as "good" and as laid down by God, but only as a "schoolmaster to lead us to Christ" (Galatians 3:24). It could teach us the meaning of sin and convict the conscience of sin but it could not give us a victory over sin, nor could it procure forgiveness. For Paul, it only led him into his "O, wretched man that I am!" state of despair. This despair was intensified by his understanding of God as a vengeful, wrathful deity, whose

. . . wrath is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men . . .  
(Romans 1:18).

Nevertheless, the law was the "shadow of good things to come" (Hebrews 10:1). The Hebrew sacrificial system centered in the Temple and the priesthood, according to which the blood of lambs, bulls, and goats atoned for sin and cleansed the sinner, became for Paul the shadow of that good thing that came in Christ Jesus. Jesus Christ the substance (not the shadow), by his death and the shedding of his blood at Calvary, became the "Lamb of God" as decreed by John the Baptist. His blood was shed to atone for sin, becoming the substance of which the law was



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only a shadow.

Thus it was that “Christ died for our sins according to the scripture (I Corinthians 15:3).

### Faith

And how, exactly, must one proceed to appropriate this fantastic blessing? Again, Paul found the answer in the Law, most expressly in the account of Abraham and his offering of Isaac as a sacrifice. I have reviewed this above in the discussion of Paul’s penchant for tampering with the Word of God. As he saw it, the fact that “Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness” meant that only one thing is necessary: believe! have faith! Justification, forgiveness, restoration to a new life before God is accomplished by one thing exclusive of all other considerations: faith. In particular the works of the law are excluded – the very means by which Paul had tried and failed to achieve justification before God. Believe that Jesus died for your sins and rose for your salvation, and you are saved! The resurrection of Jesus from the dead proved, for Paul, not only that he died for our sins, but that he is triumphant over all and is Lord of all. But they cannot believe, who have never heard (Romans 10:14), because “faith comes by hearing” so that many are called to go out into the world and preach the good news, following Paul’s example.

### Grace

How does this work? Here Paul drew out of his store of astonishing ideas his concept of the “grace of God.” Paul thought that, by believing in Christ and his atoning sacrifice, God in his grace turns from his wrath and chooses to see us identified with Christ. We are identified with him in his death, so much so that we have literally died with Christ. As a result, the life that we now live we really live in the spirit of Christ and of God.

If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit which dwells in you (Romans 8:11).

We have died with Christ, and have been born again to newness of life in him (Romans 6:4). As Paul expressed it to the Galatians,

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me (Galatians 2:20).

In the light of this conviction Paul discovered that the righteousness of Christ was literally imputed to him so that, as Christ lived in him and gave life to his mortal body, so that body, moved by the Spirit of Christ, lived according to the righteousness of Christ. He discovered that without reference to the law he was now able to conform to the righteousness of God as expressed by the law! Covetousness was no more a problem!

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe (Romans 3:21,22).

### Conclusion

It is so beautiful in its conception and in its expression! How easy it is to understand how Paul was so thoroughly persuaded within himself and how he was able to persuade so many others and continues to do so. How tempting to forget that it doesn't work, as demonstrated by these

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two thousand years! How tempting to forget that it omits the very foundation of Truth, which is the message of Jesus of Nazareth – the very one it seeks to glorify! What a powerful deception was unleashed on the earth by the little Jew from Tarsus!

Book III  
PAUL  
AND  
JESUS

## BOOK III

# PAUL AND JESUS

### Introduction

In Book II, in investigating Paul, I showed how he erred in one of his doctrines, that of the imminent return of the Lord, and how that error influenced other doctrines and may have interfered needlessly with the normal lives of his converts. In this case, his error is easy to establish because it is falsified by history. If he could err once, he could err in other doctrines as well, including what may have been the most important concept of his gospel, and therefore could have misled many others and set the stage for two thousand years of erroneous testimony by the churchmen. In these cases, that I will bring to light below, I will be content to demonstrate his errors by comparison with the teachings of Jesus, for they involve matters of faith that are not subject to historical proofs.

Nevertheless it will not be difficult to show him in error in the light of our Lord's words. The weight of this hinges on the significance we accord to the words of Jesus, and the basis of our interpretation of those words. I frankly and forcefully acknowledge that the words of Jesus are the only valid basis for all spiritual Truth, that they are in themselves perfectly consistent with accurate history and with true science, and that they are simple and straightforward, requiring little interpretation. To give an example, Jesus' command,

Do not resist one who is evil (Matthew 5:39),

is simple and requires no explanation, meaning exactly what he says, nothing less and nothing more. He knows how we identify those who are evil and used this word as we understand it. Attempts to relax this commandment are pursued by those who are overwhelmed by a clarity they cannot accept.

Paul had different standards of Truth. He founded his doctrines on revelations received, as he believed, directly from the risen Christ, through visions and other paranormal experiences and gave little attention to the utterances of Jesus. He specifically denied that he received his gospel from man (Galatians 1:12). This must be interpreted to include the man, Jesus of Nazareth, of whom he said,

From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once regarded Christ from a human point of view, we regard him thus no longer (II Corinthians 5:16).

Therefore, when he erred in doctrine (and we have already seen that he did err), we conclude that his doctrine, which was received through paranormal experiences (based on his own assertions) invalidates his revelations. This conclusion assumes, of course, that his claims as to the source of his doctrines are true, which is doubtful in view of our evaluation of Paul's veracity. The character traits we discussed above make it far more likely that Paul received his knowledge of Jesus and the Jesus tradition through contacts with those who were disciples of Jesus before him. Then he devised his account of revelations received from the heavenly Christ in order to establish independence from and superiority to the Jerusalem apostles and others of the original

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disciples of Jesus. In what follows we must also suggest sources for Paul's doctrine, since it will become evident that the source was not Jesus. This is not the place for an extensive study of his sources, a topic that would require another volume.

Now to set the stage for what follows by pointing to one of Paul's radical contradictions of the Word of Jesus, one that illustrates his ignorance of both Jesus and the Father. From Jesus we have this statement:

Now he is not God of the dead, but of the living; for all live to him (Luke 20:38).

But from Paul we have this:

For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living (Romans 14:9).

## CHAPTER I

# PAUL AND JESUS: SIMILARITIES

Now, as David Wenham states, much of Paul's doctrine seems in perfect step with the tradition of Jesus even though Paul made little mention of Jesus' words. This long puzzled me until I came to realize how much of Paul's doctrine was fueled by one erroneous conviction (that of the imminent Parousia) in such a manner as to accord with certain teachings of the Lord, yet without being drawn from the Lord's words. I will mention four inter-related examples here: divorce, treasure, government, and the Parousia.

### 1) Divorce

Like Jesus, he did not permit divorce. His fullest discussion of this is in I Corinthians 7:20, immediately prior to the passage listed above, where he issued the maxim,

Everyone should remain in the state in which he was called.

It is clear that he issued this because there was no point in making changes, such as divorcing or marrying, when the time was so short; nor was there any point in the slave seeking his freedom. This is one of the rare times when Paul appealed to the teaching of Jesus (To the married I give charge, not I but the Lord . . . v.10). But Jesus founded his prohibition of divorce on a totally different premise and Paul's maxim would not have pleased him. Jesus called a woman taken in adultery, then one who had had five husbands and was then living with a man not her husband. Would he have had them remain in the state in which they were called? The basis of Paul's admonition must actually be his erroneous belief that the end of all things was at hand. This is revealed by his concluding comment,

I mean, brethren, the appointed time has grown very short; from now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none . . . For the form of this world is passing away (v. 29-31).

So, Paul reveals that he knew what Jesus had taught but he concluded, because of the nature of the teaching, that the end of all things must be at hand. He could not otherwise understand why Jesus would have issued such a teaching.

### 2) Treasure

Jesus issued a very firm teaching against laying up treasure on earth. Instead, he said,

. . . lay up treasure in heaven, because where your treasure is, there will your heart be also (Matthew 6:19-21).

Paul had a very similar doctrine, though stated in different terms. He said,

Set not your affections on things on earth, but seek those things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. When Christ, who is our life, appears, then you also shall appear with him in Glory (Colossians 3:1-4).

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He wrote To the Corinthians,

For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, because we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen, for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal (II Corinthians 4:17,18).

Taken at face value, Paul's doctrine was, in this case, certainly consistent with that of Jesus and contributed much towards my recognition of the significance of the true gospel during a time when I considered Paul's words to have been as inerrant as those of Jesus. But Jesus framed his teaching on the necessity, to our salvation, of where our hearts are sited. For those whose minds and hearts are set on earthly things, there is no hope of eternal salvation because the hearts are set on earthly things and are therefore not truly devoted to the Father in love. It is of no significance, in the mind of Jesus, how long the earth will stand or how long a person may be fated to live upon it. But for Paul, who expected Christ who is our life to appear immediately, whatever one may experience on earth is only a slight momentary affliction, and everything earthly is transient. Therefore one would be foolish to aspire to earthly treasure. Paul's language, emphasizing Christ's soon appearing, the momentary character of the earthly, and the transience of what we see, says nothing about the set of the heart as a condition of salvation. I conclude that Paul made these and many other wonderful statements on the basis of an erroneous conviction that the Lord's return was to be so soon as to render all earthly experience slight and momentary.

### 3) Government

Paul's conviction of the imminent end of the age heavily influenced his acceptance of the Roman authorities. Why rebel—why mount a revolution and go to all the trouble and grief of planning and executing a violent overthrow of Roman authority in Judea – when the Lord was about to take care of it any day? It is true that in his most extensive teaching of this subject (Romans 13), Paul recognizes that the authorities are of God and that this becomes a reason for our honoring them. But then he immediately follows with this:

Besides this you know what hour it is, how it is full time now for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed; the night is far gone, the day is at hand (Romans 13:11,12).

Here again, Paul agrees with Jesus in his stance toward the Romans. Jesus also accepted the Roman authority in the story of the Tribute to Caesar. But Jesus framed his teaching with no thought of an imminent end of the age, whereas to Paul everything was about to end, including the Roman Empire. This was surely a dominant factor in the framing of Paul's entire gospel—but he was in error. One can only wonder how his letters would read had he been devoid of this one erroneous conviction. They certainly would be different!

### 4) The Parousia

Paul must have made himself acquainted with the teachings of Jesus. He pondered his words, such as those that absolutely prohibit divorce and other radical words such as the command to turn the other cheek, to love one's enemy and resist not evil. Then he concluded that such radical instructions could only be taken seriously if Jesus' return to close the age was to be so soon that obeying him would have little effect on this life. One might live with a contentious wife for a few days, weeks, or months. One might live with no thought for tomorrow, provided the Lord returns before tomorrow. So, Paul thought his doctrine of the soon appearing of the Lord was received from the Lord, but only because he failed to realize why Jesus said such things. He derived a reason – the eminent Parousia—but we know he was wrong. Paul's view here is

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similar to that set forth by Albert Schweitzer, the "interim ethic theory" that supposed Jesus' radical demands presumed a very short time before his return to bring this age to a close and inaugurate a new one. Schweitzer reasoned that the consequences of abiding by Jesus' radical commands could have been endured for such a short time but no longer and that since Jesus was mistaken in this presumption the commands are not now applicable.

How does this doctrine of the imminent Parousia compare with utterances of Jesus on the same subject? There are certain similarities, for Jesus emphasized the need to be prepared and also compared his return with the coming of a thief in the night:

Watch, therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But know this: if the householder had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have watched and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect (Matthew. 24:42-44).

Jesus also compared his return to that of the master of a house who had put his servants in charge before his departure. He said,

It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on watch. Watch therefore—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning—lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: watch (Mark 13:34-37).

Jesus' Parable of the Ten Maidens (Matthew 25:1-13) carries the same lesson of the importance of being prepared for his return.

We see that Jesus spoke repeatedly of his return to judge the nations and to receive his own unto himself. This is the Parousia that, Paul assured his disciples, was to occur in their generation. But Jesus had made no such promise as to the time of his return. He said instead,

But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only (Matthew 32:36).

This is why he placed so much emphasis on watching and on being fully prepared:

Therefore you also must be ready; for the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect (Matthew 24:44).

It will be much too late to prepare once he appears.

Why was Paul so certain that the Day of the Lord was at hand? We can only suppose that it was sparked by another statement Jesus made in his eschatological discourse in Matthew's Gospel:

Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away till all these things take place (Matthew 24:34).

Given in the same context as the no one knows prophecy above, it is even today often taken to mean that Jesus himself thought his return in judgment would be in that generation. It is not difficult to understand how Jesus' disciples could have understood him thusly.

But when we see that this did not occur and then take a second look at the text, it is clear that this is not what he meant to communicate. He was only prophesying that the judgment on the Jewish nation, fulfilled when the Romans destroyed the nation and temple in the first Jewish rebellion in the late sixties, was to transpire before that generation passed away. This text consists of five segments that need to be rearranged because it deals with two different judgment events that are easily confused as it now stands. I have explained this more fully in Jesus: The Rock of Offense.



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The sequence of the segments in this discourse is incorrect. This is an assembly of isolated sayings gathered by early disciples who, like Paul, misunderstood them to mean that Jesus would return very soon.

So, on these points, watchfulness and preparedness, Paul was consistent with the Jesus Tradition. If he had stopped there, all would be well. Where he departed from Jesus was in deciding that the return was at hand and in using that belief as basic to his approach to the whole of life's relationships including slavery, marriage and government.

Jesus never said or did anything inconsistent with the reality with which we all have to deal. When, after his resurrection, Jesus appeared to the apostles and they asked, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" He responded, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth."

Jesus' response to this question points to the Parousia; the kingdom had already come, a fact for which they were not prepared. He knew that it would take much time for his Gospel to reach the ends of the earth (it hasn't reached it yet—not the true one). Being prepared is one thing, but not marrying or divorcing because the Lord is coming immediately is something else altogether. Therein Paul erred, as both Jesus and history confirm, and he gave bad advice based on this error that he may not have given had he known the truth of the matter.

One might, without giving it much thought, say that Paul was simply placing additional emphasis on preparedness. If that were all we had to consider, it would be hard to fault him. Yet I should note here that Paul never spoke of being prepared for the Lord's return as Jesus did, using Jesus' terminology. But when we consider how things looked from the perspective of the members of his churches, say of Corinth and Thessalonica, who took him seriously and lived single lives rather than marry, we can see how the error becomes very significant. After thirty or forty years, they must have seen that they had missed important experiences of this life unnecessarily because Paul did not know what he was talking about and they had made the mistake of believing him.

Now we proceed to examine, very briefly, three related topics.

### Paul's Familiarity with the Jesus Tradition

These similarities between Jesus and Paul reveal, without a shadow of doubt, that Paul was very familiar with the Jesus Tradition, which is the body of Jesus' acts and teachings preserved in the minds of his disciples and perhaps on parchment. He took the message as he interpreted it and ran with it with all his might, with great zeal and full commitment. But he failed to understand it, not realizing the true foundation of the gospel. Consequently, he preached less than the Gospel of Jesus, his converts and disciples in all his churches believed less than the Gospel of Jesus, and the tragic results are clearly displayed throughout church history and modern Christendom.

### Paul has no Oil for His Lamp

Jesus surely had this in mind when relating the Parable of the Ten Virgins, an integral part of the eschatological discourse of Matthew 24 - 25. You know the story: how the five wise virgins took flasks of oil with them as they prepared to meet the bridegroom, whereas the five foolish virgins took no flasks of oil, having only the oil that was in their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. Then, at midnight came the cry, "Behold the bridegroom! Come out to meet him." The foolish virgins found that their lamps were going out so that they were unprepared. The wise, who had extra oil, trimmed their lamps and went with the bridegroom into

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the marriage feast while the foolish had to rush to find more oil so that when they returned they found the door shut. They pled to be allowed in but the bridegroom only called out to them,

I do not know you (Matthew 25:1-13).

The wise virgins, anticipating that the coming of the bridegroom might be delayed, not only filled their lamps with oil but took additional flasks of oil. The foolish ones, like Paul, were so sure that the bridegroom's coming was imminent that they saw no reason to provide an additional supply. It is precisely after this pattern that the bridegroom has now been delayed for two millennia. All those who, like Paul, are found without oil for their lamps are in danger of being shut out when at last he arrives.

## The Error of the Churchmen

So it is With the Churchmen. They look good and they sound good. One cannot tell, by merely looking, that there is any difference between them and true disciples precisely as one could not distinguish, by looking, between the five wise and five foolish virgins. They were virgins all, but there was a vast difference: no oil! This is what Paul and his followers did and continue to do – they fail to have oil for their lamps. This is the one essential for, without oil, lamps are useless. Paul has omitted the oil and this will be evident again and again as we continue our comparisons. It is particularly evident when we go to examine love as it appears in the doctrines of the two men.

## CHAPTER II

# THE DIFFERENCES: LOVE

We have been examining similarities, but we discovered that even within the context of similarities there are differences. Now we continue with the focus explicitly on the differences between the two men. Just as with the similarities, there is no attempt here to examine all of the differences, for they are a multitude. Instead, I have selected for examination only four major themes from Paul. It is not my purpose to pick at every gritty little detail. I only aim to show that Paul's gospel is fundamentally flawed and can in no way be reconciled with that of Jesus. These themes are love, reconciliation (of the world), eternal life and the law. This chapter will discuss their differences on the topic of love.

## Paul's Heavy Emphasis on Love

Love is a major element in the Gospel of Jesus, a fact that Paul did not fail to notice. He took it up so that it became perhaps the *summum bonum* of his gospel. The Colossian letter surely represents the thinking of Paul where we read,

Above all these put on love which binds everything together in perfect harmony (Colossians 3:1,4).

His love hymn in I Corinthians 13 posits love as the one essential, even more so than faith or hope or miraculous works. It is this binding together in the unity of love that renders all distinctions of class, sex or nation void, there being neither Greek nor Jew, slave nor free person in Christ (Colossians 3:11). Love is for Paul the first fruit of the Spirit, which is to be put on together with the many other fruits — joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control (Galatians 5:22). When we read passages such as this, and Paul's letters are packed with them, we must respond with a sense of great appreciation for the spirit of love that seemed to infuse his being. Against such there is no law (Galatians 5:22), he concluded, and this emphasis goes far to account for the broad popularity of his message. We are all attracted to it. The man surely knew how to talk the talk!

## Paul's Omission of the First Commandment

But look carefully. Jesus condensed all the law and the prophets to only two, the Great and First Commandment and the Second Commandment (Matthew 22:34-40). Under these two, the command to love God and the command to love our neighbors as ourselves, he said, depend all the law and the prophets. But Paul's condensation is as follows:

Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. The commandments, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not kill, you shall not steal, you shall not covet, **and any other commandment**, are summed up in this sentence, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law (Romans 13:8-10, see also Galatians 5:14).

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This wonderful passage seems perfectly in step with Jesus – but be careful! Which group of five virgins are we seeing here? Is it not the foolish virgins? Paul has omitted the oil! He has omitted the Great and First Commandment! Indeed, in all his letters, Paul never so much as mentions the Great Commandment – the command to love God. Not once. In discussing the teachings of Jesus above, I have defined the Great Correlate, which is the correlation of the Great Commandment with the Great Principle that Jesus also enunciated, as fundamental to the true gospel. It is obvious, therefore, that Paul has not understood this concept which comes straight from the lips of Jesus.

I do not imply that Paul utterly ignores man's love for God. (I should emphasize here that I am referring to man's love for God, not to God's love for man.) In at least three passages Paul alludes to the love of man for God:

We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him .(Romans 8:28).

But, as it is written,

What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him, God has revealed to us through the Spirit (I Corinthians 2:9,10).

And,

But if one loves God, one is known by him (I Corinthians 8:3).

One can debate that other passages refer to man's love for God, but my reading of them is that they all refer to God's love for man. Typical is Romans 5:5, where,

. . . God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us.

What cannot be debated is the fact that Paul never mentions our love for God except in brief allusions; he never focuses on it as a key component of his Gospel, and he never mentioned either the First and Great Commandment or the Great Principle, which are the cardinal doctrines of Christ. He has no oil for his lamp!

It is not only that he has made a glaring omission, but also he has by the omission made the Second Commandment to be the First Commandment. Referring back to Romans 13:8-10 above, some scholars have sought to minimize this by pushing the thought that Paul was not intending to replace the first with the second. He meant to say that the second subsumes only the commandments dealing with our relations with our neighbors as ruled by Commandments VI - X of the Decalogue. He did not intend to include Commandments I-IV, or so they say. This cannot be, however, for he plainly stated that Commandments VI - X, *and any other commandment*, are summed up in this sentence,

You shall love your neighbor as yourself (Romans 13:9).

After many years of cowering under the wrath of God, he was deeply impressed with the wonderful discovery of God's love for us and of the necessary response on our behalf to love our neighbors. Consequently he generally failed to see that nothing happens in this post resurrection period of human history until we love God! He has no oil for his lamp!

## Love for the Enemy

So, Jesus exalted our love for God together with our love for each other (our neighbors), and he made these two commandments equivalent to all the law and the prophets. Then he went on to

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command yet another love - for the enemy!

You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be the sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you salute only your brethren, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect (Matthew 5:43-48).

This came from Jesus, and to my knowledge has no precedent in human history. This is a new command, a new application of love, and only Jesus calls for it. I know of no one else before or after, independently of him, who has dared to command such a thing. With this law, Jesus went beyond the Law and the Prophets to define a new dimension of ethical action.

Paul does not extend his love to his enemy but was content to focus on love for neighbor as indicated above. It is evident from Jesus' language that to love the enemy was something more than loving a neighbor, who was equated with "your brethren" (v. 47). The original commandment, "Love your neighbor as yourself." comes from Leviticus 19:17,18):

You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason with your neighbor, lest you bear sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance or bear any grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

The neighbor is thus clearly equated with "the sons of your own people." The Jews therefore applied this command only to fellow Jews, in a culture in which the enemy, someone of another tribe, probably not of the sons of Abraham, would not be found living nearby in the midst of one's own people, but remotely, in another district, city, or kingdom. They have generally always applied this commandment after this fashion and to this day, as displayed by the violent wars of the modern state of Israel, history bears them witness that they are free to hate, war against and kill non Jews without breaking the Mosaic Law of love for neighbor. So when Paul applied this commandment that was designated by Jesus as the second, he did not consider that it was a command to love one's enemy, no matter how near the enemy may have approached.

Yet, in Romans 12 Paul does have instructions as to how to deal with an enemy, but it is nothing new. Quoting from Proverbs 25, he wrote,

If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head (Proverbs 25:21,22, Romans 12:20).

Then Paul continued,

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good (Romans 12:21).

This is hardly loving your enemy when your motive is to heap fire on his head! It sounds good; it is the nearest that Paul could come to Jesus' command to "resist not one who is evil." His advice is fine within its limits—but it doesn't equate with love for the enemy.

Comparison with the teaching of Jesus, quoted above, demonstrates a vast difference in motive. Jesus urged us to love our enemies in imitation of God the Father, as we must if we are to be children of the Father. The Father treats all the same, and so we are to love the enemy just as we love our neighbors, our friends, and our countrymen and fellow disciples of Jesus. Paul wants to heap coals of fire on his head! In the final analysis, then, the scope of Paul's ethical view coincides precisely with that of the Law and the Prophets and not with that of Jesus.

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I believe that it is utterly unrealistic to expect any human being to abide by the command of Jesus to love one's enemy apart from a commitment to Jesus' Great Principle of the hatred of life. Only then can one go on to love the foe and to also take seriously Jesus' related command,

Do not resist one who is evil (Matthew 5:39).

Paul never understood this and so omitted it – this vital element – from his gospel. He shows so much familiarity with the Jesus Tradition that he must undoubtedly have been exposed to Jesus' Great Principle. The fact that he never, in his epistles, put it forth as central to his gospel shows that he failed to understand it and therefore ignored it. Otherwise, when he came to instruct the Roman church on how to deal with their enemies, he would have resorted to the commandment of Jesus, not to an old precept from Proverbs. He could only move in the direction of Jesus, but he fell short. His lamp runs out of oil, flickers, and fades. As with every one of the hard sayings of Jesus, Paul dealt with this one by ignoring it entirely.

### The Reasons for Paul's Failure to Include the Great Commandment

Next we have to ask, "Why did Paul fail to find a place in his gospel for the Great Commandment, the one Jesus designated as first of all?" Discerning the answer is not easy and it is not likely that a sure one can be provided. Paul, not realizing any failure, certainly did not bother to answer it for us and there may not be adequate clues in his epistles to provide full assurance as to any answer that we may prescribe. Nevertheless I suggest an answer, not to prove anything, but only to show that my reading of Paul in this context is reasonable.

Paul may have failed to realize the supreme import of the Great Commandment because of complex influences growing out of the combination of his understanding of the character of God combined with his subsequent, faulty interpretation of the work of Jesus. He saw God first of all as a person of great wrath, as evidenced by such passages as Romans 1:18f:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth.

He then continues in Romans to develop a theme in which God has predestined some for wrath and some for mercy in such a fashion that the distinction does not depend upon man's will or exertion but upon God's mercy (Romans 9:16). This mercy is manifest only in Christ, Whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood to be received by faith (Romans 3:25). Paul's point here is that God's wrath rested upon all men because all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). This was particularly true of Paul himself, whose depiction of his unregenerate condition, and the resultant despair, is expressed thusly:

The good that I would do, I do not; and the evil that I would not, that I do. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death (Romans 7:24)?

Beginning thusly with the conviction that sees the wrath of God hanging above the head of the miserable and helpless sinner, who seeks deliverance from this terrible condemnation, Paul would hardly have been motivated to reach out in love to this almighty wrath. But then he found Christ, or at least he thought he did, and in the ensuing development of his faith, he saw the mercy of God manifest – but this was last, after the terrible wrath and after he had already begun to form his understanding of the work of Jesus. So what does Paul have Jesus do? He expiated the sinners (Paul's) guilt by taking upon himself, on the cross, the very wrath of God that had been hovering over all mankind. So, in Paul's experience, there could be no mercy until the wrath had been satisfied. Not until then does God's love for us become manifest for Paul:

God shows his love for us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Since,

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therefore, we are now justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God (Romans 5:8,9).

It is only at this point that Paul can acknowledge God's love for him so as to experience the reconciliation that loves God in return. But now it is too late, for he has already, under the impress of his long struggle with the wrath of God, formed his fatal misconception of the work of Christ, which is, in essence, that Christ has borne God's wrath in Paul's stead (I Corinthians 15:3, Romans 4:25). Hence we have the fallacious doctrine of substitutionary atonement. This all took place without any assist from Paul – indeed it was against all his zealous efforts to suppress the Truth. Consequently, in his amazement, Paul could see it only as a gift, absolutely free and requiring no input from man, and he went back to his roots in the Old Testament for a new conception to explain it: grace. The condemnation issuing from wrath is always first and foremost in Paul's thought, only followed by the recognition of the grace that issues from the love of God – yet, incongruously, only after the wrath has been fully sated on an innocent victim.

### Jesus' Emphasis is Opposite to that of Paul

But when we turn to Jesus, we find his view of the character of God has the very reverse emphasis to that of Paul. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus is the merciful father of the Prodigal Son. Far from hovering over the rebellious sinner in foreboding wrath, he looks upon him in suffering grief for the dead and lost offspring, desiring only to receive him again unto himself. When it happens, there is joy in heaven! For Jesus, the Father's first concern for the sinner can only be described as love and mercy driven; for Paul, it was wrath driven. When we look at the Father of the Lord Jesus, what we see first is the very opposite of that seen by Paul. We see love, compassion, concern, and mercy, where Paul saw wrath and condemnation on all men.

Unlike the God of Paul, this God and Father of the Lord Jesus is one we sinners can love from the outset, and who can therefore command us to love him from the outset, for he has first loved us and continues to do so. Jesus' God is the merciful master who readily forgives the debt of his servant on the sole condition that he have mercy on his fellow servant (Matthew 18:23-35) and only resorts to wrath, justly, when that mercy is lacking. He is the king who first openly invites all to share in the royal banquet and only resorts to condemnation when they have refused his invitation (Matthew 22:1-10). He is the householder who patiently and mercifully restrains his hand while the tenants repeatedly rebuke all his efforts at a reconciliation, who finally resorts to wrath, justly, only after they have slain his son (Matthew 21:33-46). He is the God who resorts to wrath on all men only after a long period of human history (Oh, how long!) and long after they have slain his Son and resisted all the efforts of his servants to move them to repent of their evil.

Paul's zeal for God must first have been motivated by his great fear of a wrathful deity, a fear in the grips of which it was impossible for him to conceive of loving God. Then he discovered, or thought he did, that an innocent man by the name of Jesus, from Nazareth, had been willingly slain in order to satisfy God's wrath toward all sinners. This was, to him, at last an act of love that turned him from the fear of God to the love of God – but it was misconceived. Paul's God does not require one to love him as a qualification for salvation as does the Father of our Lord Jesus. How else can we explain the absence of the First Commandment from his thought?

I leave it to you, my friends, to judge whether this is an adequate explanation for Paul's blindness to the Great Commandment as the prime component of the gospel. But it is reasonable to me. It is an especially strong explanation when we add to the above the two simple facts of the words with which we have to deal.

- First, Jesus had little use for the word *grace* that Paul brought forth to explain the free gift of salvation, and

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- Second, Paul had little use for the word *mercy* that Jesus brought forth to describe the foremost attribute of God, his undying love for all people. I do not mean that Paul did not use the word, for it appears many times in his epistles, but that Paul meant by it something other than what Jesus meant and therefore Paul had no use for the word as Jesus used it. With Jesus, it is the inmost quality of the character of God the Father, a fundamental attribute that is eternally God. With Paul it is only an arbitrary quality that the wrathful deity expresses at his pleasure, having no relevance to any man's will or to any human response. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy . . . so then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens the heart of whomever he wills. So, it depends **not upon man's will** or exertion, but on God's mercy (Romans 9:15-18).

But for Jesus, God has only mercy to display to man – **a mercy that awaits only what man wills**: "I will arise and go to my Father!"

There is therefore a radical contradiction here between Jesus and Paul. With Jesus, the mercy of God is poured out upon the man who is merciful. This is a principle enshrined in the Beatitude,

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy (Matthew 5:7).

God's mercy is never arbitrary but depends upon the mercifulness of the human individual. If you wish to obtain mercy from God, then show mercy to others and God's mercy toward you is assured. But for Paul, God is the wrathful deity who arbitrarily expresses his mercy, without reference to the character of the man: I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy!

## Love for the Self

This comparison of love in Jesus and Paul has considered our love for God and God's love for us, our love for our neighbors, and for our enemies. Yet two other applications of love must be considered for our comparison to be complete: love for the world (the *cosmos*), and love for self. We must say something about the self and then about the world.

Both Jesus and Paul apparently took love for self as a given, one that required little or no explanation. Jesus did this when he directed us to his Second Commandment, "Love your neighbor as yourself." This is, it seems to me, the only basis we have for comprehending the true significance of love. We can understand love for our neighbors only because we know about love for ourselves. Then, when we feel about our neighbors as we feel about ourselves, we understand that we truly love our neighbors. In the same way we must understand our love for God if indeed we do love him. Paul had a similar appreciation for self love, and apart from his use of Jesus' Second Commandment to sum the law, it comes forward most clearly in the Ephesian letter, in the discussion about loving one's wife:

Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body (Ephesians 28-30).

But in saying this (if Paul wrote the Ephesian Letter) he is inconsistent with his overall attitude to the flesh, and he mistakenly identifies the flesh with the self that we love. This, Jesus would never have done. Paul is inconsistent here because elsewhere he tends to despise the flesh as sinful flesh (Romans 8:3), or as that in which dwelleth no good thing (Romans 7:18). This is hardly consistent with extolling the nourishing and cherishing of the flesh. I believe that Jesus understood the self to be the "person," a spiritual entity that exists apart from the flesh and which one loves as being created in the image of the Father. Jesus could therefore say,

The flesh profits nothing (John 6:63),



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and also call for us to hate our lives in this world (in the flesh) while assuming that we will continue to love ourselves, without extolling any positive attitude toward the flesh. It is significant that Paul uses our assumed love of the self (our own bodies, Ephesians 5:25) to teach that husbands should love their wives, whereas Jesus, beginning with the hatred of life in this world, teaches that one cannot be his disciple apart from the hatred of . . . one's wife (Luke 14:26). Therefore, while it is true, as stated above, that both Paul and Jesus take the love of self as a given, Paul does not understand it correctly, and uses it to reach invalid conclusions that are inconsistent, not only with Jesus, but with his own doctrines from different contexts.

### Love of the World

Finally, let us see what Jesus and Paul had to say about love for the world. The Greek New Testament has primarily two words that are frequently translated into the English "world." These are *aeon*, or age, and *kosmos*, the orderly arrangement that defines the universe or its human inhabitants. In this segment we draw our conclusions considering only those references that come from the latter Greek word, *kosmos*, so as to leave no confusion that might result from using different words from the original text.

Paul was correct when he urged us to put on love, which binds all things together in perfect harmony (Colossians 3:14). We love the world when we are bound to it. In that case, we are of the world and the world loves us in return. This love of the world for us is manifest when men of the world honor us, praise us and hold us in high esteem. We see all this working out in our daily experience in the world, and it is perfectly consistent with Jesus' related sayings.

He said, for example,

If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you (John 15:19).

Without a doubt, Jesus' use of the word 'world' here defines the people who inhabit the world, for only they are capable of hatred or love. The world can love its own, or hate Jesus and his disciples, only because it consists of persons. While the most fundamental definition equates the world to the ordered arrangement of the physical creation, it very reasonably applies also to its human inhabitants. That this is the way that Jesus uses the word here is confirmed as he goes on immediately to say to the disciples:

If they have persecuted me, they will persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also. But all this they will do to you on my account, because they do not know him who sent me (John 15:20,21).

I have explained above how Jesus views mankind as a general category that is fundamentally hostile to him and to his disciples, and we are seeing here a kind of explanation as to why this is so. So his basic attitude toward the world is the same as his basic attitude to mankind (usually called "men"), and for the same reasons, because they are identical in these sayings of Jesus.

One of the best ways of comparing the views of Jesus and Paul on loving the world is therefore to compare their views on the category, "men." When we do this we find a marked difference, one that is adequate to explain their differences in world-attitude. Jesus warns his disciples to beware of men (Matthew 10:17). He calls them blessed when men shall hate you (Luke 6:22), but pronounces woe unto you when all men speak well of you (Luke 6:26). Perhaps most revealing is his terse statement,

That which is highly esteemed among men is an abomination unto God (Luke 16:15).

Paul has a very different view and it comes forth especially in Romans 12 & 13 where he is giving

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ethical counsel to the church at Rome.

Repay no one evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all men (Romans 12:17).

This counsel to Christians, to give heed to what is noble in the sight of all men is certainly contrary to Jesus' view, where that which men esteem highly (comparable to consider noble) is an abomination to God! He continues by encouraging Christians to be subject to the authorities in the world, for rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad.

Would you have no fear of him who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good (Romans 13:3,4).

Jesus, who was constantly afoul of the Jewish authorities and never received either their approval or that of the Roman rulers, who finally killed him, disagrees with Paul on this count also. We find the same sentiments in II Corinthians, which reflects Paul's views in this regard perfectly:

For we aim at what is honorable not only in the Lord's sight, but also in the sight of men (II Corinthians 8:21).

What is honorable among men is also honorable to the Lord? No, but what men esteem highly is God's abomination! This same sentiment shows up again in I Thessalonians:

. . .the Jews, who . . . displease God and oppose all men . . . (I Thessalonians 2:15).

This theme, that couples God to men, is too well represented in the Pauline literature to have been a thoughtless choice of words. It represents a continuing sense of his identity with men – an identity that Jesus carefully avoided. His stance here was diametrically opposed to that of Jesus. I am not denying that Paul distinguished between redeemed men and true followers of Jesus. He certainly did so, speaking of men as spiritual or unspiritual, as children of God or servants of God. But it is evident that he did not recognize the radical nature of the hostility that men as a general category must, by nature, exhibit towards those who follow in the way of Jesus.

That hostility grows out of their differing attitudes toward life in this world. Men love life, and exhibit this love in many ways, not the least of which is their careful bonding with it. If they see a man who is near the point of death after some long struggle with illness or injury, they can think of nothing higher to say of such a one than that he or she is a fighter, one who loves life and is determined to hang on. This devotion to life and attachment to it is almost universal. It is a hallmark of the race so that when an exception comes by he or she tends to be hated and despised and otherwise greeted with all hostility as though he were a traitor to all they hold dear – and so he or she is!

I have carefully defined a distinction between the attitudes of Jesus and Paul toward the world of humanity because this is necessary to recognize that they also exhibited differences in their love for it. Remembering that love binds all things together, as Paul clearly perceived, we can with some confidence draw the following conclusions:

- 1) God loves the world (John 3:16), and so Jesus loves the world and gives himself for it. It is this love that reaches out to every individual woman and man in the world, so as to draw him or her to himself, and out of the world. This love is at work in the Parable of the Prodigal Son, where the Father yearns to see the wayward one departing the world (the far country, as depicted in the parable) and returning home. The Father reaches out to us and binds us to himself, one by one, but only when we have become not of this world.
- 2) Men love the world but their perspective differs from that of God. Theirs is a love that

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binds them to the world, and so holds them apart from the Father such that whoever loves the world, hates God. So the Prodigal Son at first loved his "far country," for which he had deserted his father's house. The love of man for the world is therefore vastly different from the love of God for the world. God's love does not bind him to the world, but nevertheless it is a binding love – for it reaches into the world to bind individuals to himself and draw them out of the world.

- 3) Paul loved the world. While he made many distinctions between men of the world and the people of God, he nevertheless remained bound to it. He was so much a part of the category of mankind that he could not recognize the radical evil that moves men and women to strive to maintain their worldly attachments, all in consequence of the love of life. He failed, therefore, to recognize or witness to the radical hostility that inheres in the relationship between God and the men and women who make up the world. This shows up in his penchant for saving his life whenever it was endangered. For example, he appealed to Caesar rather than return from Caesarea to Jerusalem to face his accusers who would almost certainly have killed him. Unlike Jesus, and unlike the Prodigal Son, he did not really want to go to his Father! Jesus would have insisted on Jerusalem – in fact, he did (Luke 13:22). I must conclude, therefore, that Paul was not being thoroughly honest when he wrote,

I have a desire to depart and to be with Christ (Philippians 1:23),

I do not count my life of any value or as precious to myself (Acts 20:24),

. . . so we speak, not to please men, but to please God (I Thessalonians 2:4), and

. . . nor did we seek glory from men (I Thessalonians 2:6).

These statements do suggest that he had familiarity with the Jesus Tradition relative to the hatred of life but his penchant for saving his neck shows that he did not understand it.

- 4) Jesus, as a man, did not love the world. He hated his life in this world and it is in that sense that he hated the world and did not love it. He was not bound to it and so he journeyed to Jerusalem where he knew he would be killed because he wanted to go to his Father (John 16:28). Yet Jesus, as the savior, loves the world and seeks to draw human beings out of the world and bind them to himself. His was the attitude of the Prodigal Son after he had come to himself, looked about on his miserable plight, at last hated the far country and his life in it and looked with loving eyes toward his father's house.

## Summary and Conclusions

I must say that Paul talked the talk and wrote the writ of love. His many passages extolling love as the first fruit of the Holy Spirit and the supreme spiritual fruit have meant much to me as I labored to comprehend the life that Jesus would have us to live in this world. That has made it very difficult to finally come to the only correct conclusion, which is that on this subject Paul after all fails. He fails in three very important points.

- First, he did not know God; to know Him is to know Him first as divine Love, but Paul saw Him first as divine Wrath.
- Second, he did not understand that there is a First Commandment to which the love of neighbor is second, and
- Third, he does not understand and could not accept that Jesus would actually expect

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him, and us, to love our enemies or hate our lives. These three failings are interdependent, for had he understood what Jesus meant when he spoke of loving God, in the Great and First Commandment, he would have understood loving his enemy and hating his life because both entail the hatred of life in this world. On the other hand, to love one's friends and neighbors and brethren is a human trait, one that all understand and can apply. Therefore Jesus said,

For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you salute only your brethren, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same (Matthew 5:46,47)?

Yet this tax collector love appears to be all that Paul was teaching his churches.

## CHAPTER III

# RECONCILIATION OF THE WORLD

## Reconciliation: the Use of the Word

I stated above that Jesus had little use for the word "grace" that is so central to Paul's conception of Jesus and his work. Reconciliation is another word that comes forward repeatedly to express one of the views of Paul, but which Jesus never used, or never used according to the manner of Paul. The New Testament Greek is *katallasso* and its variant forms, all of which are found in the Pauline literature. Jesus did use a similar word, *diallasso*, once (Matthew 5:24) where he counsels one who, on taking a gift to the altar remembers that his brother has something against him, to go first and be *reconciled* to his brother, then return to offer the gift. This usage serves to define the word for us, for in this context it obviously describes the process by which one who is estranged from another does whatever is necessary to make peace and restore fellowship and friendly relations. This is precisely the usage applied to *katallasso* by Paul. Only, he applied it to the process of the restoration of fellowship with God through the death of Jesus, with one exception (I Corinthians 7:11), where he counseled a woman who had separated from her husband to either be reconciled to him or remain single. In this case his use is similar to the single use of Jesus, for it applies to the process of restoring close relationships between two persons, husband and wife.

## Their Differing Views of the World

Paul's distinctive use of the word, in contrast with Jesus, results from their contradictory views on the world as explained above during the discussion of love for the world. Jesus sees the world of men as intrinsically hostile to God and therefore non-reconcilable. It is, to God, dead, and its inhabitants are dead and require, not reconciliation, but rebirth. The world hates him and it hates his disciples and he never indicated that this would change. The world is that which lies in darkness and is inimical to the light that emanated from Jesus. When asked if there are few that are to be saved, he responded,

Strive to enter by the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able (Luke 13:23,24).

This parallels the saying from the Sermon on the Mount,

Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few (Matthew 7:13,14).

Many are called, but few are chosen (Matthew 22:14).

This informs us that Jesus never expected a positive response from the people of the world, and therefore he never expected the world to change. In the Parable of the Prodigal Son, it was only the Prodigal who changed, or repented. His far country remained the same, precisely as the world remains the same for all time.

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This is the pattern that underlies all of Jesus' teachings regarding this world of men. When those who find the Way are so very few, how can the world be changed by their extraction? And it is an extraction without compromise. This is clear from this prayer of Jesus:

I have given them thy word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world (John 17:14).

Then, speaking directly to his disciples, he said,

If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you (John 15:19)

Only a few from out of the world enter through the narrow gate and onto the narrow way, while the world remains precisely the same, hating the light, loving the dark and tripping the light fantastic on its merry way down the broad way to destruction. The contradiction that is Paul's view of the world is plainly displayed in his use of the idea of reconciliation:

If their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead? (Romans 11:15).

He has just explained his view that the trespass of Israel (the Jews) was necessary to the extension of salvation to the Gentiles; now he follows with the belief that the Jews, if they do not persist in their rejection, will likewise be saved:

I want you to understand this mystery, brethren; a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles come in, and so all Israel will be saved (Romans 11:25,26).

This is characteristic of Paul's contorted view of things, and it shows us that he had not the slightest inkling of the world as Jesus understood it and as it stands in Truth. For him, far from being intrinsically hostile to God, the world is an entity that is reconciled to God through the rejection of the Jews! His other uses of this word are similarly incompatible with the doctrine of Jesus:

. . . that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two (Gentile and Jew), so making peace, and might *reconcile* us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end (Philippians 2:15, 16).

For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to *reconcile* to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. And you, who once were estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now *reconciled* in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him provided you continue in the faith . . . (Colossians 1:20-23).

All this is from God, who through Christ *reconciled* us to himself and gave us the ministry of *reconciliation*; that is, God was in Christ *reconciling* the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of *reconciliation*. So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be *reconciled* to God (II Corinthians 5:18-20).

For if, while we were enemies, we were *reconciled* to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are *reconciled*, shall we be saved by his life. Not only so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received our *reconciliation* (Romans 5:10,11).

I shudder when I think of how fervently I preached from these text (and sang them) as a young

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pastor. Aren't they wonderful in their expression? Therein lies the power of their deception, that and the subtle manner by which Paul bound them to the person of Jesus Christ. "We beseech you," he writes, "on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God." You see how he claims to be writing on behalf of Christ a message that Jesus abhors?

Yes, indeed, they do sound so wonderful! Especially so to a young disciple burdened by a conscience greatly disturbed by racial segregation and injustice. I could only rush to them and bind them to my heart without the slightest suspicion as to their real nature.

### Conclusion

For so many long years I labored, unwilling to cast a suspicious eye on Paul. To me he seemed almost like a god. I plowed on, digging myself deeper and deeper into my torment and giving to him nothing but reverence and respect. Apart from the traumatic breakthrough for which I continually thank my Lord Jesus, I would yet be languishing in that misery. To all that are having similar experience in the world, I now have the freedom to say to you without reservation and in the name of my Lord: The problem is Paul!

His is a powerful and enduring deception, characterized by the following features:

- He preached in all sincerity what he believed in all sincerity, because he was himself deceived.
- He appealed to the better nature of all men, that part of our nature that is in the likeness of God, thus his intense focus on reconciliation and love.
- He wrote and did everything in the name of the Lord Jesus. By thus exalting the name of Jesus while contradicting him, he forestalls our doubts.
- He asserted the support of the Law and the Prophets with conviction and therefore convincingly, but erroneously as we have already seen.

He carefully defined his gospel in a way that makes sense to everyone who is willing to believe in a god who demands blood sacrifices as atonement for sin. It made sense to Jews and Gentiles in the First Century, and continues to do so today.

## CHAPTER IV

# THE KEY QUESTION: ETERNAL LIFE

The key question is that put to Jesus by a certain rich man: “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life (Mark 10:17)?” I designate this the key because it focuses directly on what is, I believe, the single most fundamental aspiration of almost all human beings – the desire to live forever. The corollary to this deep-seated desire is, of course, the fear of death. In consequence, men and women do everything possible to extend their lives in this world. Few they are who firmly assert, “It is time for me to go.” And when one does so speak, the lifelong society will not accommodate him. The huge amounts of effort, talent, money, and time invested in the medical industry worldwide with the stated aim of prolonging life testifies to human devotion to the quest of eternal life. Hospitals and nursing facilities crowded with terminally ill patients or incapacitated elderly patients testify to the quest. The vast investitures in pharmaceuticals and medical research testify to the quest. A legal system that protects and preserves life under any and all circumstances testifies to the quest.

It is this quest for eternal life that has made Christianity so attractive to billions of people around the globe because, from the beginning, Jesus has promised eternal life to his followers.

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand (John 10:27,28).

The question as to what we must do to obtain this gift is therefore of prime importance, and its answer, when truly stated, must be among the most important bits of information ever dispensed. Therefore the question put to Jesus by this rich man opens a topic of supreme interest. Jesus answered this question rather straightforwardly. Paul dispensed his own answer and here we examine the two and make comparisons.

## Eternal Life According to Jesus

The first thing to consider is how Jesus would have men deal with their sins. When a sinner comes to Jesus, he or she has a heavy burden indeed, and it is not reasonable to think that one can take up the promise of eternal life without first doing something about that burden that translates into guilt, remorse, lack of self respect and indebtedness. What must one do to compensate for that past life of waywardness?

### Repenting

Jesus' first word to sinners is, “Repent.”

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel (Mark 1:14,15).

We will deal with the “believe” portion of this injunction later. For now, let us concentrate on the repentance. Luke has him say,



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I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance (Luke 5:32).

So, whatever more Jesus may have said about qualifying for eternal life, the first word is, repent! One of his stated reasons for coming into the world was to call sinners to repentance. Many of us will know that the New Testament Greek from which this word comes is *metánoia*, to change one's mind. This is its definition here and it implies more than simply changing one's mind about a particular matter. It means to change one's whole way of thinking, or to change from an old mind to a new mind. But what we need here is not a definition. We need an example.

Jesus provided this very thing in his Parable of the Prodigal Son. The Prodigal, in the far country, had his mind set on the lusts and pleasures of that country. He repented when he turned his mind to life in the Father's house and thus he changed his mind in the most radical way. This change of mind, born of absolutely nothing but misery and the bankruptcy of his life in the far country led immediately to a course of action. He said to himself, I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants." Thus he repented, and we see that his repentance led immediately to a first course of action that can only be called "confession." Genuine repentance of sin always leads to the confession of the sin to the one against whom the sin was committed. In this case, it was the father of the Prodigal who represents the Father in heaven. The immediate result is acceptance and great joy in heaven over one sinner who repents (Luke 15:7).

### Confessing

This confession of our sins that accompanies repentance is one of the two kinds of confession that are essential to our acceptance by Jesus so as to inherit eternal life. The other is the confession of Jesus before men, as Lord and Savior. Jesus said it this way:

So every one who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven (Matthew 10:32,33).

The Greek for "acknowledge" is *òmologéo*, "to speak the same thing." It is translated "confess" in the Authorized Version and its significance is clear. It is to publicly acknowledge that one is a disciple of Jesus, speaking the same thing as Jesus, with Jesus being one's Lord, Teacher, and Leader. When we do this before men, Jesus will acknowledge us before the Father; otherwise he will deny us. Obviously this bears directly on our inheritance of eternal life, and it must be included here.

If we take this seriously, we must conclude that there will be no secret disciples of Jesus in heaven. This is obviously distinct from confessing, or acknowledging our sins before the Father, so that two kinds of confession must be considered in the prescription for eternal life. We see the significance of this when we look at the early Roman persecution of Christians. In some cases those who denied Christ, or denied that they were Christians, were released unharmed, whereas on the same day and before the same judge, one who refused to deny him but rather confessed himself to be a Christian was delivered up to death. Our primary calling on the earth, after all, is to be his witnesses. This becomes impossible if we deny him before men. We also see its relevance to the Great Principle, since one who loves his life on earth will deny Jesus to save it, whereas one who loves the Father with all he has and is will gladly confess Jesus so as to go to him! The two confessions, put even more briefly, are:

- Confession of our sins before God, and
- Confession of Jesus Christ before men. Both are essential.

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### Obeying

Jesus next leads us directly to a consideration of the commandments. He makes one of the most direct and positive assertions of the answer to our question in Matthew 19:17:

If you would enter life, keep the commandments.

There were, and are, many commandments so the interrogator responded, "Which?" Then Jesus answered,

You shall not kill, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not bear false witness, honor your father and mother, and you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

All but the last of these are drawn directly from the Decalogue, being the recitation of Commandments V-IX. The last, you shall love your neighbor as yourself, is drawn from Leviticus 19:18, and is the commandment that Jesus elsewhere paired with the Great Commandment (to love God) as the summation of all the Law and the Prophets. The parallel accounts from Luke and Mark do not bring this one forward, and it is doubtful that Jesus actually specified it here because it is a kind of summation of the others (V-IX), that regulate our actions with regard to our neighbors.

### Forsaking

The man interrupted at this point to say, "All these I have observed; what do I still lack" (Matthew 19:20)? Or, as Mark and Luke have it, Jesus himself said,

You lack one thing: go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me (Mark 10:21, Luke 18:22).

The man then went away sorrowfully, for he was very rich. Then Jesus announced to this disciples, who were present and overheard the transaction,

Truly, I say to you, it will be hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 19:23, cf. Mark 10:23, Luke 18:24).

Then Jesus advanced the famous metaphor of the camel going through the eye of a needle and the disciples, astonished no doubt, urgently petitioned, "Then who can be saved?" Jesus replied, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

His disciples, hearing this hard language, were plunged into a crisis of self concern, each wondering where he or she stood in this scheme of things. Peter was prompted to say, "Lo, we have left everything and followed you; what then shall we have?" Jesus answered in words that should have been comforting to them:

Truly, I say to you, when the son of man shall sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And every one who has left houses or brother or sister or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundred fold, and inherit eternal life (Matthew 19:28,29).

His concluding words reveal that he is more fully answering the rich man's question, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" So, this whole transaction is devoted to that question, and the answer given is adequate for that situation.

Do we need to elucidate so simple an answer? No; nevertheless we can bring more light to bear by examining the similar incident recorded only by Luke. This time, a lawyer puts him to the test by saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus then put the question back to

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him saying,

What is written in the law? How do you read (Luke 10:26).

The lawyer replied immediately, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as your self." Then he said to him,

You have answered right; do this, and you will live.

The answer affirmed by Jesus here is precisely the same as that supplied to the rich man. In both cases, the keeping of the commandments is the key to eternal life, and the same commandments are brought to bear. When he told the rich man to obey Commandments V-IX of the Decalogue, he was telling him he must love his neighbor as himself, for these commands cover special cases regulating his actions toward his neighbors. By keeping them, he loves his neighbor as himself. This is the Second of the two Great Commandments stated by Jesus in answer to the question, "Which is the great commandment in the law. What he said was,

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets (Matthew 22:37-40).

But how does the First and Great Commandment enter into his response to the rich man? After he had faithfully loved his neighbor as himself, he yet lacked something. He knew this and acknowledged the same by saying to Jesus, "What lack I yet?" Then Jesus told him to sell all that he had, give it to the poor and "Come, follow me." This the man could not do because he loved his wealth more than he loved God, so his failure was in not keeping the First and Great Commandment. Furthermore, he did not really love his neighbor as himself. If he had, he would gladly have shared his wealth with the poor. But the bottom line, the one thing keeping him from inheriting eternal life was his failure to keep the First and Great Commandment. He did not love the Lord his God with his entire mind, with all his soul, with all his heart and with all his strength. Had he loved God after this fashion, he would gladly have given his wealth to the poor so as to go to the Father in the embrace of life eternal.

### Following

We could easily overlook a third essential specified in Jesus' response to the rich man. It is that last admonition, "Come, follow me." This "follow me" is the single admonition that sums all things in two little words. Peter and the other disciples qualified if they had "left everything and followed you" as Peter professed. Jesus' response to Peter reveals that what must be left in order to follow Jesus is not only wealth, as with the rich man, but also house and family. This is the sufficient key to eternal life as stated in John 10:27, quoted above. (My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me, and I give to them eternal life, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand.) The full significance of the "Follow me" admonition is revealed in John 12:25,26:

He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for life eternal. If any one serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there shall my servant be also; if any one serves me, the Father will honor him.

These words were stated by Jesus as he was about to go to the cross, thus revealing to us what one must do to "follow Jesus." As he stated elsewhere, Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me (follow me) cannot be my disciple (Luke 14:27). Keeping the First and Great Commandment is therefore equivalent to hating one's life in this world for the sake of life eternal. To receive eternal life, one must love God and his Son Jesus, so that one is ready and willing to

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leave everything, including one's family and one's life in this world, to follow Jesus to the Father's house. That is the significance of bearing one's own cross and following him. That is the Great Principle to which we must conform if we are to possess eternal life.

### Believing

A second set of Jesus' sayings uses yet different language in the prescription for eternal life. Here are some examples of these:

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).

He who believes in the Son has eternal life; he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God rests upon him (John 3:36).

For this is the will of my Father, that every one who sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day (John 6:40).

These utterances state that one receives eternal life through the single qualification of believing in Jesus. This is a universal prescription that prevails throughout Christendom. One does not attend churches long until he has heard it and had it reinforced in many ways. But the following utterances give light on what Jesus mean to communicate with this prescription.

Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes him who sent me, has eternal life; he does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life (John 5:24).

For I have not spoken on my own authority; the Father who sent me has himself given me commandment what to say and what to speak. And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has bidden me (John 12:49,50).

I have manifested thy name to the men whom thou gavest me out of the world; thine they were, and thou gavest them to me, and they have kept thy word. Now they know everything that thou hast given me is from thee; for I have given them the words which thou gavest me, and they have received them and know that in truth that I came from thee; and they have believed that thou didst send me (John 17:6-8).

Jesus here attributes the words that he uttered to God the Father so that he, who hears and believes, believes the Father who sent him. He who believes, like his closest disciples, also believes that the Father sent Jesus the Son and therefore believes in Jesus as the legitimate, authorized conveyor of the message of God. This is what Jesus means us to understand when he speaks of believing in him so as to receive eternal life. If we believe that Jesus came from the Father, and that his words are the words of the Father, we will believe the words and respond to them so as to inherit eternal life. As Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:68).

To believe in Jesus means, to Jesus, that we receive his words and, believing that they came from the Father as Jesus asserted, we believe them and act upon them, thus receiving eternal life. For example, consider the Great Principle of John 12:25: "He who loves his life loses it, but he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life." If we believe in Jesus, we believe the Father sent him with these words to utter, and we believe the words, understanding that they came from the Father. We therefore believe that we must hate life in this world if we are to inherit life eternal, and that if we love life, we will lose it. When we respond to this principle by hating our lives in this world after the example of Jesus who uttered the words, we receive eternal life.

If, ignoring these words from the Father spoken by him, we cling to the love of life and count it

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righteousness we will not receive eternal life. Otherwise we are dead, regardless of what we may profess about this matter of believing in Jesus. It is the word of the Father spoken through Jesus. This understanding is fully affirmed by the strange Eucharistic sounding passage in John 6. After affirming that he is the bread of life that came down from heaven, according to the pattern of the manna that nourished the Hebrews in the wilderness, he identified the “bread, which I shall give for the life of the world” as “my flesh.” Then he continued,

. . . he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day (John 6:54).

This saying shocked his disciples, and he immediately explained to them:

It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is of no avail; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life (John 6:63).

Another way of saying the same thing is to assert that one receives eternal life by eating the words of Jesus – that is, by receiving them, believing them (believing in Jesus) and conforming to them. So again, believing in Jesus is the same as believing the words that I have spoken to you, accepting that the words came from the Father and that Jesus is the only authorized messenger of God to men. The words he uttered, and only the words uttered by him, are the words of eternal life.

Even the words of the Old Testament are not the words of eternal life. Only the sayings of Jesus are the words of eternal life; all others are excluded, although they may be witnesses to those words. Thus Jesus spoke to the Jews:

You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me; yet you refuse to me that you may have life (John 5:39,40).

So, when we hear Jesus saying, No one comes to the Father but by me (John 14:6), we hear him saying words of the Father, and when we believe in Jesus, we believe the words and accept Jesus as The Father's sole authorized messenger. Jesus, and Jesus only, has the words of eternal life.

### Summation

What, then, according to Jesus, must one do to inherit eternal life? It can all be summed as follows:

- 1. Repent and confess your sins.
- 2. Confess Jesus before men.
- 3. Obey. Keep the commandments. Keep the Second Commandment. Love your neighbor as yourself. Keep the First and Great Commandment. Love the Lord your God with all your mind, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength, for on these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets. This is equivalent to the Great Principle of John 12:25.
- 4. Forsake wealth and other worldly attachments.
- 5. Follow Jesus by taking up one's own cross. This is the sum of the above.
- 6. Believe in Jesus by receiving and believing his words. This is the sum of all the above.

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Or, we can sum it even more crisply by referring to Jesus' immediate response to the rich man:

If you would enter life, keep the commandments (Matthew 19:17).

This is Jesus' prescription for eternal life. What does Paul say?

### Eternal Life According to Paul

The early chapters of Romans set forth Paul's prescription for eternal life in a tortuous exposition of his gospel. Searching it out can be tricky as indicated by comparing the following statements from his pen:

For he (God) will render to every man according to his works: to those who by patience in well doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those

who are factious and do not obey the truth, but obey wickedness, there will be wrath and fury (Romans 2:7,8).

For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified (Romans 2:13).

For no human being will be justified in his sight by works of the law, since through the law comes knowledge of sin (Romans 4:20).

The first two texts, Romans 2:7,8 and 13, are in complete harmony with the prescription given by Jesus when he said, If you would enter into life, keep the commandments (Matthew 19:17). But Romans 4:20 seems a direct contradiction of both Jesus and Paul's own statement in 2:13. To explain this contradiction we will need to conduct a brief survey of the first chapters of Romans.

After the usual introduction, he briefly alludes to his gospel in 1:16f:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, "He who through faith is righteous shall live."

This introduces the concept of gaining salvation, or eternal life, by faith and, as we will see, this conception as Paul defines it absolutely rules out any contribution by works to the prescription for eternal life.

Recall now that what Jesus said is, "If you would enter into life, keep the commandments." But what Paul wrote is: "He who through faith is righteous shall live." But now he switches our attention to the wrath of God in v.18 and explains that "men" are without excuse for their wickedness and that therefore God gave them up. This "God gave them up" theme is repeated three times for emphasis and concludes with an exhaustive listing of the wickedness of men. Paul intends for this indictment of "men" to be universal, and he lays the groundwork in the early verses of Chapter 2, where he attacks those who consider themselves righteous while judging others.

. . . in passing judgment upon him you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things.

Those who judge others are guilty of the same wickedness; therefore all are guilty. Nevertheless, he is not ready to set them aside completely, so he gives the description of the Judgment that provides for both categories, the righteous and the wicked, and establishes the justification of the righteous through works of law. Then, beginning with 2:12, he specifies that the Gentiles are also

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included on substantially the same basis as the Jews, for the same law binds them, even though they do not have the law. Nevertheless, when they do what the law requires, they show that the law is written on their hearts (2:15).

Then he switches his attention again to the Jews (2:17) who know the law, and indicts them for not obeying it even while they pass judgment on the evil deeds of the Gentiles who have not the law. He warns the Jews that their circumcision is of no value when they break the law and then proceeds to define a "real Jew" as one whose circumcision is inward, of the heart, spiritual and not literal (2:29).

Beginning with 3:1, he notes advantages of the Jew and then explains how they have wasted their advantage so that, when we come to 3:9, we have the point that Paul was really getting at all along:

What, then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all; for I have already charged that all men, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin, as it is written, "There is none righteous, no, not one . . ."

Only now can we begin to realize the development of his theme. His earlier description of the Judgment in which God will render to every man according to his works such that "to those who by patience in well doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life (2:6,7)," must be true in principle only. In practice, absolutely no one thus qualifies for eternal life ("by patience in well doing") because "None is righteous, no, not one . . ." Then he concludes with the words listed above (3:20),

For no human being will be justified in his sight by works of law, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

The contradiction between this and 2:13 is therefore reconciled. 2:13 is true in principle, whereas in practice 3:20 rules because there is, in fact, no human being who does good – no, not one (3:10). It must follow therefore that no one, Jew or Gentile, can obtain eternal life by works of law even though this is in principle the only way.

## Faith

Nevertheless, there is hope. At 3:21 he changes gears again and states the essence of his gospel.

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction; since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith (3:21-25).

Then in 3:28:

For we hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law.

Justification by faith is therefore Paul's prescription for eternal life. God put Jesus forward to shed his blood on the cross as an expiation of our sins, and all that he requires of us is that we believe that

Christ died for our sins, according to the scripture (I Corinthians 15:3).

It is a "free gift" that we can do nothing to earn, therefore it is not of works but must be

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appropriated simply by believing. How are we to explain the free gift? Does God wink at sin, view it lightly? No, he views it with the utmost seriousness, such that there is no forgiveness except by the shedding of blood. Jesus has therefore shed his blood for us, thus “expiating” our sins, if only we will place our faith in him. Paul attributes this putting forward of Jesus to shed his blood in expiation of our sins to God’s grace. In Adam, sin reigned in death, but in Jesus Christ grace reigns

through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (5:21).

Faith in response to grace is therefore Paul’s prescription for eternal life. This is the premise on which all of evangelical Christianity takes its stand. Eternal life is an absolutely free gift:

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:23).

Being saved, justified, having salvation and receiving eternal life are expressions that focus on different aspects of the same experience. It requires faith and faith only.

### Confession

But Paul doubtless knew that Jesus had taught that one must confess faith in him before men (Matthew 10:32). Therefore confession enters into the equation. Paul wraps it all up nicely in Romans 10:9f:

If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

It is to this formula that I subscribed when first I came to Christ.

But what about sin? Will we not continue to disobey the law in spite of everything? Does this matter when we “are not under law, but under grace?” Or, as Paul asks in Romans 6:1,

Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means!

Then he brings forward baptism as the explanation of the new power that believers have to overcome sin. The old, sinful man died and was buried with Christ in baptism so that the new man might be raised with him in newness of life. “If we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him.”

Sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

Under these circumstances and by the miraculous power of God in Christ, the righteous works of Jesus are imputed to the sinner.

### Righteousness of Christ

The result is that the sinner is to be judged for eternal life, not on the basis of his own works, but by the righteous deeds of Jesus. Seeing that the righteous deeds of Jesus are imputed to him, he has confidence that the blessed eternal glory of Jesus is also his for eternal life and that he will stand approved on the Day of Judgment. The formula of Romans 2:6,7 above, that holds in principle, therefore applies ultimately also in practice because the sinner is judged to have upheld the Law and is to be judged not by his own works, but by the righteous works of Jesus. The work of Christ was

. . . in order that the just requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit (Romans 8:4).



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The sinner has therefore “put on Christ” (Romans 13:14; See also Galatians 3:27).

### Why the Contradictions?

On the surface this is a powerful gospel that provides eternal life as a free gift while simultaneously promising the ability to live a new life in Christ. Since its focus is on Jesus and his cross and resurrection the churchmen have assumed through the centuries, without question, that it is the same prescription offered by Jesus himself. But the prescription of Jesus for eternal life as described above knows nothing of this “free gift” righteousness by faith apart from works of law. How can we explain the contradiction?

We cannot explain it by supposing that Jesus laid the foundation for Paul to later build upon, because the two are contradictory and therefore incompatible. Besides this, Paul specified the foundation to be the apostles and prophets, with Jesus being, not the foundation, but the chief cornerstone (Ephesians 2:20).

Did Jesus intend to lay down what was true in principle and defer to Paul to lay down what was necessary in practice? No, for Jesus clearly indicated that he had revealed “all that I have heard from my Father” (John 15:15) and that his word would endure though heaven and earth pass away (Matthew 24:35). If his word endures though all else passes away, it must be the last and enduring word, requiring no additions or corrections. Again, Jesus once told his disciples,

I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth . . . (John 16: 12,13).

Can this be the explanation? Again, no, for what Paul came teaching, the free gift of grace, was, and is, much easier to bear than what Jesus, with his Great Principle, left us. Furthermore, Jesus indicated that it is the Spirit of truth who would “guide you into all the truth”, without any suggestion that the Spirit would require an intermediary such as Paul. We must look for some other explanation.

If we cannot find an explanation by looking to Jesus, we must look to Paul. Indeed, it is there that we will find it when we discover his many errors. Some of these errors have already been defined in our previous discussion of Paul, but they must be listed here again as the explanation of the disparity between the prescriptions for eternal life of Jesus and Paul. His primary errors appear to be those of interpretation of scripture. They raise the interesting question, “Did he err because of the way he interpreted scripture, or did he err for other reasons then misinterpret the scripture to make it appear to support his error?”

I think we must apply the latter of these explanations, because he would himself refuse to accept that his gospel came to him through the study of scripture. No, he consistently attributed his gospel to direct revelations from the Lord himself, without any intermediary, such as the Law and the Prophets that comprise the scriptures. Therefore he must have approached the scriptures with a gospel delivered, as he believed, by the Lord. Since he believed the scriptures bear witness to his gospel (Romans 3:21), he would then have searched the scriptures to gain scriptural support for the gospel already formed in his mind. Such support would greatly strengthen his presentation and provide a second witness, thus confirming his gospel. Let us now examine the nature of this support.

His gospel stands ultimately on one fundamental assertion, “We hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law” (Romans 3:28). Being justified means that one is accounted righteous so as to qualify for eternal life, and it is dependent only on faith accompanied by confession of Jesus as Lord. This faith is the act of believing as Paul has spelled it out in Romans 10:9,10:

if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised

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him from the dead, you will be saved. For man believes with his heart and so is justified, and he confesses with his lips and so is saved.

To get a witness from the Law and the Prophets he went first to Habakkuk and quoted him as follows:

He who through faith is righteous shall live (Romans 1:17, Habakkuk 2:4).

That this is the fundamental text in his mind is suggested by the fact that it is the first one on which he alights, and he quotes it very early in his presentation. Everything he writes thereafter is founded on it. But as I have shown above, he has radically misunderstood this text. Read in its context, translated according to the best lexicons and compared with its usage in other places where it is found in the Old Testament, the Hebrew word he translates to read "faith" (*emunah*) means something else altogether, namely, "faithfulness." Now, faithfulness means steadfastness, firmness, and stability. Habakkuk uses it to describe one who does not fail to continue waiting for the fulfillment of a promised "vision." It has no essential relationship to the contents of the vision, or what the faithful waiter believes. It applies only to his steadfastness in the course of waiting. He doesn't give up, though the wait is a long one. He is faithful. "Faith" is a substantive that indicates what one believes, whereas "faithful" is an adjective that describes how tenaciously one holds to it. One could believe anything and be faithful if he held faithfully to it, but this surely isn't what Paul meant to be saying, for whom a very specific belief about Christ was the sole key to salvation and eternal life. Paul failed to see this distinction, probably because he used the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament that was in common use in his time, which does not make a distinction. He believed that the righteous shall live by his faith. But he chose a text that says, "The righteous shall live by his faithfulness."

Next, Paul needed an example from the Old Testament to illustrate his case and to explain certain aspects of it, such as his stance toward the law. For this he chose Abraham and pounced on his transaction with God as described in Genesis 15:1-6. There, God assured Abraham that he would yet have offspring. "Look toward heaven and number the stars if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your descendants be." Then Abraham "believed the Lord, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." From this Paul argued that Abraham was the first to be "accounted righteous" on the basis of pure faith, or simply by believing the Lord, and that now, by believing something else, that Christ was raised from the dead, one can likewise be accounted righteous.

There are two difficulties with this. In the first place, according to Paul this is the end of the matter but this did not settle things with God for Abraham. Later, we read that "After these things God tested Abraham" (Genesis 22:1). If God already counted him righteous, in the final sense as Paul understood it, there would have been no need for further testing. Nevertheless God found it necessary to put him to a test by commanding him to offer up his son Isaac on an altar. It was only after Abraham passed this test that God then spoke to him and said,

By myself I have sworn, says the Lord, because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will indeed bless you and I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore. And your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies, and by your descendants shall all the nations of the earth bless themselves, **because you have obeyed my voice** (Genesis 22:15-18)..

Surely, if God had counted Abraham righteous as Paul conceived it, these promises would have come to him without the test. This reveals that God did not finally account Abraham as righteous until after the test, for he would not have made the promise unless Abraham passed it. And God has here stated why the promise was finally given: "because you have obeyed my voice." The patriarch was therefore justified and blessed because he had obeyed a law of God. But this is precisely contrary to Paul, who asserted, "by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified."

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Now, the order of events is extremely important here, for Paul uses it to establish the idea of righteousness apart from law by pointing out that it was before he was circumcised that Abraham was accounted righteous (Romans 4: 10). But this final test of righteousness did not come until after Abraham was circumcised! Paul fails again to prove that Abraham was reckoned righteous on the basis of faith alone, apart from works of law.

The second difficulty with Paul's argument is that James, the Lord's brother, flatly contradicted it!

Do you want to be shown, you foolish fellow, that faith apart from works is barren? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered his son Isaac upon the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by works, and the scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness; and he was called the friend of God." You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone (James 2:20-24).

On the other hand, Jesus' view that one enters into life by keeping the commandments accords fully with the above Old Testament texts, selected by Paul himself, as well as with the text from James.

Paul's conviction that all men, both Jews and Gentiles, are under the power of sin was fundamental to his doctrine. This seemed evident to him, and it meant that the law was unable to produce a single righteous man. If a man could obey the law perfectly, he would be without sin and could be declared righteous on the basis of his works. He used himself as an example of the impossibility of obeying the law by describing how he had been unable to deal with his covetousness (Romans 7:7f). He explained how his carnal nature had prevented his obeying the Tenth Commandment. Rather than make him a righteous man through keeping this law, it only revealed to him his own covetousness. "The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me." (Romans 7:10)

But he needed scriptural support for this also, and he gave a lot of it in 3:9-19. I have shown above how the seven texts he brings forward here to certify his assertion that all men are, without exception, under the power of sin are ill conceived. In every case the contexts of the selected texts reveals that their authors had a place for the existence of righteous men along with the sinful ones. His use of the scriptures here is fatally flawed. It does not at all witness to his gospel.

Paul is in these texts seeking to justify his assertion that man is justified by faith alone apart from works of the law. We should pause here to consider that he is attempting by any means to contradict the simple doctrine of Jesus, "If you would enter into life, keep the commandments." I do not object to the idea that Jesus' doctrine is only true in principle and that in practice something more is required to qualify one for eternal life. That this something more is faith as Paul conceived it is yet to be established, for Paul certainly fails to do so. Nevertheless, one of the very texts that Paul selected as testimony to his doctrine clearly identifies this "something else." So here we bring forward yet another of his errors.

Paul next brings the great King David to the dock to witness for his gospel. "So also David pronounces a blessing upon the man to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works." Then he refers us to Psalm 32:1,2:

Blessed are those whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not reckon his sin.

This text struck Paul as being extremely appropriate and directly applicable to his theses of justification by faith. He has just written, "And to one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his **faith is reckoned as righteousness.**" When David writes of one who is blessed by having sins covered so that the Lord does not reckon his sins against him, it must be

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because of his faith. But when we look at the Psalm to see precisely what was in David's mind when he wrote these words, we find he was responding to a blessed personal experience that had no reference to his believing a particular creed. He first writes of his great unhappiness, his "groaning all day long," when the hand of the Lord was "heavy upon him" and "my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer" (Psalm 32:3, 4). Then he tried something different: "I acknowledged my sin to thee, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, 'I will confess my transgression to the Lord; then thou didst forgive the guilt of my sin'" (v.5). This confession was what produced David's great blessing of forgiven transgression, or covered sin. There is no reference in this Psalm to justification by faith or to subscription to any article of faith, but only the counsel to confess one's iniquities to the Lord. That is what produced David's forgiveness and the great blessing of forgiven transgression.

This can be brought forward to support Jesus' teaching to ask the Lord's forgiveness for our sins (The Lord's Prayer), and he promised that our sins would be forgiven in that case, provided only we also forgive others when they offend us (Matthew 6:12). But it cannot reasonably be cited in support of Paul's doctrine of justification by faith only, as he does here. Why did he do it? It must have been because of the similarity of language, including the word, "reckon." David spoke of being blessed because the Lord does not reckon his sin, which sounds at first hearing much like the "man to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works" (4:6).

The "something more" mentioned above is, of course, God's promise to forgive our sins when we confess them, as David did in Psalm 32, and provided only that we also forgive others who sin against, or offend us. This is the first ingredient in Jesus' prescription for eternal life as specified above. Divine forgiveness following repentance and confession is an ingredient missing from Paul's gospel. He really does not know anything about this feature of the divine character, of forgiveness following confession. In this letter to the Romans, where he unveils the essence of his gospel, he does not mention divine forgiveness apart from this one misquoted reference from the Psalms. In other letters he barely mentions it, and bases it solely on the confession of faith in Christ. He does not base it on the confession of sins to the Father.

Though we can find little evidence for Paul's incorporation of repentance in his prescription for eternal life in Romans, Luke in the Acts quotes him as finding a place for it. He has Paul preaching the gospel at Athens and saying,

The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30; see also 26:20, 19:4, and 20:21).

It may very well be that Paul used such language. But from the evidence in Romans that testifies to the absence of this concept from his gospel, he must have used it simply because it was religious lingo that carried no special significance. The verb, "repent" does not appear in Romans; it plays no part in Paul's exposition of his view of salvation. The substantive, "repentance" appears in Romans only once (2:4).

Repentance and confession of sin clearly played no significant part in Paul's personal religious experience. There are two witnesses to his "conversion" in the New Testament. One is by Luke in Acts 9, and Paul has a veiled reference to it in Galatians (1:11-17). In neither is there the faintest implication of remorse or guilt on the part of the sinner. There is no confession of sin, no indication that he recognized his actions as sinful. He even boasts of his zeal for the traditions of his fathers. One day he was intent on destroying the flock of God. Then the Lord struck him blind, and three days later he was zealously building it up! There is not even a hint of repentance and confession of his sins to God the Father.

He liked to appeal to David as a witness to his gospel. It is a pity he was so blind to the true testimony of David, whose repentance and confession before God were stated in the most vivid language to be found anywhere. Typical is this:

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Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy steadfast love; according to thy abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned and done that which is evil in thy sight, so that thou are justified in thy sentence and blameless in thy judgment (Psalm 51:1-4).

There is no evidence to suggest that Paul ever thus repented and confessed his sins to God.

I believe we can explain this omission when we examine his reference to his own sinfulness in Romans 7. There he points specifically to his struggle with the sin of covetousness as forbidden by the Tenth Commandment. He has just asked the question,

What shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I should not have known sin. I should not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet."

Now he does something that is disastrous to his gospel, but it is so very easy to overlook. He gives "sin" a personality, one with will and motive and evil intent.

But Sin, finding opportunity in the commandment, wrought in me all kinds of covetousness.

I capitalize the word in this context, to indicate his imputation to Sin of a personality and individuality of its own.

Apart from the law, Sin lies dead. I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, Sin revived and I died.

Note that Sin is distinct from Paul, and see how their conditions alternate. When Sin was dead, Paul was alive; when Sin came to life, Paul died. Sin, this devil-person, found an opening through the commandment and deceived Paul, then killed him! Note here that Paul himself is not complicit. This perverse, independent personality, Sin, made him do it. It gets worse. It was not the law that killed him. The law is still good.

It was Sin, working death in me through what is good in order that Sin might be shown to be sin and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.

Now he advances an excuse for his actions by taking refuge in the fact that "I am carnal." "I do not even understand my own actions." If he doesn't understand them, how can he be complicit? Now we come to his great evasion! It is pure genius! Listen:

For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now, if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. So then it is no longer I that do it, but Sin which dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but Sin which dwells within me.

Then he goes on to say,

So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of Sin which dwells in my members.

Now we know why Paul never repented of sin, and never confessed his sins. He had none. When he did evil things, it was not him that did them, but this invention of his, this Sin-person who inhabited his flesh and imprisoned his mind so that he was helpless to control his actions. He

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was not a sinner – he was the victim of Sin!

There may have been times in his ministry when he acknowledged sin, moments when he was not challenged but could share his inmost being with a dear friend. One example of this is his confession to Timothy,

I thank him who has given me strength for this, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful by appointing me to his service, though I formerly blasphemed and persecuted and insulted him; but I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. And I am the foremost of sinners; but I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience for an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life (I Timothy 1:12-16)

When we see Paul repeatedly using the scriptures in this deceptive way, we cannot but conclude that the Law and the Prophets in fact do not witness to his gospel as he asserted. But how could he get away with this? Wouldn't his error be evident to those to whom he wrote?

No, his errors would be rather neatly concealed. Remember that Paul was aiming his message primarily to Gentiles who had little or no knowledge of Hebrew scriptures, and even his Jewish disciples would not likely have at their disposal a copy of the scriptures by which to check his message. He blended the text into his message so as to make it appear to be very relevant. They felt no need to question his sources. Furthermore, he was so thoroughly convinced of the validity of his message that he was himself most likely blind to the true import of the scriptures he cited. The same can be said for the churchmen of today who firmly believe Paul and hold to the integrity of his message even though his shortcomings are obvious to an honest and critical mind.

### Summation

We can summarize Paul's prescription for eternal life somewhat as follows:

- 1. Confession: Confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord (Romans 10:9).
- 2. Faith: Believe in your heart that God raised him from the Dead (Romans 10:9).

This two-part prescription is based on the following presumptions:

- 1. It is the doers of the law who will be justified (Romans 2: 13).
- 2. There is none righteous, no, not one (Romans 3:10). No one does the law.
- 3. Therefore, the works of the law will justify no human being (Romans 3:20). Therefore (1) is of no effect.
- 4. But now the righteousness of God, which is the righteousness of Christ, has been manifested apart from the law and by God's grace. It is a free gift.
- 5. We appropriate this righteousness to ourselves when we have faith in Christ. We will thereby be justified per (1), which remains true in principle.
- 6. In Christ, therefore, we are under grace and not under law.
- 7. One certifies this prescription by confessing with the lips that Jesus is Lord.

For your convenience and for comparison, the prescription of Jesus as summarized above is

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repeated here:

- 1. Repent and confess your sins.
- 2. Confess Jesus before men.
- 3. Keep the commandments. Keep the Second Commandment. Love your neighbor as yourself. Keep the First and Great Commandment. Love the Lord your God with all your mind, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength, for on these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets. This is equivalent to the Great Principle of John 12:25.
- 4. Forsake the things of this world.
- 5. Follow Jesus by taking up one's own cross. This is the sum of the above.
- 6. Believe in Jesus by receiving and believing his words. This is the equivalent of all the above.

Or, put more concisely, "If you would enter into life, keep the commandments."

Setting these two prescriptions side by side brings three things into focus.

- First, it never occurred to Paul that God would forgive sins through simple repentance and confession. His early focus on the wrath of God, with the resulting suppression of the significance of the love of God, forced him into a perfectionist stance. He seemed to believe that, before God, the only way to be righteous is to be perfectly righteous, without sin or without any disobedience of the law.
- Second, his misappropriation of Jesus to be the expiator of our sins seemed a perfect fit for his personal needs, who never had any real conviction of sin and who excused his worst misdeeds because he did them "in ignorance."
- And third, he never gave much attention to the uttered words of Jesus. Had he listened to Jesus, he would have known better. But because he made Jesus the key player in his plan of salvation, seeming to exalt him in every way, he was able to convince the world of the correctness of his view. The true prescription for eternal life as uttered by Jesus has therefore been ignored. What irony!

## CHAPTER V

# THE LAW

The Law entered our discussion of the prescriptions of Paul and Jesus for eternal life, but we must now place our prime focus on this matter of the Law, for Jesus and Paul held widely divergent views. The following texts illustrate the difference, in which it is clear that Paul's view radically contradicts that of Jesus. The quotation from Jesus we have already examined above in the context of the prescription for eternal life.

Jesus: If you would enter into life, keep the commandments (Matthew 19:17).

Paul: . . . the very commandment which promised life proved to be death to me (Romans 7:10).

You see the problem. These texts only mention commandments, not the Law or the Prophets, but they are nevertheless vitally related to our discussion. The "Law" as generally conceived is the term used to define the collection of all the commandments of God from the Old Testament, especially from the Pentateuch. It is the collective term, while "commandment" is the specific designation of a single law. Therefore we have "the Ten Commandments of the Law." While either term can be used in the singular or the plural, the general usage distinguishes between them in this way. So we could very well substitute "law" for "commandment" or "commandments" in these verses. Jesus is telling us to keep the law if we would enter into life, whereas Paul is explaining that, for him, though the law promised life, it proved to be death.

Both most certainly had in mind the Leviticus texts that linked life to law or commandments:

Moses writes that the man who practices the righteousness which is based on the law shall live by it (Romans 10:5).

Thus Paul explained his basis for this view, that the commandment promised life. He may have been thinking of Leviticus 18:5: "You shall therefore keep my statutes and my ordinances, by doing which a man shall live: I am the Lord." Linking life with the keeping of the commandments and ordinances of God, or with the keeping of the Law, was characteristic of Moses. Deuteronomy 4:1 also stands out:

And now, O Israel, give heed to the statutes and the ordinances which I teach you, and do them; that you may live, and go in and take possession of the land which the Lord, the God of your fathers, gives you.

By examining the contexts of Matthew 19:17 and Romans 7:10 quoted above, it is evident that, for both Jesus and Paul, "life" means eternal life. A similar examination of the contexts of the quotations from Moses, Leviticus 18:5 and Deuteronomy 4:1, will establish that what Moses meant was to live temporally. We cannot go into this difference here, because for present purposes it is sufficient to establish that Jesus and Paul were agreed that the subject is eternal life. Jesus has told us that we will receive eternal life by keeping the commandments (the Law). Paul has told us that, for him, the commandment (Law) failed to keep its promise of eternal life. Not only so, but as presented above, in our discussion of the prescriptions for eternal life, Paul went on to explain his view, how it is impossible for him or any one to receive eternal life through



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the keeping of the commandments of the Law. I can only conclude that the two men held different views as to the Law, its nature and its effects. We here examine the view of Jesus, the view of Paul, and then make a brief comparison.

### Jesus and the Law

Jesus often paired the Law with the Prophets. The typical expression is,

On these two hang all the Law and the Prophets (Matthew 22:40).

I understand that the Law here has reference to the Pentateuch, the five books of Moses, and the Prophets refer to the balance of Holy Scripture that we call the Old Testament (The Psalms are sometimes distinguished from the Prophets). Both Jesus and Paul would also agree on this distinction. However, Paul's argument focuses primarily on the Law and for that reason this is also our focus here. They will be carried forward together whenever they appear together in the texts, and indeed what can be said of the Law can often be said of the Prophets as well. But to bring the Prophets into our discussion would needlessly complicate it, so you should understand that we are here discussing the Law, exclusive of the Prophets.

We also note the fact that there was another body of "law" developed by the Rabbi's that grew primarily out of their intention to accurately apply the Law to every situation. This was the beginning of a vast body of interpretive material that was later codified as "The Mishna." In the gospels, this body is termed "the traditions of the elders." It was the center of controversy between Jesus and the Pharisees, for it was largely the creation of the latter, and Jesus certainly excluded it from any consideration as valid "law."

The Pharisees and the Scribes once came to Jesus with the complaint, "Why do your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat." Jesus answered, Why do you transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition (Matthew 15:1f)? He closed this transaction by applying to them the prophesy of Isaiah 29:13: "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men." So Jesus considered this body to come from men, not from God, and he vigorously condemned the men who sought to apply it, teaching it along with the Law. We continue, then, in the confident assertion that when Jesus spoke of the Law, he meant to include only the five books of Moses.

Now, how did Jesus see Moses and the Law? He saw Moses as the man who served as God's spokesman to Israel; and the Law as that which came, through Moses, from the Mouth of God. Reading the Pentateuch we come repeatedly to the expression, ". . . the Lord said to Moses . . ." These expressions are summed nicely in Exodus 33:9f, in the story of the tent of meeting:

When Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the door of the tent, and the Lord would speak with Moses. And when all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the door of the tent, all the people would rise up and worship, every man at his tent door. Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.

Later, also from the pillar of cloud at the door to the tent of meeting, the Lord rebuked Miriam and Aaron, saying,

If there is a prophet among you, I the Lord make myself known to him in a vision, I speak with him in a dream. Not so with my servant Moses; he is entrusted with all my house. With him I speak mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in dark speech; and he beholds the form of the Lord. Why, then, were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses (Numbers 12:6-8)?

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Jesus fully endorsed this evaluation of Moses as God's lawgiver and prophet. Consequently, he held Moses high before the Jews and before his disciples as worthy of great honor, so much so that the very office of Moses, as God's spokesman to the people, was sanctified for all time even when it was occupied by unworthy persons. It is in this light that we hear him saying,

The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; so practice and observe whatever they tell you, but not what they do; for they preach but do not practice.

Therefore, Jesus surely accepted Moses as God's chosen spokesman, and the Law as delivered by Moses to be from the mouth of God.

Yet God did not speak all of the Law to Moses and, through him, to the People. We know this because he also said through Moses,

I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brethren; and I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him (Deuteronomy 18:18).

Why raise up another Moses, unless Moses had not communicated all of the Law to Israel? There would be no need for such a prophet had Moses declared all. Jesus saw himself as fulfilling this prophecy.

This fact is brought forward forcefully as we read through the fourth gospel and see the strong emphasis that Jesus placed on the source of his own words. We have, for example:

For I have not spoken on my own authority; the Father who sent me has himself given me commandment what to say and what to speak. And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has bidden me (John 12:49,50).

That is precisely how Moses spoke to the people. Jesus is therefore Moses' successor as lawgiver, sent to make up what was lacking in the Law as delivered by Moses. Both delivered the words received from the mouth of God.

Jesus therefore placed the words of Moses – the Law – together with his own words, in the same unique category – that of words having the mouth of God as their common origin. That he viewed them thusly is also demonstrated by the common way that he spoke of them. Of the Law of Moses he said,

For truly I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished (Matthew 5:18).

Then of his own words, he said,

Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away (Matthew 24:35).

So, two things will not pass away: the Law as delivered by Moses, and the Word delivered by Jesus. The two stand together while heaven and earth endure. This is what we should expect of words having God as their common origin. The words of the eternal God must themselves be eternal!

Those Jews who believed in a final judgment in which men are to be judged and assigned their eternal destiny usually understood that this judgment would be based on the Law of Moses. The Law would be set beside them to serve as a standard measure of their guilt or innocence. Paul had apparently held this conviction, as expressed in Romans 2:12:

All who sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law.

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Certainly Jesus would have been aware of this, and by placing his own words in this same function, showed even further how he classified his utterances alongside those of Moses. I am thinking of this utterance in particular:

He who rejects me and does not receive my sayings has a judge; the word that I have spoken will be his judge on the last day (John 12:48).

This confirms what I have already established, that Jesus placed his words in the same unique category as those of Moses – words that came from the mouth of God. Both sets of words are to remain though heaven and earth pass away, and both will therefore serve as a basis for eternal judgment.

### What was lacking?

What was lacking in the Mosaic code? Why was it necessary that Jesus come after Moses to amend it? We can derive the answer to these questions two ways, and since each yields the same answer, we have confidence that the answer is the correct one.

First, consider the question about divorce as presented to Jesus in Matthew 19:1f. The Pharisees came to Jesus with the question, "Is it lawful to divorce ones wife for any cause? Jesus referred the to Moses' Genesis creation story and concluded,

What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder (v. 6).

The hostile Pharisees responded with another question, referring to the Law: "Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?" Jesus answer came immediately:

For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, makes her commit adultery.

I conclude that the Law of Moses was qualified, in this case, by limitations in the ability of the primitive Hebrews to obey or to understand. They could never have responded to the Law as it was from the beginning of creation. The generation of Jesus did not receive it either, and Jesus acknowledged the problem. His own disciples were reluctant to receive it, as we realize when we proceed to v. 10: "The disciples said to him, 'If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is not expedient to marry.'" Then Jesus responded,

Not all men can receive this concept, but only those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to receive this, let him receive it.

Since the time of Jesus there have been some persons who were and are able to receive the Law as amended by Jesus, and so the Father sent Jesus with the fullness of the Law, as it has been from the beginning. This should apply not only to the law of divorce, but also to any other of the many commandments delivered by Moses. The Law of Moses made accommodations due to the inability of men to receive it in its perfect expression. Jesus ended these accommodations and presented the Law as it has been from the beginning.

Second, the Law of Moses was an approximation to the will of God in that it relaxed the rigid norms that have been the perfect will of God from the beginning. Jesus' amendments were required to make up what was lacking and were therefore perfect. The traditions of the elders, with their interpretations of the application of the Law of Moses, tended to relax even this already relaxed code, which is a primary reason for Jesus' harsh condemnation. The Law of Corban

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exemplifies this practice. It seems the Rabbi's needed a relaxation of the Fifth Commandment, "Honor your father and mother." They had therefore developed an interpretation that allowed this law to be relaxed. One needed only to announce that whatever might have been given toward the support of father and mother was "Corban" (Mark 7:11), which means offered, or to be offered, to God as a sacrifice. Then one need not support father or mother. The Law as delivered by Moses was incomplete in that it allowed for such accommodations by relaxing the perfect will of God.

### The Tightening of the Law of Moses

This relaxation, or loosening, of the law was anathema to Jesus who aimed to do the very opposite by tightening or perfecting it and bringing it into accord with what has been the Law of the Father from the beginning. It was doubtless at the heart of Jesus' ongoing controversy with the Pharisees. It also explains the nature of the six "antitheses" of the Sermon on the Mount. In each of the six cases, Jesus takes the Law as expressed through Moses and stiffens it immeasurably. One of his most revealing statements relative to the Law begins with his introduction to the antitheses at Matthew 5:17:

Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

The Greek for "abolish" and "relaxes" in this quotation come from the verb *lúo* which means literally "to loosen" or, as translated here, to relax. Prefixed with *kata* it means to loosen completely, to dissolve, hence to abolish, destroy, or bring to an end. When Jesus says, "Not an iota, not a dot, shall pass from the law until all is accomplished," he must be understood as meaning that nothing is to be done to the law that would result in a loosening or relaxation of its application. His purpose is to do the very opposite, by tightening it. Then he continues to illustrate the significance of this by the antitheses, in each of which the Law of Moses provided for a relaxed application, whereas the Law of Jesus stiffened it immeasurably. We will not discuss all of them here, but the first one will illustrate this:

You have heard that it was said to the men of old, "You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment." But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother shall be liable to the council, and whoever says, "You fool!" shall be liable to the hell of fire (Matthew 5:21,22).

Just being angry with your brother has the same result as killing him! This is a radical change that lifts the law as delivered by Moses to a much higher plane where a man's desire or intent is the same as carrying out the deed, though the brother may not have been touched. This is what I mean when I say that Jesus stiffened the Law. This also would seem to make the keeping of the law much more difficult. This is the same sort of change accomplished by the second antitheses:

You have heard that it was said, "You shall not commit adultery." But I say to you that every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart (Matthew 5:27,28).

This stiffening of the Seventh Commandment again takes the offense out of the category of actual commission of an act and places it in the category of thought or intent. If this commandment seemed hard to keep already, Jesus' stiffening made it much, much more difficult. So it goes throughout the other antitheses, where the Law of Moses presented a relatively relaxed standard regulating divorce, the practice of swearing, retaliation and the

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disposition toward one's enemy. In every case the change advanced by Jesus was extremely radical and – so it would seem – far, far more difficult to keep.

The Law of Moses was lacking, then, both because it fell short of the will of the Father as it has been from the beginning, and because the primitive Hebrews were unable to receive anything more demanding. Jesus brought it to perfection and now calls on all men everywhere to strive for the perfection of the Father.

## The Fulfilling of the Law

We are now in a position to draw a conclusion as to what Jesus meant when he said, above, that he came to fulfill the Law. He considered the law as given by Moses, like a cup only half full, to be incomplete and unfinished. He took that cup and filled it to the brim. This is the interpretation of the Greek, *plerosai*, as used here. Thus he literally “fulfilled” or “filled full” the Law. He certainly did not come to destroy it or otherwise to bring it to an end! In the Law of Moses, Jesus took an old and incomplete house, weather worn and lacking a roof then fully refurbished and completed it so that it lacked nothing. I use this metaphor to emphasize that he ended with the same house that was there at the beginning, yet significantly strengthened. The United States Constitution is a good comparison. It has been amended and there have been changes of administrations but the Constitution is still there. Not one dot or comma has passed away from it! Thus, Jesus amended the Law as delivered by Moses.

He also introduced a change of administration. He did this when he said of John,

The Law and the Prophets were until John. Since then the Kingdom of God is preached . . . (Luke 16:16).

Jesus did not mean to indicate with these words that the Law and the Prophets were terminated with the ministry of John the Baptist. Prior to John the whole earth was under a different administration. This administration changed when Jesus introduced the Kingdom. The Law and the Prophets, with Jesus' amendments, continues to be the rule of the Father for men but the administration has changed in that the Kingdom of God has come to earth and Jesus has been exalted and installed as king. The apparent contradiction of this utterance with his other statement that the Law and the Prophets will not pass away is thus seen to be no contradiction whatever. They did not pass away but continue in full force, greatly strengthened and stiffened by the new administration of Jesus the Messiah.

Likewise, when he stated,

It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void (Luke 16:17),

he did not mean that every facet of the Law would continue to be enforced. To the contrary, his radical stiffening of the Law, his raising it to be a matter of will or desire instead of mere action, and the resulting simplification necessarily renders much of its minutiae obsolete. In a similar fashion, many laws in the United States are no longer enforced. Times change, the society changes, and they are not currently needed. Nevertheless, they remain on the books and can be enforced should any administration choose to do so. So it is with much of the law as delivered by Moses.

## The Laws that are not Enforced in the Kingdom

The laws regulating both fasting and ceremonial cleanliness are not enforced in the Kingdom of God. The reason for this is the internalization of the Law, as is evident from the utterance of Matthew 15:10-20 (See also Mark 7:14-23):

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And he called the people to him and said to them, Hear and understand: not what goes into the mouth defiles a man, but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man. ... But Peter said to him, "Explain the parable to us." And he said, are you still without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach, and so passes on? But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, this defiles a man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a man; but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man.

Similarly, that portion of the Mosaic Code that regulates ritual and sacrifice, the ceremonial law, is no longer enforced. When Jesus quoted the Father, "I desire mercy and not sacrifice," he again internalized the law, since mercy comes from the heart. He also placed the temple rituals in storage by making the assertion that God does not desire sacrifice (Matthew 9:11, 12:7). Then he sealed this action by allowing the Romans to utterly destroy the temple in AD 70.

Large portions of the five books of Moses were intended to regulate institutions, such as slavery, that no longer exist. Other ordinances regulated procedures for managing lepers since leprosy was not understood. Modern understanding of these things renders such ordinances obsolete. The genocidal ordinances given when the Israelites invaded Canaan cannot be reconciled with Jesus' "Love your enemy" or "Love your neighbor as yourself." These ordinances are enforced no more. Much of the Mosaic Code was given to regulate a culture of which the prevailing circumstances no longer exist. Obviously, these ordinances can no longer be enforced, although they are still there, jot and tittle, precisely as Jesus indicated.

## Jesus Condensed the Law

Jesus has confronted all these cultural circumstances and made such ordinances moot by his condensation of the law. In so doing, he has also universalized it so that it is applicable to individuals of all cultures and times. He condensed and universalized it by the following utterances:

So whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them; for this is the law and the prophets (Matthew 7:12).

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets (Matthew 22:37-40).

I emphasize that this radical condensation of the law comes from the law, so that it does not represent a new legal code. It is the same code, differently perceived. Also, by recasting the essence of the law in terms of love and wish, Jesus has further internalized it, called individuals to full responsibility and made each person accountable for wants and desires. The human will was thereby set free, as though it had come to the age of accountability before God.

## A Fundamental Distinction

Almighty God spoke to Moses out of fire and smoke on Sinai's peak, commanding what human beings shall and shall not do; the Holy Father spoke through Jesus on the mount of the Sermon commanding what human beings shall or shall not love and desire. In the first case He spoke to servants through a servant ("my servant, Moses"). In the second case, He speaks to children through a son ("This is my beloved son") – to advanced children who can be held fully accountable both for their deeds and desires and whom He expects to make their own enlightened decisions.

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This distinction comes into clear focus when we compare the voices from heaven that identified Moses and Jesus. When the Lord rebuked Miriam and Aaron from a pillar of cloud because of their complaint against Moses he spoke of the latter as “my servant Moses” (Numbers 12:1- 8). But when he rebuked Peter, James and John on the Mount of Transfiguration, he spoke of Jesus, saying, “This is my beloved son; listen to him” (Mark 9:7)! Jesus is therefore higher than Moses in the house of the Father as a son is higher than a servant in the house of the king. In Moses, the Lord spoke through a servant to servants; in Jesus, the Father speaks through a son to children – to sons and daughters. The law as delivered to Moses was therefore a law for servants; the law as delivered through Jesus is therefore a law for children in the likeness of the Father. It is the same law amended to render it suitable for children.

It follows that, for the children of God, the law and prophecy of Jesus supersede the Law and the Prophets, personified in Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration. We note that Peter, James and John wanted to build three tabernacles, one each for Moses, Elijah, and Jesus, thus placing Jesus on par with the other two. The voice from heaven was a rebuke to the three frightened disciples who, looking around, suddenly saw no one but Jesus only. Moses and Elijah had passed from view and only Jesus remained! But the servant law is still with us, complete with every jot and tittle, and it yet applies to servants..

When Jesus stiffened the law of divorce by eliminating all grounds, the disciples grumbled and he explained, “Not all men can receive this.” This explains two things. **First, the application of the law of Jesus, the son, is qualified by being restricted to the *children of God*. Second, the jot and tittle does not pass away because the law as delivered by the servant, Moses, continues to be applied to the *servants of God*.**

## The Missing Component

When Jesus confronted the scribes, Pharisees and lawyers on this matter of the application of the law, he was most adamant:

They bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with their finger (Matthew 23:4, see also Luke 11:46).

This “heavy burden” was the application of the law as interpreted through the “traditions of the elders.” It was not that it was strict, but that there was so much of it that it was weighty. When the apostles later decided that it was not necessary to bind the Gentile converts to the Law of Moses, Peter explained to those Jewish disciples who wanted the Gentiles to be circumcised and to keep the law that this was not necessary. He said, “Now therefore why do you make trial of God by putting a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?” The Law of Moses therefore was generally thought to impose a heavy yoke and burden about the necks of all that were subject to it. Yet Jesus took this heavy yoke and burden, decried those who would relax it in any way, and then amended it in a manner that greatly stiffened it. And then he said to his disciples:

Come unto me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light (Matthew 11:28-30).

This is not reasonable on the surface. One takes, for example, the Seventh Commandment, “You shall not commit adultery,” which was a “burden hard to bear.” Then Jesus stiffened it immeasurably by internalizing it,

Everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart (Matthew 5:27).

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This lightens the burden? Or one takes the ordinance of Moses that reads, “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,” and stiffens it:

Do not resist one who is evil (Matthew 5:38,39).

This eases the yoke? We are surely missing something here, since even Jesus recognized that not all men can receive this precept, but only those to whom it is given (Matthew 19:11).

If you will recall our interpretation of the message of Jesus above, you should see clearly that what is missing is the application of his Great Principle: **Whoever loves his life loses it, but whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for life eternal.** We will only be able to make sense of Jesus’ radical stiffening of the Law of Moses after we have applied this Great Principle.

The Law of Moses the servant is applicable to the servants of God among men, who love the life in this world. Its ordinances are therefore rooted in the love of life. Seeing that it is this love that has fueled the evolutionary forces that work for the preservation of life, the law as delivered by Moses is applicable to all men everywhere in principle and, indeed, every nation develops legal codes compatible with it. It is “a life for a life,” in order that life may be protected and preserved compatibly with the love of life. It is the law for servants.

The Law of Jesus is only for those “to whom it is given.” These are those who have committed to the Great Principle and have, through Jesus and his Gospel of the Kingdom, learned to hate the life that we have in this world so as to qualify for eternal life as children with the Father. The Law of Jesus is for children.

It is not reasonable for a person who loves life to love the enemy who would hurt or destroy that life. It is not reasonable for a person who loves life to turn the other cheek. It is not reasonable for a person who loves life to give no resistance to one that is evil. It is not reasonable for a person who loves life to reject divorce from a spouse who is ruining that life. And so on it goes. But all these things become reasonable when the attitude to life is reversed in accord with the Great Principle. If I love the Father so much that my only unyielding desire is to go to Him, then I not only can live according to the command of Jesus, I will so live and the enemy is no threat to the things that I hold dear. So it was that Jesus went without resistance to the cross, with the prayer, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do!” It is only by compliance with the Great Principle of Jesus that his yoke becomes easy and his burden light. It is simple logic, indeed. If my hearts supreme desire is to leave this life and go to my Father in heaven, where moth and rust do not corrupt and thieves cannot break in and steal, then nothing threatens me here. The enemy then becomes an enabler.

## An Example

Let me use an example. Air, like the love of life, is ubiquitous on the surface of the earth where we live. Large material objects, metal or fabric, are very heavy. The material in a dirigible weighs several tons, and if provided without voids or hollows would comprise a yoke too difficult and a burden far too heavy for any man to bear. Shape it in a certain way so that it becomes a large hollow vessel, and it still weighs tons. Then carry out one more operation – replace the air within it with hydrogen or helium, and it floats of its own accord. So a seemingly heavy burden becomes light – a yoke easy to bear. Yet it looks the same! One can even add more weight to it – put people on board – and still it goes up, lighter than air! What I mean is that when people are immersed in the love of life, the law as amended by Jesus seems impossibly heavy. But replace the love of life with the love of God and it becomes easy to bear.

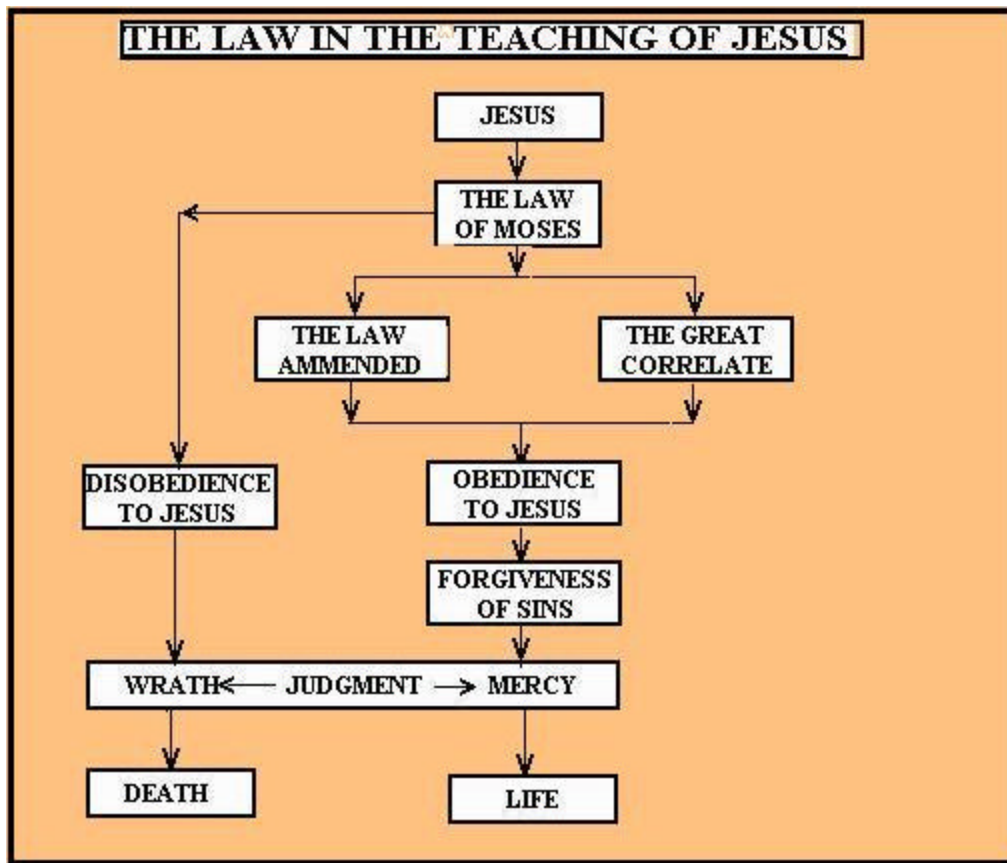
In summary, we see that Jesus maintains the Law of Moses without loss of jot or tittle as the law for servants under the administration of the Kingdom of God. Then he *condensed* it to its essence, the First Commandment and the Second Commandment, and this he applied to all men



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who would enter into life. If you would enter into life, keep the commandments! Then he *stiffened* the law as required to make it compatible with the Great Principle and the Love of God, and this he applied to the children, to those who are “born of God.” He also *internalized* the law by making it a matter of the thoughts and attitudes of the heart rather than the deeds of the hands. This was necessary to make it compatible with the divine spirit indwelling the hearts of the children of God, and to make every individual accountable for its interpretation. Finally, he *universalized* it, not in the sense of application, for it is not given to all men, but in the sense of applicability. By extracting it from a distinctive Jewish culture and circumstance he rendered it applicable to all cultures and circumstances. He definitely did not destroy the Law of Moses and he did not bring it to an end. He took the imperfect law as given through a servant to servants and perfected it. Then he gave it, not to the Jews and not to all men, but to the children of God, and made it the medium through which men and women may receive eternal life. This he did when he said, If you would enter into life, keep the commandments. Keeping all these considerations in mind, Jesus’ view of the law can be illustrated by the chart entitled:

### The Law in the Teaching of Jesus



## 2. Paul and the Law

We have already given some consideration to Paul’s view of the law in the discussion of his prescription for eternal life. There is more to be said here which will tend to build on the above.

First, his explanation of why the law was given and the purpose it serves indicates fuzzy thinking

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with an apparent contradiction. He explained that one mans trespass (Adams), led to condemnation for all men, and likewise, one mans act of righteousness (Jesus') leads to acquittal and life for all men. Then he states that "law came in to increase the trespass." (Romans 5:20) The resulting increase of sin only causes grace to abound all the more.

But in the Galatian letter he asks: "Why then the law?" Then he explains that it was added because of transgressions. He states:

Before faith came, we were confined by the law, kept under restraint until faith should be revealed, so that the law was our custodian until Christ came (Galatians 3:23).

The law, keeping the Jews under restraint like a custodian restrains and disciplines children can only reduce the transgressions. But he has told us in Romans that it came in to increase the trespass. And in Romans he was careful to explain that this is indeed the case, for "through the law comes the knowledge of sin," (Romans 3:20) and "sin is not counted where there is no law" (Romans 5:13). Describing his own experience as typical, he stated:

Apart from the law, sin lies dead. I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died (Romans 7:9).

If the coming of the law brought sin to life in Paul's experience, then it must certainly have resulted in an increase in transgressions. But he asserted,

Where there is no law, there is no transgression (Romans 4:14).

So, does the law increase the trespass, or, like a custodian over children, does it restrain and therefore reduce the transgressions?

You see the contradiction, I am sure. I ask, can this be resolved by examining the two words, trespass and transgression, together with sin? I do not see how this is possible. A trespass is an offense, and an offense to God must be categorized as a sin, and Paul used these two words (trespass and sin) interchangeably (Romans 5:20). Presumably, one can trespass against or offend God in the absence of law. Transgression is different, if "where there is no law, there is no transgression." Therefore, a transgression must be a special case of offense to God, resulting from disobeying his law. But this also is sin. So if both are sub categories of sin, the contradiction must stand. It cannot be resolved by resort to splitting hairs as to the definition of words. In addition, if we think of a trespass as some type of offense to God apart from the law, as we must if we accept Paul's assertion that "law came in to increase the trespass" then it cannot be true that "apart from the law, sin lies dead" (Romans 7:8).

So, the more we think of it, the fuzzier Paul's thinking becomes. While it is true that he shows himself adept at the application of logic in many instances, sometimes he goes beyond his ability so as to reveal to us, when our eyes are open, that he is, after all, just another man speaking his thoughts.

### Another Contradiction

We have yet another problem with his contrast of Christ and Adam. He summarized this contrast in writing,

Than as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man's act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men (Romans 5:18).

According to this Paul is a Universalist, believing that all men will receive life through Christ. He certainly believes that all men are condemned in Adam, writing to the Romans

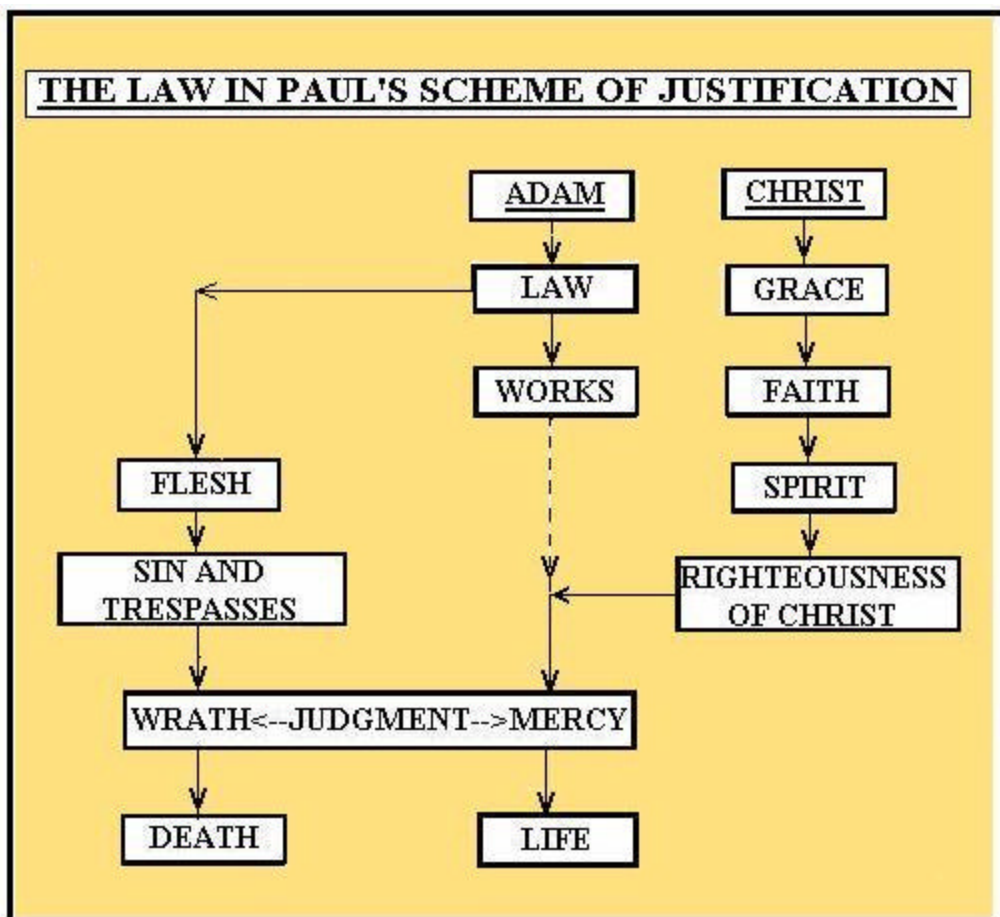
## THE LAW

All men, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin (Romans 3:9).

Therefore he must be saying that all men, both Jews and Greeks, are acquitted by the work of Christ. Otherwise the contrast is not appropriate. But we do not find this to be the case, for he believes that there is a judgment of wrath waiting for all that have not turned to God (I Thessalonians 1:10).

Overall, of course, he tends to make a lot of sense, otherwise his logical indiscretions would have revealed him to all for what he is. As it is, his asserted universalism goes unnoticed by his disciples, who prefer to believe that he only intends to be saying that life in Christ is available to all men. Perhaps that was his intent, but then his contrast with Adam falls flat.

His positions on many theological themes tend to a kind of dualism, in which he pairs contrasting ideas. A diagram can best show this. He pairs Adam with Christ.



As in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive (I Corinthians 15:22).

He pairs law with grace,

Yea are not under law, but under grace (Romans 6:14,15).

He pairs works with faith,

For we hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law (Romans 3:28).

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Coming down one step further on the chart, he pairs flesh with spirit,

Having begun with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh (Galatians 3:2)?

Then, of course, he pairs sin and/or trespasses with righteousness and/or justification,

For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be made righteous (Romans 5: 19).

God's wrath is paired with his mercy in the act of judgment,

What if God, . . . endured with much patience the vessels of wrath . . . in order to make known the riches of his glory for the vessels of mercy . . . (Romans 9:22,23).

Life is paired with death,

For as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive (I Corinthians 15:22).

The central column of the chart illustrates what might have been, or what is true in principle as set forth in Chapter 2 of Romans. The law came in under Adam and, in principle, should have resulted in good works as men responded through obedience to the law. They would have received God's mercy at the judgment and would have been rewarded with eternal life (Romans 2:7). But because of the flesh, the good works were not forthcoming, so the arrows below the LAW are shown in dotted lines. This indicates that this is intentional only, showing an intent that is never realized. Instead the action shifts to the left hand column where sin, aroused in the flesh by the law (Romans 7:5), comes to life. This results, of course, in the outpouring of God's wrath at the judgment, and death that is eternal separation from God. For all these, says Paul, there will be "wrath and fury" (Romans 2:8). There are no exceptions. Death spread to all men because all men sinned (Romans 12:12). I can find no evidence that Paul credits any man with a degree of righteousness apart from Christ. It seems to require only one transgression of the law to shift the action from the center column to the left hand column. In Adam, all die!

But then Christ entered the scene and opened up a new avenue to LIFE, as illustrated by the right hand column. As the perfectly free gift of God's grace, everyone who places faith in Jesus will receive the Spirit and the righteousness of Christ. I emphasize that it is a perfectly free gift. The perfect righteousness of Christ is imputed to the believer, who then is judged through the mercy of God to be worthy of eternal life, as though perfect in all his deeds and thought. The action switches back to the center column where it should have been but was not. This wonderful free gift is possible, writes Paul, because the sacrificial death of Jesus has expiated our sins. Each individual, by his faith in Jesus, has died with Jesus so as to live with him in newness of life. This life comes when the Spirit restores the life to our mortal bodies, which were crucified with Jesus. In the embrace of this faith and the life of the Holy Spirit we are enabled to produce the works that are acceptable to God – namely, the works equivalent to the works of the law, but only through Christ.

How does the law come? It comes through Moses and is passed down from generation to generation, I would assume. This seems to be how it came to Paul. He wrote, "I was alive once, apart from the law, but when the law came, sin came to life and I died." He indicates that this is the only avenue for the law when he wrote, "I should not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet" (Romans 7:7). Yet he knew perfectly well that there were multitudes of Gentiles who lived as though they had received the law, even though they may never have heard of Moses. He accounted for these by saying,

When the Gentiles, who have not the law, do by nature what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law (Romans 2:14).

## THE LAW

Was the law not available to Paul on the same basis, before he was taught the Law of Moses? Presumably not – by his own rationale, he must have been morally and spiritually dense when compared with the Gentiles.

### More Confusion

Paul is very ambivalent with regard to the law. On one hand, we have these statements:

The law worketh wrath (Romans 4:15).

Through the law comes the knowledge of sin (Romans 3:20); and

It is the law of “sin and death” (Romans 8:2).

Yet his commitment to Judaism would not permit a negative attitude toward it.

The law is holy (Romans 7:12).

The law is spiritual (Romans 4:14).

The law is good (Romans 7:16).

He works his way around this ambivalence by incorporating “sin” and “sinful flesh” into his doctrine in such a manner as to personify sin and to credit this “sin” with all transgressions because of the weakness of the flesh (Romans 8:3). And, as I showed earlier, he managed to exempt himself from any responsibility for his sins by hiding behind “Sin” and the weakness of his flesh.

If I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwelleth within me (Romans 7:20).

## 3. Comparing Jesus and Paul

We can best make this comparison by comparing the two charts provided above. Paul found the law impossible to keep (see Romans 7) even though the scriptures testified that it was not too hard (Deuteronomy 30:11). When the law came to him, sin came to life through the weakness of his flesh, and Paul died. Referring to the chart above, we see that Jesus also provided for disobedience to the law of Moses such that disobedience leads to wrath and death much the same as Paul.

But how does one find salvation from this wrath? The answer to this question discloses the vast difference that distinguishes the doctrines of the two. Paul, cowering under his wrathful deity, could find no forgiveness for his sin, and no grounds for righteousness. This was because he repeatedly sinned due to the weakness of his flesh. Dedicating himself to the strictest clan in Judaism, the Pharisees, he struggled to achieve righteousness but all to no avail. His conclusion?

Wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from this body of death (Romans 7:24)?

Then, in his despair, he had his personal encounter with Jesus and, caught up to the third heaven, heard things impossible to utter. Out of that came his doctrine of salvation by grace through faith, with a new life in Christ arising through the baptism of the Holy Spirit. By this means he found his way back to the mercy of God, and claimed the promise of eternal life.

But Jesus presented a radically different way of salvation. Accepting the law as the basic standard, one that was not too hard to keep, he held all men accountable for keeping it. He then

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extracted its essence, thus distilling, stiffening, universalizing, internalizing and clarifying it. This did indeed make it too hard to keep by itself, but he made it possible for the children of God by his introduction of the Great Principle and the Great Correlate as defined above. The children of God, focussed on the love of God and the hatred of life, can become obedient to the standard of righteousness taught and exemplified by Jesus.

### The Critical Difference

Now comes the vast difference between Jesus and Paul. In the cases where God's children fall into disobedience and sin, they need only repent and God who always loves his children will forgive them so that they have confidence of receiving the mercy of the Father and the inheritance of eternal life on the Day of Judgment. The love and forgiveness of the Father does not require the expiation of sin as Paul taught. A sin forgiven does not require punishment as Paul imagined. The righteousness of Christ is realized, not by imputation according to Paul, but by following Jesus in the way of the cross, which is the way of the love of the Father and the hatred of life in this world. The Prodigal Son stands before us as the metaphorical example. The chart illustrates this.

In Paul, the terrible wrath of God cannot be satisfied apart from the shedding of blood and atonement. In Jesus, the wonderful forgiveness of God requires only repentance and following Jesus in the Way. The difference is critical. In Christendom, where multitudes of churchmen around the world have followed the way of Paul, history shows that they are as bound to sin as if they had never heard of Jesus. They still fear death and strive to postpone it as long as possible. They continue to sin by going to war and by doing selfish deeds because they are yet in love with life. So, when at last death overtakes them they cannot go to God. It is solely because they do not want to go – never having embraced the Great Correlate as set forth by Jesus. The way of Paul is therefore literally a dead end because it ends in death. The way of Jesus, which is the way of the Cross, is the living way because it leads to life eternal.

### The Differences Explained

The differences seem to arise primarily from the contrasting views of God held by Jesus and Paul. For Jesus, God is first of all the loving Father who only wants his children to repent of their waywardness and come home. He is the Father who forgives his children when they repent (provided only that they likewise forgive others) and who sent his son to show the way. For Paul, he is the terrible deity whose wrath hovers over all men and that cannot be satisfied by anything other than the shedding of blood – the terrible suffering of Jesus who shed his blood for our sins on the cross, provided only that we put our faith in him. For Paul, the law is only a schoolmaster to lead us to Christ and thereafter has no relevance; for Jesus, it is the standard of righteousness that leads us to the Father.

A Prayer  
of Jesus

I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes; yea, Father, for such was thy gracious will.

## Conclusion

# THE SILVER PEN

Jesus and Paul had very little in common as to the foundation of their gospels. This has been amply illustrated in the above discussion, which focuses on four major areas of disagreement: Love, Reconciliation of the World, Eternal Life and the Law. This is adequate to demonstrate that Paul's gospel differs radically from that of Jesus.

His doctrine of the cross as a vicarious sacrificial atonement and expiation for sin that only requires faith to qualify the believer for salvation and eternal life is his invention. As such it is a false gospel that is powerless to save souls. It is nevertheless a powerful gospel because of its deception capabilities. For two thousand years it has been drawing in the multitudes and thereby assuring their eternal condemnation because they are without excuse. The message of Jesus is in front of them and they have refused to acknowledge or believe it because, in the shackles of their deception, they think they are secure.

Paul spoke with a silver tongue and wrote with a silver pen, characteristic of false prophets and deceivers in every age. There are so many wonderful passages throughout his epistles that we should not be surprised at their deceptive power. The wonderful exaltation of love in I Corinthians 13, and the magnificent passage pointing to the humility of Jesus who "emptied himself" in Philippians 2, are two of the many examples of texts rolling from his silver pen. Perhaps James, who most probably wrote to counter Paul's doctrine by faith only, had him in mind when he said,

From the same mouth come forth blessing and cursing. My brethren, this ought not to be (James 3:10).

We have seen above how Paul could issue curses when his dander was up!

The fact is that he authored many texts that are a blessing to read – what a tragedy that they are surrounded by lies. Those who are thus deceived cannot truthfully say they were not warned.

Beware, said Jesus, **of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves** (Matthew 7:15).

He said clearly,

**Many false prophets will arise and lead many astray** (Matthew 24:11).

Where are these many false prophets? Are they confined to isolated individuals scattered through Christendom, the "Elmer Gantry" types? No, for in that case they would only number a few. Jesus said they are many.

Are they confined to the glitzy television evangelists who have wide influence in the world? Again, No, for those are, again, only a few. Jesus said they are many. Then who can they possibly be?

Let me direct your attention to the only place where prophets of any kind can be called "many." It is the churches of Christendom that do indeed contain many prophets. There are not many

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anywhere else, so I can only conclude that Jesus' "many false prophets" must be in the churches!

Yes, and he also warned us specifically to close our ears to Paul, the captain of false prophets on whom most of the churchmen rely:

**A stranger they (his sheep) will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers** (John 10:5).

This stranger can only be Paul, a stranger to Jesus, a stranger to the apostles and a stranger to the fellowship of disciples that first gathered in Jerusalem, Damascus, and Antioch. He remains a stranger to the little flock of disciples of Jesus who abide in the world even today. He is a stranger to me and I hope also to you. And these "strangers" whose voices the sheep do not know? Surely you can answer this by yourself!



Book IV

**THE**

**CHURCH**

## BOOK IV

# THE CHURCH

## INTRODUCTION - THE SAINT

There was at least one saint in my childhood and youth. There may have been more, but of this one I am most certain. Uncle Alvin, uncle by marriage to Dad's sister Fanny (we all called her Auntie), was a faithful member of his Southern Baptist Church till the end of his days. He had been a carpenter and he had farmed. But somewhere through the years he came into the employ of a Jewish dry goods merchant who owned stores in Northwest Tennessee and Southwest Kentucky. When I was very young he was transferred from a store in Hickman, Kentucky to the only dry goods store in his (and my) West Tennessee hometown of Kenton and that is the setting in which my memories of him stand out most vividly. His job was not strenuous, but it was tedious and boring, with long hours. As the store's only sales person for men's furnishings, he also was assigned the task of opening in the morning and closing at night, six days a week. Since his health was very good (I never knew him to be ill) he seldom if ever missed work for that reason, so the store was his life during the week, day after day, year after year.

The years of the depression thirties were tough and I seldom warranted new garb. Maybe once a year, at the start of school, Dad took me to Schatz's Dry Goods Store where Uncle Alvin fitted me with, maybe, a pair of shoes or a shirt or, maybe, a pair of new denim overalls to wear in the fields. Once I even got a three-piece suit for Sunday School and church! "Maybe," mind you, for nothing was assured. Curiosity always drew my eyes to the rear of the store where his employer maintained his business office and was usually seen sitting at an elevated desk. He could survey his domain from there including, of course, Uncle Alvin and his activities.

Dad transferred me from the rural Lonoak Elementary School to Kenton Elementary School in 1938. That started a new wintertime pattern because the rudimentary school bus was unable to negotiate the often-muddy road on which we lived. So, to avoid the muddy trek to the bus in bad winter weather, I stayed with Auntie and Uncle Alvin in their Kenton apartment Monday through Thursday nights. They never owned their home and my impression was that, in spite of Auntie's uppity posturing, they were very poor. That's when I got to know them well, both of them, and became very fond of them.

They never owned a car, so Uncle Alvin walked the few blocks to work and back, rain or shine. On those winter evenings he would arrive home long after dark and we sat around the table enjoying the dinner Auntie had prepared for us. Afterwards I might finish my homework while Uncle Alvin prepared his Sunday School lesson or attended to church business, or perhaps read the Bible or a newspaper. He was both a deacon and a Sunday School Teacher in the First Baptist Church. Sometimes, we gathered around the table and played Chinese checkers while I sensed that I was extremely welcome in that home – perhaps I filled a void left by the deaths of two infants, a daughter and a son. And perhaps Auntie, with her meticulously groomed, bouffant and silvery white hair helped to fill a void in me – one left by the death of my mother not long before.

She was highfalutin' and most unhappy. She was disappointed – in her life, in her circumstances, in her husband and in their station in life. She put on airs. She liked to talk to me about her congressman or senator, to show her respect for them and to boast of them – what fine men they

## INTRODUCTION – THE SAINT

were. I didn't know it at the time, but that was her way of encouraging me to aspire to high stations in this life (at this she failed miserably). And their pastor! Oh, he was surely one of the finest men who ever lived! She was strangely silent about her husband. Indeed, to the best of my memory, she said little about him. They did little communicating when they were together. There were neither quarrels nor displays of affection in my presence, although that was not unusual in their generation.

Uncle Alvin was a small man, slight of build but ramrod straight. His features were sharp, including a beaked nose, but his eyes were soft and gentle behind thin rimmed glasses. His head was covered with thinning gray hair, which was always well groomed. He was quiet and spoke softly. Never did I hear him raise his voice to anyone and never was he opinionated, judgmental or quarrelsome. There was not a dishonest atom in his body. He dressed for work as impeccably as his circumstances allowed – trousers freshly pressed by Auntie, starched shirt, tie, suit and well worn but shining shoes.

He didn't talk about his religion; he lived it so faithfully that I always saw Jesus in him. He never "preached" to me and never pressured me to convert. Only once did he encourage me to consider becoming a Christian. It was 1944 and I was leaving for the Navy and stopped at the store to tell him good-bye. As I was about to go, he came with me to the door and said, "Let me walk with you to the bus," so we went together down Main Street to the nearby bus stop. I don't remember his exact words, but I could sense his genuine concern for my welfare, both physically and spiritually. Since I was going off to train for war, he was thinking that he might never see me alive again and he could not bear to see me go without telling me of the Lord's love and urging me to commit my life to his Jesus. I thanked him, told him good bye, and got on the bus. Thereafter I saw him only briefly, during short trips home, when I always stopped in at the store to say hello.

Seven years later, in 1951, I was married and, together with Nellie, studying for the ministry at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. One day I came home to sad news – a phone call had informed us that Uncle Alvin was dead – an old man, tired and weary, still working, still walking to work. That evening, on the way home to Auntie, he had collapsed on the sidewalk and in that moment he went, instead, to heaven – that quiet, simple, meek and unpretentious child of the Father who, without knowing it, was a powerful influence in my young life and in my decision to become a follower of Jesus of Nazareth. Uncle Alvin, I love you. This is my tribute to you.

Patient reader, you are wondering why I am telling you all about Uncle Alvin in an essay set to discuss the church? Because I want you to know where I stand on the subject. I want you to know that I love the church with all its Aunties and Uncle Alvins. I want you to know that I understand that there are many such persons in the church, and that through them the church has been and is a powerful influence for all kinds of good in this world. I want you to sense how much I hurt because I can't be a part of it. I want you to know and understand why one of the three most unhappy days in my life was the day a church told me I could no longer serve as its pastor and cast me out.

But mostly, I want you to know that, strange as it may seem to you, I came out of the church because I was following the Lord. He led me out; I still follow him and I cannot go back unless he leads me, which seems very unlikely. He has called me to bear testimony before the church, which I must do from outside. Besides, if I accept your invitation and go to church with you next Sunday, one of the first events will be the offering up of a public prayer to the Lord – the same Lord, mind you, who has commanded us, when we pray, to enter into our closets, shut the door, and pray in secret! And worse yet, it will probably be the so-called "Lords Prayer" with its petition, thy Kingdom come, that was long ago granted as we learn if only, like his sheep, we hear his voice.

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I beg of you, I earnestly implore you – listen to him! Please! Take seriously that commandment directly from the Father that was spoken to Peter, James and John on the mount of transfiguration: This is my beloved son; HEAR YE HIM! This is my urgent plea to the churchmen: HEAR YE HIM (Mark 9:7)!

## CHAPTER I

# A WORD STUDY

"Church" is an interesting word in that Jesus apparently never uttered its New Testament Greek equivalent; a word that is not used anywhere in the record of his utterances in the Greek gospels. It occurs only twice in the entire Greek New Testament and that to refer to things unrelated to what we normally think of as "church." Now, you are thinking that this is a ridiculous statement, seeing that your New Testament is literally peppered with this word? Let me explain.

The English word derives, according to The Oxford English Dictionary, from a Greek word, *kuriakos*, that means "house of the Lord." This does not necessarily imply "belonging to the Lord Jesus." Rather, it applies to any lord, whether a landlord, a master, a lord of slaves or any other lord. It is this word, from which "church" is derived, that occurs only twice in the Greek New Testament. In I Corinthians. 11:20, it is used to identify the "Lord's Supper" as belonging to the Lord. In Rev. 1:10, it is used to refer to the "Lord's Day" as belonging to the Lord. There is no record that Jesus ever used this word, *kuriakos*, and it is not found in the Gospels.

Of course, I am aware that "church" occurs many times in the English New Testament. We find it more than one hundred times, primarily in the Acts and the Epistles, and always as translated from the Greek word that, transliterated, becomes in English *ecclesia*. This word in turn derives from a Greek verb that means "to summon forth," or "to call out from." It apparently has no etymological relation to *church*. *Ekklesia* is not a uniquely Christian word. In the Greek world it had numerous applications, often indicating an assembly of citizens, such as a town meeting.

Even in the New Testament it is not uniquely Christian. When Paul was at Ephesus (Acts 9:23-41), Demetrius, the silversmith, vigorously opposed him and gathered together silversmiths and other craftsmen and started a riot that enveloped the whole city, for "the city was filled with confusion." Then a great mass of pagan citizens, crying out "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" laid hold of Paul's companions, Gaius and Aristarchus, and dragged them into the theater. Some cried out one thing, some another, for the "*ekklesia*" was in confusion. Then the town clerk took charge of the assembly, rebuked the mob and urged them to bring such charges as they might have before the courts, which were open. "But," he said, "if you seek anything further, it shall be settled in the regular *ekklesia*." Then, after a few more words, "he dismissed the *ekklesia*."

Here we have the word used to specify a rioting mob of pagan citizens of the city of Ephesus, and also to apply to a legal assemblage of citizens. Luke in Acts also used the same word in relating the speech of Stephen that resulted in his martyrdom. Speaking of the great congregation of the children of Israel that gathered with Moses at Sinai, Stephen said, "This is he who was in the *ekklesia* in the wilderness . . ." (Acts 7:38). In the first case, we have a rioting mob called out from the city of Ephesus by Demetrius, the silversmith. In the second case, we have the Israelites whom God had called out from Egypt, and assembled with Moses at Sinai. Finally, Luke also used *ekklesia* to refer to the assembly of disciples, in many references such as Acts 5:11, where he related, "And great fear came upon the whole *ekklesia* and upon all who heard of these things."

In the Septuagint, it is used in place of the Hebrew, *qahal*, for the assembly of the Israelites, especially when gathered for religious purposes. Thus, below, we will find it used in this way in Acts 7:38 (by Stephen, based on his reading of the Septuagint) to define such an assemblage, and in Hebrews 2:12.

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Jesus used *ekklesia* only twice in the gospels. After eliciting Peter's confession of himself as the Christ, the Son of the living God, he said:

Blessed are you, Simon Bar Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter (*petros* – stone, little rock) and upon this rock (*petra* – crag, cliff, large rock) I will build my *ekklesia* (Matthew 16:17,18).

Later, giving instructions to the disciples as to how to respond to a brother who had sinned against them, he said:

If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the *ekklesia*; and if he refuses to listen even to the *ekklesia*, let him be to you as a gentile and a tax collector (Matthew 18:15-17).

It is interesting to note that if we did not have Matthew's Gospel, we would have no record whatsoever of any direct reference of Jesus to the *ekklesia*, for neither Mark, nor Luke, nor John use this word in relating his utterances. At the very least, this tells us that the apostles and other earliest disciples, who heard Jesus and later recorded his utterances, had very little recollection of any special significance that this word might have in the doctrine of their Lord. **I believe it means that *the church*, as we know it, had absolutely no place in the message of Jesus.**

Why is church used to translate *ekklesia* into English, when it derives from a completely different Greek word? *Ekklesia* was carried over into Latin and all the romance languages, but not into English, German, or any Teutonic or Slavonic language (see Oxford Dictionary of the English Language). We have no sure answer to this question, so I can only suggest one. Consider that you are native to the British Isles at an early time when Christian missionaries were first preaching the Gospel in Britain, or when the first church buildings were being erected. You might ask, concerning a new building under construction, whose is that? And an appropriate answer would be, perhaps, "It is the Lord's house." Or, in a single word, "that is a *church*," for the word from which *church* is derived, *kuriakos*, means "belonging to the Lord." It may have applied generally to the house of "the lord of the manor." Then it is an easy step to apply church also to the assembly of persons who met in, and maintained the building, then to the larger institution consisting of the union of local congregations. Thus it may have been that the use of *church* evolved through history with no reference to scriptural usage or precedents. I have suggested the setting as Britain, for I am suggesting the origin of an English word; however, it may have been some other location where the word resembled the English *church*, such as in Germany where the corresponding word would have been *kirche*. Carried over into English, it would naturally have become the corresponding *church*. So while I do not know the answer to this question and can only suggest possibilities, I do believe it is very significant, for it seems symbolic of a transition from the Truth to the sham gospels that the modern church proclaims in the name of Jesus, both in the English speaking world and throughout Christendom.

There may be a another reason for the switch from *ekklesia* to *church*. *Ekklesia* generally applies to an assembly or congregation of people who are "called out" or summoned to come together. When applied to a gathering of the disciples of the Lord, this is properly interpreted to indicate a summoning of people to come out of the world and to congregate in his name, apart from the people of the world. This was most appropriate in the early years of Christianity, when people were intensely aware of their uniqueness in having been called out of the world and set apart for the service of the Lord. But their organization became worldly, particularly after Constantine, the Roman Emperor, converted to Christianity, legalized and protected the gatherings of the Christians and appropriated their movement to use on behalf of governing the empire. Centuries passed during which the Christians, oftentimes forcibly "converted," lost their sense of being called out from the world, and related more to the building in which they met to worship, to the

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local congregation, or to the multi-national institution ruling over them, than to a gathering of "called out individuals." Thereafter, it was natural for them to refer proudly to their great buildings as "belonging to the Lord," and to refer to themselves, to their local gatherings, and their institution, in another sense as also belonging to the Lord, even though the Lord did not possess them! In my mind, at least, this word switch according to which church comes to describe the buildings, gatherings, and local, national, and institutional religious organizations in English speaking Christendom, as also the mystical "body of Christ," in contrast to *ekklesia*, the general, or nonspecific, word used by Jesus and his disciples is symbolic of the tragic march of heresy through the centuries. The "church experience" is therefore one that genuine disciples are well advised to avoid as being fraught with frustration, compromise, and all spiritual conflicts. I do not mean that individuals are condemned by belonging to a church, only that it is an association that will bring much tribulation to a true follower of Jesus.

Again, suppose *church*, as derived from *kuriakos* (lord's house), and *ekklesia* (called out assembly) are each valid descriptions of separate but related entities. In this case, I suppose that *church* is properly applied exactly as we apply it: to the behemoth that we call "the church," But *ekklesia* may well apply to that worldwide assembly of individual children of the Father who are genuine disciples whose faith rests on the love of the Father and the hatred of life, and who listen to the Good Shepherd. Many, perhaps most of them, are members of the churches and they will not be sorted out until the Judgment Day, when the Lord will gather and sort them at the Great Assize. That final assemblage may be one thing that Jesus had in mind when he made his reference to the *ekklesia* in saying, "On this rock I will build my *ekklesia*." Then, in the early years, when the apostles were assembling small groups, little flocks, of disciples in the various cities of the Roman Empire, and when they were predominately genuine disciples, they would have been representative of the final gathering into the *ekklesia*. As genuine representatives of that great and final assembly, these groups would have been properly called "the *ekklesia*" in whatever city they gathered, exactly as we read in the New Testament. Later, that is, today, when the multitudes who congregate in the Lord's name throughout the world no longer listen to his voice and so are not his true sheep – except for those few scattered through them who do listen – it is no longer appropriate to refer to them as *the ekklesia*, seeing that few of them will join that entity in the Great Assize and neither do they exhibit a separatist conscience as they must if called out from the world. Thus, in English and Germanic speaking nations at least, they have another name, *kuriakos*, or church.

So, just what is in the word? Apparently not much, at least from the perspectives of Jesus and the early disciples. Based on its New Testament usage, the state assemblies and the House of Representatives in Washington are all churches! Likewise are the mosques and the synagogues.

## CHAPTER II

**JESUS AND THE CHURCH**

Now we turn to the task of evaluating the modern church in the light of the teaching of Jesus. He was involved in calling out from the world a people for himself. They were to form associations for mutual fellowship and encouragement; indeed the negative response he expected from the world would force them to bond so as to withstand the opposition. The primary responsibility of the individuals in this association of "called out" people was, and is, to be his witnesses, to "Preach the Gospel to every creature." But Jesus was not concerned in the least as to what to name this human entity, this gathering of God's children he was and is calling out of the world to follow him. He referred to this "called out gathering" in a various ways, but one way, as indicated above, was to designate them, at least in their final assemblage to stand before him, as the *ekklesia*.

**Jesus' Use of *ekklesia***

As I have already stated, there are two instances where this word appears in Jesus' utterances. In the first instance, when he blessed Peter after his good confession and said,

. . . on this rock I will build my *ekklesia* (Matthew 16:17,18),

he may simply have acknowledged his intention to call out a growing body of persons from the world, individuals knit together in love and founded upon himself and the confession of their faith in him as the Messiah, the Son of the living God. Contrary to the Roman Catholic interpretation, this reference does not imply that the Christian *ekklesia* was to be founded on Peter as the confessing apostle. The stonemasons typically selected a site consisting of a large rock surface for a foundation. Then, upon that, they added the building blocks, smaller stones joined together with mortar and built up into a great building. In similar manner, Jesus the Christ is building up his "assembly," by setting them upon the foundation rock. This rock is Jesus himself, and also our good confession of him as the Christ. He sets us individually upon the rock and joins us with the mortar of love and of trust in his Holy Word. But he gave no distinctive name to this structure. He chose *ekklesia*, a word that was in common use to define numerous types of gatherings, all defined as being "assembled" or "called out" or "congregated" from a large population.

It is very significant that he gave no attention to defining his followers by the application of a unique name that would distinguish them from all others. Most of us, if we were concerned with creating an organized body that would likely survive us and carry on our work in the world, would be tempted to give much thought to selecting a distinctive name. We would want something that sounds impressive and that would, to some degree, define its purpose and remind the world that we were charter members. This would seem to be motivated by at least two things, both of which Jesus was devoid. One is pride, the tendency to exalt ourselves, to want to leave one's mark on the world. The other is closely associated with this, and is the deep seated belief that this world is a place of great inherent value and significance. I mean that if we looked upon the world as if it were a society of criminals, we would not be so inclined to want to leave our mark upon it. So Jesus, devoid of human pride and unconcerned about how this world of transgressors might view



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him in the long run – indeed, thoroughly comfortable with the fact that the world was to hate him and his followers, gave no attention to the selection of a name by which to distinguish us. If we are true to our calling, the distinction is always there, and the name by which we are called is of no concern.

Jesus' other utilization of *ekklesia* to define his followers has a somewhat different focus (Matthew 18:15-17). Here, he clearly used it to define some larger body. In the first instance, if your brother sins against you, go to him alone, taking no one with you, and seek to reason with him. If he hears you and responds appropriately, you have gained your brother. However, if he refuses to acknowledge his fault, then expand the action. Take two or three others with you and go to him a second time. If he hears you and responds appropriately, you have gained your brother. But if he continues to harden his heart, then take the matter to the *ekklesia*, the larger group consisting of many others, having the "two or three" present to witness to his intransigence. If he still does not hear you, let him be to you, said Jesus, "as a Gentile and a tax collector." Look again at the order: first, go alone; then take two or three others; finally, take them with you to the *ekklesia*. The *ekklesia* seems to have no more significance than to imply the gathering of a progressively larger group at a local site. Or does it?

Wait! Are we about to miss something? Here, in Jesus' *ekklesia*, there are no Gentiles or tax collectors! Else, why would Jesus have said to them, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector? Furthermore, it is clear that the common Jewish attitude towards Gentiles and tax collectors must in this context be acceptable to Jesus, otherwise how could he have recommended, even commanded, it to his disciples?

I conclude, therefore, that in the mind of Jesus this *ekklesia* must refer to the synagogue, which remained a part of the lives of Jesus and his disciples, and where Gentiles and tax collectors were hardly honored. The synagogue consisted of Jews, to whom Gentiles (except God-fearers) and tax collectors (publicans) had no true knowledge of God and were therefore to be avoided. Jesus was giving instructions that were immediately authoritative, but no church (as we know it) yet existed. It would seem, therefore, that he could not have been indicating that they should take the matter before the church, as we understand that word. If so, it is also to be distinguished from that *ekklesia* that he would build upon the foundation of the Good Confession. Therefore it is highly unlikely that anything resembling a unique assemblage of Christian disciples was indicated by this use of *ekklesia*.

Nor does this incident imply that Jesus hated, or despised, Gentiles and tax collectors. Everyone is aware of his love and concern for these categories of people, and of his willingness to accept them, on his terms, as his disciples. Nevertheless they were excluded from the synagogue (except for God-fearers and full converts), which is surely what Jesus is here indicating. Yes, Jesus has here instructed his disciples to take the matter before the Jewish synagogue! There remains, then, only one reference to the *ekklesia* that could possibly imply a unique assemblage of disciples, the one in which he promised to build it upon the foundation of the Good Confession, and which is best interpreted, I believe, to mean the assemblage of the saints to stand before him at the last day. But the fact that Jesus used *ekklesia* only twice in the Gospels, of which one use applied specifically to the synagogue of the Jews and the other to an entity that he would build suggests that his *ekklesia*, the one he would build, also bore enough similarity to the synagogue to merit also being identified as such. What he proposed to build on the grounds of Peter's Good Confession may be his synagogue, a synagogue of Jews distinguished from other Jews only by their confession of and belief in Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God. This being what he implied by one use of *ekklesia*, it is likely that this was his primary meaning in the other of the two uses. The *ekklesia* before which one is to lodge one's complaint against an offending brother is, then, the synagogue. But as indicated, he may also have meant to specify the assembly of his sheep, called out from the world to stand before him at the last day.

This is important because he always chose his words carefully, using an economy of words, to

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express precisely his ideas. It follows that Jesus never, in all the New Testament record, made reference to a Gentile institution to be called "the church," and furthermore, institutions that we call "church" are nowhere defined in the Gospels. Instead, he used completely different terminology when referring to the associations of his disciples throughout the world. We will come back to this below. It also follows, since Jesus made no specific provision for the institution of the church distinct from the synagogue, that he laid no plans for founding that Gentile institution we call the church.

Grant, then, that the name is not important (although the method of its derivation may be very significant). Grant also that Jesus gave no attention to the selection of a distinctive name for the body of his disciples, either locally or world-wide; that the name that is now used in the English speaking world to describe their assemblages, *church*, is a name Jesus is not recorded to have uttered; and that the name used throughout the New Testament to identify the assemblage of his followers, *ekklesia*, is a non-specific name that applied to many entities. These included rioting mobs and the synagogue. Then also grant that Jesus himself only used it twice in the Gospel record, to apply either to the assemblage of the saints at the last day or to the body of believers in the world in one case where it almost certainly was in his mind a synagogue, and to definitely apply to the synagogue in the other.

## Provisions for the Ecclesia

Did he then make no provision for the perpetuation of his movement through the establishment and continuation of an institution defined as the body, or assemblage, of his disciples throughout the world and apart from Judaism? Yes. What follows is an effort to define these provisions and put them in perspective. If we do this properly, we should have a meter stick by which to evaluate the qualifications of what men call "church" to merit its designation as the genuine body of the disciples of Christ in the world. Or, alternatively, we may find that there is no body so qualified.

There are at least four different things to be examined here. They are

- (1) The synagogue;
- (2) The perpetuation of the Word in the world;
- (3) The basis of unity of the disciples; and
- (4) The administrative structure, or hierarchy.

### 1) The Synagogue

Jesus' attitude toward this institution is consistent with his general approach to all institutions of this world: he accepted it as he found it and gave no instructions to change anything. He expected that his disciples would, after his departure, maintain a continuing relationship with the Jewish institutions. He was himself establishing a new (Jewish) synagogue of disciples. He set an example for them in frequent appearances at the synagogue. At his home city of Nazareth, he first entered into the synagogue and taught the people. It was his custom, the evangelists tell us (Luke 4:16), to attend on the Sabbath Day, and that is where he first declared himself. Likewise, the apostles went first to preach the Word in the synagogues of the cities they visited in the course of their missionary journeys. They were seldom well received, just as the message of Jesus was not well received in the synagogue at Nazareth. Jesus knew before hand that this would be the response of the synagogues, and said so. The following quotations are illustrative of his expectations:

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. . . they will scourge you in their synagogues (Matthew 10:17).

. . . (some) ye shall scourge in your synagogues (Matthew 23:34).

And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not be anxious how or what you are to answer or what you are to say . . . (Luke 12:11).

. . . they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons . . . (Luke 21:12).

. . . they shall put you out of the synagogues . . . (John 16:2).

Jesus expected the disciples to follow his example by going first to the synagogue to preach the message. He also expected the synagogue to be no more receptive to them than to him, foretelling that they would be scourged there, persecuted, delivered up to prisons, and cast out.

Therefore, he certainly knew they would not long have a continuing fellowship within the synagogue. If not there, where? If not according to the Jewish customs and institutions, how? He was strangely silent. Had I been in his position, I would surely have felt charged with a responsibility to lay down some administrative guidelines for the fellowship of the disciples that must inevitably grow as they were more and more expelled from the synagogues. This brings us to the second item listed above:

### 2) The Perpetuation of the Word in the World

When Jesus prophesied the fall of Jerusalem, he concluded the prophecy by saying:

Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away (Mark 13:31).

This is as forward looking as a prophecy gets, seeing that it looks all the way forward in time to the passing of the heavens and the earth. There was one thing that was destined to endure, not only to the end, but, if we accept his statement literally, beyond the end; for this one thing, his very words, will not pass away. Thus far, after nineteen centuries, the prophecy remains secure. Now, it was to the Jewish nation that the oracles of God, including those of Jesus, had been given. Jesus was careful to direct his ministry to the Jews, maintaining that he was not sent but to the lost sheep of the House of Israel. He directed the disciples to do the same, right up to the day of his ascension from the earth, when he finally commanded them to go to all nations and preach the Gospel to every creature. Yet there is no record that he gave them instructions as to how to pursue their worldwide ministry, how to organize for effective proclamation of the Word, or how to maintain the work. Nevertheless, the Word has survived, has maintained its power and has not passed away so that, twenty centuries later, his testimony to the perseverance of the Word in the world has certainly been confirmed. He did, however, have a plan, as expressed in John's Gospel.

This plan revolved around the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the Counselor, whom Jesus would, and did, send following his departure from this world. The Holy Spirit was to fulfill certain duties, listed as follows:

. . . he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you (John 14:26).

. . .he will bear witness to me (John 15:26).

. . .he will convince the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment. (John 16:8).

. . . he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but

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whatever he hears he will speak and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you (John 16:13,14).

It is obvious that the duties of the Holy Spirit focus upon the Word, or utterances, of Jesus. He will bring them to the disciple's remembrance, he will bear witness to Jesus, that is, to his words. He will utilize these words to convince the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment, and he will speak in the world whatever he hears from the Lord, for he will take what belongs to Jesus (his words) and declare it to the disciples. He will declare the things that are to come. It is through these activities that the Holy Spirit is operating to maintain the Word in the world, and he will continue to do so until the end. This is the sole explanation of how the Word has persevered and is still alive in the world.

The Counselor, the Holy Spirit, initiated his work on the Day of Pentecost according to the *Acts* which contains the primary record of the events that transpired shortly following the Ascension.

The disciples being gathered in one place, He fell upon them and inspired them to proclaim the Gospel in other (national) tongues, for all the foreigners present heard them speaking in their native tongues, even though the disciples were apparently not versed in those languages. While the *Acts* does not inform us of the location of their gathering, it was in a public place, perhaps in a court of the Temple. In any case, the commotion was heard by many, who rushed together to see what was afoot. Then Peter, inspired by the Holy Spirit, stood up with the eleven and expounded the Gospel, beginning with the prophet, Joel, where he found an explanation for the strange event. Many received the Word and were baptized, being about three thousand in number.

With this beginning, the Holy Spirit went on to direct the literal "explosion" of the Word to both Jews and Gentiles, as partially recorded in the *Acts*. This composition, commonly called "The Acts of the Apostles" might better be called "The Acts of the Holy Spirit," since the Holy Spirit is credited with directing the initial activity of proclaiming the Word of Jesus to the world, both Jew and Gentile. However, in reading *The Acts of the Apostles*, one must keep ever in mind that it was written, by its own testimony, by Luke, a faithful disciple and protege of Paul. I use it here because it is the only readily available record we have, though there are other references in other ancient texts that give some clues as to the events of those early days.

It was the Holy Spirit that directed Peter to go to Caesarea with the messengers of Cornelius, a centurion and a Gentile, to be the first to preach the gospel to Gentiles with the result that many were converted and the Holy Spirit fell upon Gentile converts. In this, we see clearly how it was the work of the Holy Spirit to direct the activity of the Word in the early days of the *ekklesia*.

On the other hand, when we come to the description of events related to organization and administration of the fellowship, or *ekklesia*, we find that it is the apostles and disciples who are acting, not the Holy spirit. The Eleven presided over the appointment of Matthias to take the place of Judas. When the disciples at Jerusalem entered into a communal arrangement by selling their possessions and making distribution to all according to their needs, there is no evidence of activity by the Holy Spirit. When the first deacons were selected and set apart to serve tables, it was the twelve who initiated the action, not the Holy Spirit. When the disciples in Antioch decided to send relief to the brethren in Judea, there is no mention of the Holy Spirit. When the apostles and elders, together with Barnabas and Paul, met in Jerusalem to consider the circumcision controversy that had arisen in Antioch, it is the apostles and elders who are acting, not the Holy Spirit. When they reached a decision and wrote a letter to the brethren in Antioch to confirm the results, they first said regarding their decision, . . . it seemed good to us. . . , then later in the letter added, . . . it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us. . . . It could be, here, that they made their reference to the Holy Spirit only as an after-thought.

This could also be an early example of a practice that began in those days and continues to this day, according to which people clothe their words and deeds in spiritual language when the Spirit has had nothing to do with them. In any case, it appears that Jesus was not depending on the

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organization of the "church" to carry on his work of spreading the Word in the world; rather, he had assigned this task to the Holy Spirit, who would use certain persons as instruments to this end.

### 3) The Basis of Unity

Any institution, such as the disciples' *ekklesia* in the world, must have some mortar – some unifying power – that binds its parts one to another, providing a unity of purpose and action and a common motive underlying its operation. Jesus provided this "mortar" for the unification of his disciples through the ages and you may be surprised as to its character. But first, let us take a look at the basis of the unity of the church as defined by Paul. He defined the *ekklesia* as a body (I Corinthians 12:12f) of which we are individually members, knit together in love (Colossians 2:2). In the Ephesian letter, he developed a very elaborate presentation of the basis of the unity of this body, the body of Christ, the "*ekklesia*." There is, he said, one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all (Ephesians 4:4-6).

Behold, the many grounds of the unity of the *ekklesia*! Paul here lists seven, the magic number! They are body, Spirit, hope, Lord, faith, baptism, and God the Father. Then he proceeded to explain that this unity is further facilitated by gifts, which were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, for the equipment of the saints, for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love (Ephesians 4:11-16). Surely, there is no more profound statement of the grounds of the unity of the body of Christ, the *ekklesia*, than this one. As I look at Paul's words, I am impressed to shout "Wonderful!" Yet with it all, he failed to focus on the very essence of unity in Christ; that is, the principal ground as defined by Jesus himself:

I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me, as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep, that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd (John 10:14-16).

"This fold" is, of course, the Jewish nation. Those not of "this fold" are the Gentiles of all nations of the world. The "one flock" is the assembly of his "sheep" from out of all the nations, including the Jewish one. And if you look sharply, you can clearly perceive the unifying factor: and they will heed my voice. It is only in consequence of this heeding of his voice that the unity of the "one flock" is produced. The heeding of his voice is the one fundamental that defines his "sheep." He is their one and only shepherd!

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. . . (John 10:27).

Paul erred, but he was not in error, neither did he omit any grounds of unity of the faith, for when he specified one Lord, and designated Christ as the head into which we grow up, he was absolutely correct. But by failing to indicate that Christ is identified with his Holy Word, and that it is only by heeding his voice, the words he uttered, that unity is obtained, he left the field open to many different interpretations of the meaning of the words one Lord, and Christ, the head. As I indicated above, he has no oil for his lamp.

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Unfortunately, throughout the history of Christendom, churchmen have focused on Paul rather than Jesus when they were considering the administration of the church and we can easily see the result as we cast our eyes about to observe the great numbers of disparate bodies that have arisen. It is this most fundamental ground of unity that Paul failed to define adequately when he elaborated the various grounds of unity of the *ekklesia*, and it is, I firmly believe, the only valid explanation for the great divisions and conflicts among the churches of Christendom. Paul failed to define it, and so the churchmen failed to define it; but that is no excuse, because Jesus plainly specified it in John 10:27.

There are many different denominations because churchmen have not heeded his voice; there are so many different, conflicting beliefs and doctrines in Christendom because churchmen have not listened to his voice; and there are doubtless so many sad souls professing his name who yet have not heard his voice, and who therefore do not know him, who are not among his sheep, and whom he does not know, all because they do not hear his voice and because they have not heeded the very words of God the Father that were broadcast in the world by Jesus, the Son. One can count on the fingers of one hand the times Paul appealed to the sayings uttered by the voice of Jesus, in all his epistles. Rather, he appealed to no higher authority than himself, his claimed apostleship, his signs and wonders and his vision of the risen Lord. It is not strange, therefore, that he should fail to comprehend the essence of unity of the body of Christ as expressed by the voice of the historical Jesus.

### 4) The Administrative Structure

Paul, in Ephesians Chapter 4, as quoted above, named five offices, or functions, in the *ekklesia*. These are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. He elsewhere (I Timothy 3) specified the qualifications for additional offices of bishop (overseer) and deacon (*diakonos*). These, added to the five listed above, again give us the magic number of seven. The churches of Christendom have them all, more or less, because they have always been there, and, of course, because Paul set them forth in the beginning. This, however, could have been done only by totally ignoring the instructions of Jesus. I refer you to the following quotation:

But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brethren.  
And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. Neither be called masters, for you have one master, the Christ (Matthew 23:8-10).

The prohibition of "father" as a title is extremely important and lies at the very foundation of Truth. I discussed it in Jesus, the Rock of Offense, and elsewhere in this book. Now, however, we are concerned with the prohibition of the title of teacher, or rabbi. "Rabbi" is Hebrew for "teacher," but whatever the language, Jesus' disciples are not to be called "teacher." Yet Paul plainly attributes to the Lord the gift of the office of teacher. The Lord forbids it, yet Paul boldly proclaims that the Lord provided the office of teacher as a gift. Furthermore, if you examine the churches in the world today, you will find them full of "teachers." Yet for those who listen to Jesus, who hear his voice, there can be no such office and no such title, except as applied to the Lord Jesus himself. He applies but five titles for all of us:

- 1) that of servant (Greek, *diakonos*, Matthew 20:26) and
- 2) that of slave (Greek, *doulos*, Matthew 20:27),
- 3) that of witness (Acts 1:8),
- 4) that of disciple (John 8:31) and
- 5) that of friend (Greek, *philos*, John 14:13-14).

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At least, Paul got the "deacons" right (I Timothy 3:8)! The most we can be, in the hearing of the voice of Jesus, would be, perhaps, teacher's aids. But to be called a teacher he has absolutely forbidden. This also means that he has forbidden his disciples to be called "doctor," for this is from the Latin for "teacher." But in the churches, instead of being ashamed of this appellation, they take great pride in being called "Doctor," and every congregation seems to want a learned doctor in the office of pastor, all in gross disobedience to the Lord. The same applies when we seek to call someone a leader among us. Jesus has forbidden it, because he is the sole leader as he is the sole teacher. This becomes reasonable only in the light of the establishment of his Word as our sole leader and teacher. Even the Holy Spirit cannot be a teacher or leader, except as an aid, for Jesus stated:

. . .he will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you (John 16:14).

Jesus also forbade us to apply the title "father" to any man on earth, as stated above, and as explained earlier in this book and in Jesus, the Rock of Offense. This was very specific, and was accompanied by the reason: the disciples have but one father, even the Father in heaven. Clearly, the Father is jealous of this, his name, and if we are his obedient children, we apply it to no other. But Paul was very bold, so bold as to call himself the father of the disciples at Corinth:

For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. I urge you then, be imitators of me (I Corinthians 4:15,16).

Now, Jesus has elsewhere counseled us to be merciful, even as the Father is merciful – in other words, to imitate the Father. But here, Paul has made himself the father to the disciples in the Corinthian church, and urged them, literally, to imitate him. The man has put himself in the place of God! Elsewhere Paul emphasizes the Fatherhood of God, but here he is obviously entirely ignorant of the exclusiveness of this relationship in the Word of Jesus; he has not heard his voice.

Turn now again to the church in the Twentieth Century and what do we see? Everywhere it consists of "fathers" and those who call themselves "fathers" in radical disobedience to Jesus. Even the pastor-priest is called "Father." The male parent is called "father." The Pope is called "Holy Father!" The Patriarch of the Orthodox Church is, literally, the ruling father. All in the church, all in the name of Jesus Christ, all in radical disobedience to him. It is obvious that all of them, beginning with Paul, are assigning to themselves and other men a name and title so exalted as to fit only one person, The Eternal Father in heaven. This is self exaltation of the grossest sort! It may even be sacrilege. The passage from Matthew 23, quoted above, goes on to conclude with the words:

He who is greatest among you shall be your servant; whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted (Matthew 23:11,12).

In these verses Jesus is contrasting the disciples with the scribes and Pharisees, who sought to exalt themselves among their fellows by assuming the titles "rabbi," "teacher" and "father." If we turn back to Matthew 20, he makes a similar comparison with the Gentiles and their governors:

You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant (Greek, diakonos), and whoever would be first among you must be your slave (Greek, doulos); even as the son of man come not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Matthew 20:25-28).

Here he has said essentially the same thing, with this profound addition that surely applies everywhere: **It shall not be so among you!** I take this to be, not an exhortation, but a simple statement of fact and I understand it to mean that among those disciples of Jesus who are disciples indeed, who listen to his voice, there is, in very fact, no such title or authority. I say this

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regretfully, reluctantly, after nearly a lifetime of careful consideration, not as a judgment of my own, but solely on the recognition of the simple Truth as enunciated by Jesus and as received by all who hear his voice. It shall not, he said, be so among you.

Jesus therefore provided a very limited number of offices for his little flock, and none of them carry administrative authority. The offices of servant, diakonos, and slave, *doulos*, are typical. In doing this he was expressing a deep concern about two things: greatness and authority. Unlike the Gentiles, the sheep of his flock do not exercise authority over one another. There is but one authority, the Good Shepherd. However, it is possible to aspire to greatness. All who truly qualify as mere servants (*diakonos*) one of another are among the great ones; and any one who becomes the slave (*doulos*) to all is the greatest of all. Of course, it follows that if there is one who is servant to none, that one is least of all. This is inverse pecking order! When I was a farm lad, there seemed always to be one from the flock of hens that could peck all the others and lord it over them without fear of attack. Then there was one who could peck all except the first one, without fear of attack from the others, and so on until the last poor creature, its head and comb raw, that was pecked by all and received satisfaction from none. The word slave, as used here by Jesus, is extreme language and can be accepted only when we realize that these questions of greatness and authority are extremely important to him.

If we turn our attention again to the office of pastor, one that nearly every congregation has, we can make some interesting observations. *Pastor* is a term that comes from the pastoral setting, and literally means "shepherd." A shepherd is, with respect to the sheep, their leader. He has authority over the sheep and commands them to remain in the way he intends for them to go. But Jesus has forbidden that his disciples should be called leaders, and identified himself as their "Good Shepherd." There can therefore be only one shepherd, the Good Shepherd, and the sheep hear his voice. Any other shepherds are not allowed; they, as pastors, are usurping the office that belongs exclusively to Jesus himself!

The administration of the *ekklesia*, following the precepts of Paul as specified in the New Testament and as applied in the churches everywhere, is overthrown as soon as we begin listening to Jesus. He allows for only one leader, only one pastor, only one teacher, only one Father and all the rest, friends who serve only as servants and slaves.

### 4. The Governance of the Disciples

Then how, on earth, did Jesus provide for the governance of the body of his disciples? He provided but one thing for the administration of the ecclesia. That is the Logos (the body of his utterances that will never pass away). This Logos is, among other things, the Constitution of the Body of Christ in the world, in much the same fashion that the Constitution of the United States is the foundation of the American nation. The Logos is here on the earth, having been planted by Jesus and protected by the Holy Spirit, and it is accessible. However, it does nothing until it is heard. That is why it is so important that a person listen to him. When we do so listen, and believe what we hear, we have believed in Jesus and have become his sheep and members of his flock. Furthermore, in his flock we are a unit for each hears and responds to the same voice. The ability to listen to Jesus' words, to truly hear him, puts us into a unique category that, by the essence of its nature, unites us. Much as the American nation is one nation under the force of its Constitution, so the flock of Jesus is one flock, perfectly one, under the unifying power of his Holy Word, the Logos. If we can truly hear his voice, if he is our Good Shepherd and if he is Lord indeed, we are one people knit together in love, and thus his Word becomes the ground of our unification. If we cannot listen to him, our unity is fractured; our members are divided, our religious world becomes a hodge-podge, exactly as we see it today. But as it is, in the true flock of Jesus, we are one people because we have one teacher, the Christ; we are one people because we listen to only one voice, the voice of Jesus, our shepherd (pastor); we are one people because we have only one leader, Jesus of Nazareth; we are one people because we have only one Constitution, the Logos of The Father; we are one people because we have but



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one Father, the Father in heaven. When Paul enumerated the bonds of our unity in the Ephesian letter, he got many of them correct; he properly included one Lord but he failed to define the Lord as known only through his Holy Word, and thus omitted the most important, most effective one – the Logos. It is, first of all, through listening to Jesus that we are molded into a unit. Only when we hear his voice do we become one. And this is not the voice of Paul, or the voice of the apostles, or the voice of the prophets or of Moses or of the pastor as he speaks from the pulpit. It is uniquely the voice of Jesus of Nazareth, and only Jesus of Nazareth. Paul came close with the stipulation that there is "one Lord," but by failing to explain that Lordship is realized only through listening to the voice of Jesus and responding to his Word, he left the door open to all manner of errors with the results that we see in Christendom. We realize this when we listen to Jesus and hear him say:

Why do you call me "Lord, Lord," and not do what I tell you? (Luke 6:46)

But let's become practical. Whom will we select for our pastor? Nobody! We already have a pastor, always have had a pastor and always will have a pastor – the one shepherd of all the sheep, the Good Shepherd who alone is authorized to tend the flock of the Father. Within the Logos, I do not even see a provision for an under shepherd, or assistant pastor. We only need to listen to him! Whom will we employ to teach in our Sunday Schools, Bible schools, and seminaries? Nobody. We already have a teacher, always have had a teacher, and always will have a teacher: the Lord Jesus, through his Word. The words are simple; we need only listen and allow the Holy Spirit to provide anything else we may need toward understanding them. The Word is so marvelously simple that children can readily understand. We only need to listen to him!

Then whom will we select for our bishops, our priests, our pastors, our presbyters, our elders, and our overseers? Nobody! We have one and only one leader; there is only one person in authority over us. We have always had him and always will have him, the Christ. We do not need another. When we begin to seek other leaders, we create division, and are no more one people, one flock of God. This leaves only the friends, the servants and the slaves, and we all fill those categories when we qualify to join his flock. We need only listen!

But where shall we meet and how are we to provide for our worship and educational structures? Again, Jesus has the answer. He said:

Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them (Matthew 18:20).

The answer is, therefore, simply "where" or "wherever." Are we deaf and blind? Can we not see that the practice, in Christendom, of building and congregating in great houses of worship, and of setting up administrative structures and authorities, is one of the most divisive things we could do? And the answer is so simple when we are able to listen to Jesus. Just think how simple and uncomplicated is that one word, "where." If we can listen to him, that is all the answer we need. It requires no explanation. Every child can understand "where." Why do we not heed him?

This is a sterling example of what I mean by the simplicity of the Word of Jesus. How uncomplicated it is! It is the men of this world who need the huge buildings in which to draw multitudes under the aegis of the human leader. Jesus does not need such structures. How large must a building be to house "two or three?" The early Christians, cast out of the synagogue, resorted to meeting in their homes. That was adequate then and it is adequate now. When they later broke out of those small gatherings and, empowered, proceeded to build churches and cathedrals, they laid the foundation for the apostasy that yet prevails. We only need to listen to him!

Jesus chose the word "fold", or sheepfold (Greek, aule), very carefully. When he stated that there is but one fold, he used this word that describes an open, roofless enclosure. No great

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stone edifice, no huge cathedral with flying buttresses, well roofed and protected. No, none of this; his figurative expression for shelter for his flock is only an open, fenced enclosure, with a gate. And he is the Good Shepherd, the sole authority, who leads them all out and calls them by name, and guides them to pasture. And there is but one fold, one fenced and gated enclosure! In Jesus, we are all sheep and we are all his sheep! We are the lambs of his flock, and the sheep of his pasture. We have but one shepherd or pastor, the Good Shepherd. His rod and his staff, they comfort us. He leads, teaches, and protects us. The ecclesia of Jesus is the one Little Flock that bears no resemblance to the worldly institution of Christendom, called the church. It is rather the Little Flock called out from the world and assembled in the one fold. If you want to see how Jesus provided for the future associations of his disciples in the world, then look for the sheep, look for the sheepfold, and look for the Little Flock. We only need to listen to him!

So you see, he did indeed provide for the administration of his flock; he established their offices and their constitution, appointed their single administrator, provided a clear line of authority together with standards of greatness and gathered us all into the single, fenced enclosure, the sheepfold. And, he provided the terminology. We need absolutely nothing else. But if you are looking to Jesus for a provision of cathedrals, offices, authorities, and gathering places of the churches of Christendom, you look in vain. You will need to look elsewhere for that! "It shall not" he said, "be so among you."

Now pause to take note of an interesting condition that results from the above considerations. There is no pastor, but only the Good Shepherd, Jesus, who is invisible but who is nevertheless present through his Word. There is no authority save the authority of the one Lord, Jesus, who again is invisible. There are no merely human leaders, bishops, overseers and the like. There is only one leader who, again, is invisible. There is no teacher whom we can see, for we have only one teacher who, yet again, is invisible, yet ever present. There is no structural grounds of unity, no visible edifice, nothing save the Word of Jesus, that again, while it is heard, is nevertheless invisible. There is no father or patriarch of the visible sort. There is only one Father, the Father in Heaven, who likewise is invisible. Everything pertaining to the Little Flock is spiritual, not physical, and therefore is invisible to men. There is only one visible entity related to the Little Flock of the Good Shepherd, and that is the sheep. But even they have no visible congregation beyond the "two or three gathered in my name." They are scattered throughout the world, in and out of the churches, mixed in with many others and, while always distinguishable by their attitude to life, their only local assemblage is the "Little Flock."

Does this *ekklesia*, this synagogue of Jesus, this Little Flock of the Good Shepherd, really exist in the world? Of course! Everyone who hears his voice, who truly listens and believes, belongs to it, for he said,

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me, and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand (John 10:27,28).

Every such person is a lamb of his flock, and as again and again I must emphasize, that status has only one qualification: the ability to listen to his voice, to hear the Holy Word, the Logos of God the Father. And I must again repeat, so that there can be no question of the significance of the utterances of Jesus, that this hearing of his voice applies only to the hearing of the very words uttered by Jesus of Nazareth and recorded in the gospels, for that, alone, is the Logos of God. It exists in the world, this Logos, this living body of Truth bound up in human language and planted in the hearts of the first disciples. It is maintained through the ages by the Holy Spirit and the faithful "preaching" of this Gospel of the Kingdom throughout the world. Through it, through the Logos, the flock continues and renews itself daily by the admission into its membership of every one who begins to hear his voice and keep his Word. And, where two or three of these are assembled in his name, there he is in the midst of them – because his living Word abides in their hearts. Their fellowship is therefore with him and, through him, with one another and with God

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the only Father. Everything, absolutely everything, depends upon hearing and keeping his Word. Listen:

If a man love me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. He who does not love me does not keep my words; and the word which you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me (John 14:23,24).

## CHAPTER III

# THE LITTLE FLOCK AND THE EVOLUTION OF THE CHURCH

## The Church in the Prophecies of Jesus

If we look at his prophetic statements, there are some in which the church, or rather, what we know as the church, must have been in his mind, even though there is no specific reference to the term. Some of these are listed here to show how keen was his insight into the future. The "narrow door" utterance comes first to mind:

And someone said to him, Lord, will those who are saved be few? and he said to them, Strive to enter by the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. (Luke 13:23,24)

We have here a clear reference to the doorway into salvation. Now where, I ask you, are the "many" who are seeking to enter into this door, if not in the church? And note it well, they are not only seeking to enter, but they shall not be able! This prophecy bodes not well, then, for those who are only members of the churches.

Then there are the "false prophet" prophecies:

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. (Matthew 7:15)

And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. (Matthew 23:11)

For false Christs and false prophets shall arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to lead many astray, if possible, even the elect. (Mat. 24:24)

Again, where, I ask you, are the "many false prophets" if not in church? These prophecies and many others are thoroughly consistent with the church as we perceive it today, containing a vast multitude who are seeking to enter, and who will not be able because they have turned a cold shoulder to the spoken entreaties of their only Lord and Savior by refusing to hear him and take him seriously; containing also a multitude of prophets, in all kinds of clothing, including sheep's clothing, who are to be judged false prophets because they have not truly spoken the Word of our Lord.

## Whence, Then, Came the Church?

**Christendom is the triumph of Judaism over paganism, and the local church is the Gentiles' synagogue.** This statement defines the essence of the church and characterizes its development. I have arrived at this conclusion after a careful study of the beginnings of the church, both as related in the New Testament and from other historical sources, and by recognizing that it cannot be the true institutional representative of Jesus for the reasons explained above. Specifically:

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- it does not manifest the administration authorized by him and
- it does not take the forms prophesied by him. But most important,
- it does not listen to him.

This latter is conclusive evidence, for he has assured us that his sheep hear his voice. This must be the telling characteristic of the Little Flock. What follows is one explanation of how the prophecies of Jesus came to be fulfilled in the world.

### The Jewish Priority

Let us acknowledge that Jesus was a Jew and that he confined his ministry to the Jewish nation, saying:

I was not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. (Matthew 15:24)

It seems obvious that his heart's desire was, first, to convert the entire Jewish nation and then, through them, to present the Word to the world. I believe he first anticipated the conversion of the Gentiles as a conversion to his refined Judaism. He first looked around and about upon his countrymen and said,

Behold, the fields are white unto harvest. (John 4:35)

But they did not respond. First, his family rejected him; then his hometown rejected him; finally, his nation rejected him. And he came to realize that:

A prophet is not without honor, except in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house. (Mark 6:4)

### The Rejection of the Jews

Near the end, in great disappointment and grief, he recognized that his hopes for his nation were not to be realized, that it was their leaders who would instigate his crucifixion. At that point, after that realization, he announced that the Jewish nation had lost the kingdom because of their lack of response to his Word of Truth (Matthew 21:43). Their great city was to be utterly destroyed because:

You did not know the time of your visitation. (Luke 19:44)

It then became, for him, but one nation among the many of the world. He foretold their national destruction, which occurred in 70 AD. Blindly clinging to the Old Covenant, they rejected the New, and were themselves rejected. Jesus thereafter placed the entire burden for the extension of the Gospel of the Kingdom on the shoulders of those few who comprised the original "Little Flock." They were to wait for the Spirit, than to go out into the world and preach the gospel to every creature under heaven. Whoever responded, whether Jew or Gentile, would be added to the Little Flock and thus they would spread out into the world and capture men and women from every nation, including the Jews. But the Jews as a nation no longer occupied any place in the Kingdom. It was taken away from them and given to the Little Flock (Matthew 21:43). As individuals, they now come on the same basis as individuals from every nation under heaven, but as a nation they have no standing in the Kingdom.

### Antisemitism

At this point I must emphasize that the Jews of the world do not bear any particular responsibility or guilt for the crucifixion of Jesus. They are not thereby guilty of deicide or any other national

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crime, any more than the citizens of modern Rome are culpable. Remember, it was the Roman representatives who both passed the sentence of death and carried it to completion. It is true that some Jews cried out, "His blood be upon us and upon our children!" But Jesus cried out in their behalf: "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do!" And the Lord said through the prophet, Jeremiah,

In those days they shall no longer say, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." But every one shall die for his own sin; each man who eats sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge. (Jeremiah 31:29,30; see also Ezekiel 18:1-4)

No, there is not nor has there ever been an ongoing national culpability of the Jews because of their forefather's rejection and crucifixion of Jesus. We are each judged strictly as individuals for our own deeds. So, on those individuals who sought and achieved his crucifixion, both Roman and Jewish, rests the blood of Jesus, and for them Jesus pled forgiveness. What the Jews as a nation lost by the rejection of Jesus was the Kingdom of God and their privileged status as the sons of the kingdom, a loss that was sealed by the end of their national sovereignty in AD 70. There is absolutely no justification for the perverse anti-Semitism of Gentiles that has created so much grief through the centuries and, in our own century, the Nazi Holocaust. Anti-Semitism is barbarism and it is always fueled by the love of life.

### The Early Disciples

All the first disciples were Jews, since Jesus had confined his ministry to that nation. They continued, immediately after his death, to operate under the impress of his earlier instructions by confining their ministry to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel." There were about a hundred and twenty of them, all Jews, on the Day of Pentecost. Then the Holy Spirit fell on them, again exclusively on Jews, and about three thousand souls were added to their numbers. Although they soon began to be excluded from the synagogues, they nevertheless aspired to remain attached to Judaism. Their ministry in Jerusalem was focused on the Temple area, where they were witnessing to Jews. When they spread outside the city, they went as Jews to the outlying synagogues to address their message. They were amazed when, at Antioch, the Holy Spirit first fell on Gentiles, and their acceptance of this event was most reluctant. Peter required a special vision to convince him that Gentiles were acceptable, and the record from those days indicated that the disciples at Jerusalem were never acclimated to the acceptance of the Gentiles. The Jews had always been accepting of Gentiles who converted to Judaism. This required, however, that the converts take on all the trappings of the Jews, beginning with circumcision, but some were accepting them on the basis of unacceptable standards: they were not required to be circumcised! The Jews as a nation could not accept Jesus; now even the Jewish converts to Jesus were being rejected by their Jewish brethren as heretics.

### A New Sect of Judaism

What sort of people were the apostles seeking to add to the nation of Israel? We need only note that the Jews were uniquely monotheistic; they led a precarious existence in the midst of a polytheistic, pagan world. Therefore, when the Gentiles began to be added to the church, they were converting from polytheism to the monotheism of the Jews. This resulted in their being considered as Jews by their Gentile neighbors so that the earliest Gentile converts to Christianity were equated with the Jews by other Gentiles but among the Jews they were heretics. So the new movement struggled to gain a foothold in the Jewish nation and the world, but came to be considered heretical by the Jews, and Jewish by the world. But of great importance is the fact that they considered themselves Jews who had added Jesus as a new dimension to their faith. **The earliest disciples of Jesus then constituted a new sect of Judaism.**

The early church was therefore from the outset grappling with an identity crisis. As Jews they

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accepted Jesus as the promised Jewish messiah while retaining all their devotion to the faith of their forebears. They were increasingly involved in a struggle with their kinsmen because the bulk of the Jews, not accepting Jesus as messiah, considered them to be heretics. More and more they were expelled from the synagogues, as Jesus had prophesied, and found themselves forming their own associations, which typically met in homes. In time, they organized their assemblies and began to apply the term *ekklesia* to them. It was a common term, as we have already seen, in general use to define any assembly of persons. It was natural that they should administer the *ekklesia* just as the synagogue had been administered, for they knew no calling to belong to anything other than a synagogue. It was what they knew and understood. The movement spread outside Jerusalem and Jews in many other cities were converted to a belief in Jesus as the Messiah on the strength of the apostles' testimony. Every where, however, they maintained their Jewish identity. If allowed to do so, they maintained their relationship with the synagogue. Otherwise they formed separate assemblies, which they conceived according to the pattern of the synagogue.

We must acknowledge that we are considering the organizational activities of people who, in most cases, never knew Jesus personally and never heard him speak. For their knowledge of the Word, they were dependent on the apostles and earliest disciples, who were heavily influenced by Jesus' early focus on the Jewish nation. They remembered the substance of his sayings, and later had them recorded, but during the first formative years of their *ekklesia* they may have depended on an oral tradition. Thus, they failed to listen carefully enough to the accounts of his sayings to realize his provision for their administration. They did not realize they were on their own as far as God was concerned. They could not believe that their venerable and ancient tradition had been cast out and that the Kingdom had been taken away from the Jewish nation. They struggled, therefore, to remain Jews while becoming Christians. And, perhaps most important, they continued to honor the sacred scriptures of the Jews, the Old Testament. It was their only scriptural guide.

The above also applies to the results of Paul's work among the Gentiles. He first went to the synagogue to present the Gospel as he understood it. Usually some Jews were receptive, but most turned against him with the results as described above. He then turned his focus on the Gentiles. But Paul also was a Jew, an "Hebrew of the Hebrews" who never gave up the hope of the full inclusion of his nation in the Kingdom. His work was so very important that I have devoted a large part of this book to him and we need not discuss it here.

The early Christians held in common the belief in their Jewish messiah, the Gospel as preached about him by the apostles, and a common devotion to the Hebrew scriptures and traditions, including the Law, and to the one God. In general, they failed to acknowledge and follow the distinctive instructions of the Lord because they had only the oral tradition. I have found no evidence that the apostles gave prime attention to the utterances of the Lord, and their converts would not likely do so.

Thus, as the movement spread, it was in essence an expansion of Hebrew religion into the polytheistic world, distinguished by a belief that Jesus was the messiah. Its victory, which followed on the conversion of Constantine three centuries after the crucifixion, was therefore the triumph of Judaism over paganism. It carried with it:

- the Passover feast redefined as the Eucharist; it carried with it the Jewish messiah, identified as Jesus; it carried with it
- the administrative forms of the synagogue;
- it carried with it the Decalogue and the inspired scriptures of the Jews, claiming to be its true interpreters;
- it carried with it the Jewish Sabbath, eventually modified to the first day;

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- it carried with it the atoning sacrifice;
- it carried with it a patriarchy after the Jewish pattern. So, on and on we could go, identifying the elements of the church that were derived from Judaism. Perhaps of most importance,
- it carried with it, into the pagan world, a belief in the one God of the Jews (later modified to accommodate the Trinity).

So, as the church moved out into the world, expanding and conquering, it eventually became the behemoth we see today – the triumph of Judaism over paganism, in which the local church is but the synagogue of the Gentiles.

### Identifying the Little Flock

The "Little Flock" was always there. It existed wherever there were those who "loved not their lives unto death" (Revelation 12:11).

It existed whenever anyone listened carefully to the Good Shepherd. It surely included the holy martyrs, beginning with Stephen. It surely included all those individuals, whoever they were, who persevered in keeping the utterances of Jesus substantially intact as an oral tradition for perhaps a generation. My thinking allows for the possibility that there were much earlier written versions of the utterances of Jesus, but a crucifixion date of 30 AD and the date of the writing of Mark's gospel, probably the first one written, of 65 AD leaves a probable span of thirty-five to forty years during which the Word, insofar as we can determine, was preserved primarily by the oral tradition. Those words were so unique, so powerful, and so offensive to the world that only the sheep of the Good Shepherd could endure to keep them alive. It is a miracle of the Holy Spirit that those words, hated by the world and even by churchmen, have been preserved. We have no good reason to doubt their validity because they define principles founded on the hatred of life, to which the world is hostile, and no ordinary man or woman would have conceived them.

### An Identity Crisis

The fall of Jerusalem to the Romans in 70 AD was a traumatic experience and a pivotal time in the history of the Christian fellowship. It is no accident that the earliest Gospels, containing the Logos, were written about this time as the early Christians began to realize that they were not, after all, Jews, and that they no longer had a political entity with which to identify. This forced upon them a new crisis of identity that they resolved by increasingly defining themselves as independent of Judaism. Still, they continued to maintain their devotion to the Hebrew scriptures, their synagogue-like administration and their monotheism that knew only the Jewish antecedent. Historical evidence (from Eusebius) indicates that, following the instructions of Jesus uttered many years earlier (Luke 21:21), they fled the city of Jerusalem prior to the Roman onslaught and took up residence east of the Jordan in the Perea city of Pella. Their abandonment of Jerusalem may have been the final straw that separated the young movement from Judaism, for the Jewish patriots who sought refuge within the city walls must have interpreted this to be a desertion under fire.

They retained another Jewish feature that they shared in common with the pagans as well – the belief in the sacrificial system. The Jews continued the sacrifices until the destruction of the Temple, but during the period prior to 70 AD the Christians, following the teaching of the Apostles and especially of Paul, accepted the interpretation of the crucifixion as that of an atoning sacrifice in which Jesus served as a paschal lamb, rendered to God as the just requirement for forgiveness of sins and in accord with many prophetic texts. This doctrine may well have been partially motivated by the loss of sacrificial privileges in the Temple when the Jews became hostile to them. Yet this is, above all others, the common element that continued to identify them



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with the Jews in the eyes of the world, and to distinguished them from the members of the Little Flock. The latter, listening to Jesus, would have early learned that no sacrifice was required, and that in his crucifixion Jesus was not making a sacrifice but rather was, first, demonstrating the Way by the exhibition of the hatred of life and second, ransoming the captives and defeating the evil one, thus establishing the kingdom on the earth. This also identified the *ekklesia* with the pagan world, for they, too, held to a sacrificial system. This identification, more than anything else, marks the church as essentially being one with the world. The only exceptions are those few, members of the Little Flock, who may or may not be associated with the churches and who are not depending on a sacrifice.

The process that established the church as an independent entity, seemingly separate from Judaism, was well established by the end of the first century. The dominant parties of the Jews had from the very beginning been hostile to Jesus. This hostility continued and grew during the Apostolic period, thus forcing the young church to seek an identity apart from an intimate relationship with Judaism. They then began to claim the Jewish scriptures for themselves and maintained that they were the new Israel and as such had supplanted the old Israel. In other words, they did not give up on becoming Jews, but since the Jews expelled them from the synagogues, they maintained that they carried the true essence of Judaism with them into the Gentile world. The ethnic Jews who refused to receive the apostolic message had rejected the promises of God and had themselves been rejected, or so the churchmen asserted. This conviction was, they thought, confirmed by the destruction of Jerusalem in A. D. 70. Thereafter, increasingly, the Christians viewed themselves as the true inheritors of the promises made through the prophets and Jesus, and the Jews as apostates who, by rejecting Jesus as messiah, had lost any claim to the promises of the Father. Their message appealed predominately to Gentiles and the result was a Gentile church that was viewed with hostility by the traditional Judaism and in return responded to the Jews with growing hostility of its own.

Since few of them were ethnic Jews, they spiritualized their identification as the new Israel. The Jewish sacrifice became the mystery of the atonement. The circumcision of the Jews became a circumcision of the heart. The descent from Abraham became that of the spiritual new birth through faith rather than a literal descent from generation to generation. They appropriated the traditional Jewish baptism ritual, applied to proselytes, and made it the mark of entry into their fellowships.

For nearly three hundred years the early Christians, following primarily Paul's leadership and that of his successors, expanded their movement throughout the Roman Empire, preaching a gospel that convinced people to trust in a sacrifice for their salvation. It was a thing that all understood, both Jew and Gentile, so it made a convenient point of contact with the Gentile world. But, having begun in a misguided fashion, under the impress of Judaism and sacrifice, they failed to realize in the larger association the expressions essential to the Little Flock as constituted by Jesus. Mixed in with them, there was nevertheless those individuals who found the grace to listen to the voice of Jesus, and who thus constituted the Little Flock, blended with the church and concealed thereby from history. Many showed their true devotion to The Father, manifested by the hatred of life, through the martyrdom they experienced during times of persecution by the World. Other multitudes, denying the Lord through deafness to this Word, nevertheless continued to constitute the body of the church and to misrepresent Christ to the world. These, misguided as they were as to the true import of the Gospel, found themselves involved in many foolish distractions, heresies, schisms, and in many barbaric acts, all because they could not bear to hear his voice. They appear to have loved their lives in this world.

From a common base that included the Hebrew scriptures, the monotheism of the Jews, and the sacrificial system and the messianic concept, the churchmen developed and deviated from the Jewish course because they were rejected by the Jews as heretics and because of their identification with the name, Christian. Nevertheless, they maintained their Jewish heritage and thus, in their conquest of the world, achieved the triumph of Judaism, or a form of Judaism, over

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paganism. This was no mean achievement, for it involved the overthrow of polytheism, which must have given them a supreme sense of accomplishment, leaving them with no reason to doubt that they were in the service of God.

The church struggled against great opposition during the pre-Constantinian period because, as a new entity, Christians were not recognized by the Empire. The Jews, on the other hand, were there before the Romans and had generally enjoyed certain privileges and the protection of the Emperor with some exceptions. This was not lost in consequence of the rebellions in AD 67-70 and AD 135, for those Jews of the Diaspora who maintained their communities throughout the Empire continued to be protected. During the first century the Christians tended to be identified with the Jews and to enjoy some degree of protection as a result. But when Jewish hostility forced them into a separate identification, they eventually lost their associated protection and entered into periods of persecution. The fact that the Christians prevailed and conquered the Empire without military action is testimony to a depth of conviction and perseverance unexcelled in history.

By the time of Constantine, they had accomplished much. They were still a minority, but may have constituted as much as ten percent of the population. Their churches were found throughout the Empire; their patriarchal system of administration was efficiently molding them into a unified force in spite of the numerous heresies that had arisen. The Arian controversy was raging at the very time that Constantine came on board and assayed to appropriate the church as a means of unifying his domain. The Council of Nicea, in AD 325, was assembled by the Emperor primarily to resolve this issue. It also afforded him the opportunity to assert his authority over the church and the world. The Christians wielded political power for the first time, and they slowly began to assert it in their relationships with the Jews. It is not surprising that, since they considered that they had supplanted Judaism, some would see themselves as God's instruments set to exterminate a faith that no longer, in their view, had a justified existence and that had become generally hostile to them. Thus arose in Christendom the evil leaven of anti-Semitism that found its most terrible expression in the "final solution" of the German National Socialists from 1932 until 1946. The conversion of Constantine and the consequent rise of the Christians to political power was a great disaster for the cause of Truth, for it placed Christians in a position of world power that their Lord never intended. The reformation did little if anything to resolve this incompatibility. **The Christians have ruled the world, but they have lost the Way.**

One would like to think that, even if the local church is only the synagogue of the Gentiles, it is at least a notch above the synagogues of the old Israel. This is not true, for in integrating with the world the church has made compromises so as to render it ineffective as a redemptive tool. This makes the church an effective trap. Baited by the promise of salvation, it lures in the multitudes then slams the door shut. They remain inside on the grounds of the conviction that they are saved and their sins are forgiven. Thus entrapped, they no more seek salvation, or they continue to seek it through the ministrations of the trap, and so their condemnation is assured. This is no excuse, however, for the Lord has kept his Word alive in their midst so that they must deal with it, either here or hereafter.

## The Major Compromises

What are the compromises the church has made in its conquest of the world?

- First and foremost is the compromise with polytheism, a compromise that the synagogue has avoided to this day. As they expanded out into the world of the pagans, they found it not expedient to strictly maintain the Jewish devotion to the single God and effectively expanded the number to three – the Holy Trinity. This was the central issue at the Council of Nicea, and it was temporarily resolved by a compromise that, while asserting

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the unity of the one God in the godhead, nevertheless left him with three manifestations, a sort of theistic monstrosity, but one the pagans could appreciate.

- Next, the icons of Catholic and Orthodox Christianity represent a compromise with pagan idolatry.
- They also compromised, with both Jews and pagans, by their retention of the sacrificial system. I mean the interpretation of the crucifixion as a sacrifice for sin, with Jesus as the lamb of sacrifice.
- However, the deadliest compromise of all, one all persons can appreciate, was the compromise with the love of life. This issued in the radical misrepresentation of the Gospel that has undermined everything that might have been effective for salvation.

The result of all the compromises was that the church that had been built on the confession of Jesus as the Christ had, after all, rejected him, having replaced him with a tailor made messiah more to its liking. The synagogue first rejected Jesus by refusing to accept him as messiah, then the church rejected him by rejecting his Word, the Holy Logos of the Father, while nevertheless continuing to claim his name. Thus did the early churchmen again identify with the synagogue, and thus again was the church seen as the triumph, not of Christ over Caesar, but of Judaism over paganism. Christianity therefore stands before the Father under the same indictment as Judaism, that of having rejected Jesus as their messiah. They do this even while confessing his name. This, Judaism has not done and in this may after all be as true to the will of the Father as are the Gentiles of Christendom.

## The Benefits

What benefit is the church to humanity? The temporal benefit is great, for without him we Gentiles might yet be offering sacrifices at the altars of Jupiter, Diana and Mithras. This overthrow of paganism was an achievement without precedent, and could never have been accomplished by original Judaism with its circumcision and exclusiveness.

Yes, and there has been much profit beyond that, for there is a remnant in Christendom that has not rejected The Holy Word, just as there was a faithful remnant of seven thousand in Israel when Elijah thought himself alone. This remnant constitutes the Little Flock of the Good Shepherd – those who, like sheep listening to the shepherd, have listened and heard the Holy Word of Jesus. They are always there, and so is his Word. There appears to be a paradox here.

How is it that the church, hating the words of the Lord and refusing to take them seriously in the application to life, has nevertheless contributed so much toward preserving them in the Gospels? I think the churchmen did it because they could not help themselves. Having planted the Word in the world at so great a cost, the Father will never permit it to be eradicated; therefore, as I have explained earlier, the Holy Spirit has always been active to protect and maintain the Word for the sake of the sheep of the Little Flock, those who are the fruition of all the Father's work and the consummation of his will: the resurrection to Glory. I have sought a metaphor to explain this phenomena in other terms, and the following seems to serve my purpose.

## A Metaphor

AIDS is a terrible malady. When the virus is discovered to be causing ones illnesses, it is a disaster to the lover of life for the illness eventually issues in death, there being no known

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remedy. Some persons, however, are found to carry the virus who have no symptoms. They are deemed "carriers," and they may live for years and suffer no ill effects, even eventually dying of other causes. They cannot by any means rid themselves of it. They may unwittingly infect others, who succumb. So it is in the Kingdom of God. The Truth, implanted in the church by Jesus, abides as does the virus in the carrier. Therefore, the church is a carrier of the Truth, yet without symptoms. Every individual within the church who knows the Truth and does not abide by it, who does not love God so as to hate the life in this world, is a carrier.

The carriers all hate the Truth, just as the AIDS carrier hates the virus and hopes it will not destroy the life on earth. But, like the AIDS carrier, there is no remedy; there is nothing they can do to rid themselves of this virus, this Truth. And, scattered about in the midst of the carriers there are those, devout disciples of Jesus, who not only carry the Truth, they live by it, and therefore, they die by it, for they are "infected" to the point of death. As Jesus has firmly explained,

He who loves his life loses it; but he who hates his life in this world will keep it for life eternal (John 12:25).

Stephen, the Christian martyr, was the first one, after the Lord, to succumb to the Truth virus. It is therefore a terrible malady from the point of view of the life lover; it is a fatal, hopeless disease inimical to life on earth. Men hate the Truth for the same reason they hate the AIDS virus: it threatens the life of everyone it touches; and in the past two thousand years, beginning with Jesus, it has taken the lives of many thousands, devout servants of God who suffered the pangs of physical death rather than deny their Lord.

The carriers of Truth, the churchmen, no more like to be carriers than do the carriers of the AIDS virus like their own unhappy condition, for they can never know when it may become aggressively active within them, become even fatal. However, there is nothing they can do, for there is no remedy; the Kingdom of God has come; all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to him with whom we all must ultimately deal, and he exercises it to the end that, though heaven and earth pass away, his Holy Word, his Truth, will not pass away! The Word is indeed life threatening as history abundantly testifies, and there is no remedy!

## Another Metaphor

This one gives further insight into the status of the church in the world through the centuries. Moses is reckoned the first man through whom God made his words known in the world. Then came Jesus, that "prophet like unto Moses" (Deuteronomy 18:15f) who, like Moses, made known the words of God to man. Just as Jesus, through his words, has been preserved in the world by a church that is his enemy, so Moses was nurtured in his world by the house of Pharaoh, who had sought to kill him together with all the first born of the children of Israel in Egypt. Moses, the savior of the Hebrews who delivered them from Egypt, was protected and nurtured by him who had decreed his death; likewise Jesus, as his Holy Word, the savior of all the children of God who delivers us from this present age, has been protected and nurtured in the world by an institution of the world that, could the facts be acknowledged, would have destroyed him as soon as he was born!

## CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has throughout been concerned with four categories of mankind:

- (1) the Gentiles;

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- (2) the Jews;
- (3) the Church; and
- (4) the Little Flock.

These, when summed, encompass the whole of humanity. To understand their inter-relationships and the purposes they have served in the divine plan, we need to look to the ultimate purposes of The Father as revealed in Jesus. This has been defined in the first volume, *Jesus, the Rock of Offense*, and reviewed in *Book I* of this volume. Let us sketch it here briefly again, and relate it to the church, the Jews, and the Little Flock as set forth herein.

### The Purpose of the Creation

First of all, recall that the purpose of the Father in creating was and is that he might populate his Glory with like minded children. The will of the Father is the resurrection to Glory of his children. He chose to realize this through the creation and the consequent evolutionary process of which we human beings are the culmination. We evolved through the creative processes, and this means that we have an historical development in every phase of our being: physical, mental, biological, volitional, moral, and spiritual. It follows that there was an early time in our development when our ancestors were so spiritually and intellectually undeveloped as to be completely in ignorance of God, even as the dumb beasts today. Then, as they developed, they learned to understand and explain simple things in a manner that had meaning to them, in their relative darkness. They became superstitious; it was a giant advance in their understanding of themselves and their world. They applied supernatural explanations to all events they could not otherwise explain, and eventually came to believe in spirits, ghosts, demons, and gods.

I believe that at this point in their early development some of our ancestors, of whom Adam and Eve are the archetypes, became "living souls," invested with the freedom of the will, when the Father "breathed into their nostrils the breath of life." They then ate the forbidden fruit, becoming knowledgeable of good and evil; thereafter they had understanding sufficient to warrant their being held accountable for their actions and attitudes and were no more innocent. They were invested with the freedom of the will. Their progress had brought them to the point where they had the capacity to know God. But they yet did not know him.

Now, the Father's love encompasses the world, the whole of humanity from beginning to end. He looks longingly down upon us from his glorious habitation and would draw all to himself, exactly like the father in the Parable of the Prodigal Son. But he can do nothing that would compromise the freedom of the will, for it is his will that his children come to him with this freedom intact and secure. Therefore the freedom of the will is, from the Father's perspective, inviolate. If any one of us is to rise to his eternal Glory, it must be because that one wants to do so, precisely as the Prodigal came to himself and wanted to return to his father's house. The Father can reason with us; he can explain and attempt to persuade, he can and does impose limits; but he can not, he will not, coerce. How, then, can he proceed to realize his will and purpose for us while we remain in love with the life of this age?

### Getting Our Attention

The first thing he must do is get our attention. Since the freedom of the will is individually based, he must first get the attention of some individual. Through that individual he must then get the attention of other individuals, and through them, yet others. As we consider this process we may at once realize that the most promising way to do this is to work through one of the more developed individuals. The revelation would then be transferred to his children, then through their children in turn, for the parents greatest influence will be upon their children. This process does not occur in a vacuum; the chosen ones (chosen to know the one God), are immersed in a sea of

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darkened humanity having its own powerful influence on them from generation to generation. The children of those who have known God must somehow be protected from the perversions of the world, or the knowledge of God will be lost. This is precisely what has occurred in the Father's dealing with the Jews.

The first individual to know God must have been Abram. Or, perhaps it was his parent, Terah, who first undertook to journey with all his household, including his son, Abram, and Abram's wife, Sarai, from Ur toward the promised land of Canaan. He settled instead at Haran, and there he died at the scriptural age of two hundred and five years. We do not know what motivated Terah; why he undertook to journey to Canaan, or why he settled at Haran. Had God also spoken to him? Did he expend all his energy and resources getting to Haran?

There is no doubt about what motivated Abram to continue the journey began by the parent.

Now the Lord said to Abram, Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing; I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves (Genesis 12:1-3).

From this, as anyone can plainly see, as of first importance is that Abram was chosen, not for his sake alone, or for his family's sake, or his progeny forever, but that all the families of the earth should come to be blessed, or to bless themselves by him. Thus the Father claimed Abram's attention, and he obeyed the Lord and resumed the journey begun by Terah. Taking all his possessions – Sarai his wife (and half sister), Lot his nephew, all their possessions and the persons of their household, he moved on to Canaan where the Lord appeared to him a second time.

The Lord said to him, To your descendants I will give this land (Genesis 12:7). There Abram built an altar, but he pressed on, because there was a famine in the land (Genesis 12:10).

Passing through the Negeb, he went all the way to Egypt. There, for the first time, we see the religiously primitive state of Abram's character. Like everyone else among our forebears, he loved his life and did not want to lose it, but he feared the Egyptians would kill him for Sarai, for she was very beautiful. Therefore, he concocted a plan, saying to Sarai,

Say you are my sister, that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared on your account (Genesis 12:13).

Abram then cut a sharp deal with Pharaoh, who saw Sarai and wanted her for himself, for Abram immediately come into the possession of sheep, oxen, he-asses, menservants, maidservants, she-asses, and camels, and Sarai entered into the house of Pharaoh. But afflictions and plagues came upon the house of Pharaoh because of Sarai. He learned that Sarai was really Abram's wife and feared to keep her. Because of the plagues, he returned her to Abram, saying, What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me she was your wife? Why did you say, "She is my sister," so that I took her for my wife? Now then, here is your wife, take her and be gone (Genesis 12:18,19). And guess what? Pharaoh set him on the way, with his wife and all that he had! So it was that Abram kept his life, retrieved his wife, and gained wealth in the deal so that he left Egypt a rich man and returned to Canaan, to the place where he had built an altar.

Back in Canaan, The Lord again spoke to him saying,

Lift up your eyes, and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the land which you see I will give to you and to your descendants for ever. I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth; so that if

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one can count the dust of the earth, your descendants also can be counted. Arise, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you (Genesis 13:14-17).

Now, Abram was becoming an old man, and remained childless. Then the Lord came to him in a vision and he pled his case with the Lord, complaining that he had no son for an heir. Then the Lord said to him,

Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them. So shall your descendants be.

Then, suddenly, one of the greatest spiritual breakthroughs in history:

He (Abram) believed the Lord, and he reckoned it to him as righteousness (Genesis 15:6)

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him again and established a covenant with him. First he changed his name from Abram to Abraham; he also changed Sarai's name to Sarah, and reiterated his promise that Abraham should bear a son by Sarah. Also, at this point, he established as a mark of the covenant the rite of circumcision.

Why did the Lord do this strange thing? If he did not want men to have foreskins, why did he create them with foreskins? In retrospect, his reason seems obvious. It was in order to insure that Abraham's offspring would remain distinct from the other nations of the world. It was a peculiar mark that each parent would bestow upon the male infants as they were born, according to the covenant with the Lord. It would distinguish them from all other people and bind them together into a unique and peculiar people, in order to preserve the knowledge of the Lord that had been granted to them through Abraham, and later, the prophets and other oracles of the Lord. Without this physical distinction, subsequent generations would doubtless have blended with other peoples and the covenant would have been lost.

To put this all in perspective, we should acknowledge that in this man the Father had chosen a polytheistic polygamist and slave holder, a man who was in the process of offering his young son as a burnt offering according to pagan custom, when something happened inside him. Perhaps it was the awfulness of what he was doing that stripped the shackles from his mind and soul. Whatever it was, it resulted in his giving his attention to God. Probably for the first time, the Father truly had the attention of a man.

### The Work of Jesus

Abraham's son, his only son Isaac, who was saved from the altar of sacrifice was also a participant to the revelation and a point of beginning for its continuation. From this beginning, the Jewish nation developed and persevered until the scriptural fullness of time, when the Father sent his son, Jesus, into the world to reveal the secrets of the kingdom of God to all with the ears to hear.

His work in the world consisted in the infection of the world of men by the persistent virus of the Word of the Father, culminating with his death on the cross, exemplifying the foundation of his message: that to love the life in this world is to lose it; that it can only be saved by hating it for the sake of the Father. This message is, however, so onerous to men that it was hardly received; only a very small remnant of the Jews received it. Through Jesus, the Father claimed their attention. This small group, this "Little Flock," then went out into the world sowing the seed, the Word of Truth, into the hearts of men everywhere. Thus he claimed the attention not only of Jews, but of Gentiles also.

Then a certain pattern repeated itself: there was growth as the *ekklesia* persisted and expanded throughout the world, but the expansion was accompanied by a dilution of the significance of the Word of Truth. Its major theme, the love of the Father with the accompanying hatred of life in this

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world, was submerged and replaced with a different doctrine – that salvation comes by faith in a Christ who sacrificed his flesh and blood as a sacrificial lamb. He came to be understood, in the light of the prophets, to have taken our sins upon himself, and it is this false doctrine that still prevails in Christendom.

Nevertheless, there always remains a remnant, the Little Flock, who have heard the Word of the Good Shepherd and have responded, thus proving themselves to be his sheep. I remind you how he said:

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me (John 10:27).

His death on the cross also signaled the victory over Satan who had before ruled the world of men through appeal to the fear of death – a victory that consummated the rule, or Kingdom, of God on the earth. Thus all people, Gentile and Jew, churchmen and the sheep of the Little

Flock, play their parts in the divine plan that issues, at the Resurrection, in the eternal salvation of the children of God, and the final realization of his Holy Will – that he might have children to share his Glory.



## Chapter IV

# THE CHURCH OF TODAY

## Preview

These pages examine the church under three categorizations, the church of today, the church of Paul, and the church of Jesus. These examinations will, in each case, focus on certain salient features as follows:

- 1. Size
- 2. Divisions
- 3. Doctrine
- 4. Administration
- 5. Adjudication
- 6. Recruiting
- 7. Worship and ritual
- 8. Relation to the world
- 9. Life

We will focus briefly on each area under each of the three categorizations. We will select a key word in each case, then, we will collect and compare our observations and draw conclusions. This final book of this volume does not pretend to do an exhaustive study. Instead, we only deal with what is obvious and incontrovertible, at least to the eye of a long time observer who was once part of the church but is so no longer. This type of study is sufficient to provide a basis for understanding the church in its essence and of its relation to Jesus. We will find some interesting comparisons of these salient features.

The method is important in that we do not seek an exhaustive study such as one would expect from an accomplished scholar. My intention is to show that the prominent features of today's church are so obviously different from the standards laid down by the Lord that even a child can detect and evaluate them. That leaves all without excuse.

Also, the reader should be aware that the church as understood here is an umbrella term that defines the worldwide institution that exists to promote the Christian religion. It is composed of all of the "Christians" in the world who, individually, "belong" to the church. It is a singular institution, hence has no plural when defined in this way. It is, however, composed of the many denominations and individual congregations that have arisen.

## 1. Size

The church is huge! Here at the turn of the century, when the world population is about 6.2 billion,

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there are about two billion Christians, or almost one of every three people on the face of the earth, who are members of "the church." Of these, about half, or one billion, are Catholics and one half billion are Protestants. The latter include primarily Lutherans (or Evangelicals), Calvinists (or Reformed), Anabaptists, and Anglicans. Additionally, there are about two hundred million (.2 billion) Orthodox Christians worldwide. Other, lesser sects (.3 billion) add up to the total of two billion Christians in the church worldwide. This means that Christianity has more adherents, more members in its congregations, than any other religion! This is true even though there are some European countries where Christianity is considered to be in decline and where the expression "post Christian" is often used to describe the religious environment.

Southern Baptists constitute the largest Protestant denomination in the United States. Baptists in the United States all together belong to more than twenty different denominations and number about 40 million, or about 40 percent of the Protestant population.

These large numbers are yet too small to suite the churchmen, and "winning the world for Christ in our generation" is one of the most frequently heard church slogans in our time. One gets the idea that they expect every single human being on the face of the earth to eventually become a Christian and a member of the church.

To this end the more evangelistic Protestants are constantly pushing to increase the size of their congregations, and the success or failure of pastors and evangelists depends on the number of their converts. Any pastor, priest, or bishop who presides over a declining congregation will not have a great future in the ministry unless there are clear and obvious reasons for the decline, which no one could overcome. In short, success in the ministry depends on the numbers more than on any other single factor. The pastor of the huge congregations such as Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis, TN. must see a growing church if he is not to be replaced.

Some of the larger denominations of the church, primarily the Catholic, Orthodox, Lutheran and Calvinistic denominations in Europe have sought to insure growth through becoming state churches and enforcing universal church membership by baptizing all persons born in their state or nation. Indeed, this has been the rule for a large portion of the history of Christianity, beginning with the incorporation of the church into state affairs by the Roman Emperor, Constantine, in the early Fourth Century.

Yes, the church of today is huge, and seems destined to become even larger as its missions pursue converts in such relatively untouched and heavily populated nations as China, India, Pakistan, and the Muslim Middle East states. One of the primary reasons for the vast expansion of the church is, of course, its cheap admission fee. All that many Protestant denominations require of one is to confess sins, repent, believe in the gospel as preached by the particular denomination, then confess belief in Christ and submit to baptism. This is the long list! The short one is cheaper yet: believe in Christ as your savior and confess your sins. This, of course, is the Baptist formula for salvation. If you want to join the church and obtain voting rights in the congregation, you must also be baptized.

Admission is cheaper yet in Catholicism. If one is born into a Catholic family, one has no choice but is baptized as an infant into the church. Confirmation is required of youths, but this is assured for every youth wanting to join, after which it becomes almost impossible to get out!

The single key word that best defines the size of the Church of today is: huge! This word not only defines its actual size, but also its attitude to size.

## 2. Divisions of the Church of Today

It is possible to speak of the worldwide church in the singular only because all Christians, whatever their denomination, tend to have four things in common: (1) monotheism; (2) the belief that Jesus as founder and savior of the church; (3) the Bible as Holy Scripture, and (4) the name "Christian". These are very significant unifying factors, yet, institutionally speaking, they have almost no effect because the sad fact is that there are hundreds, perhaps thousands, of different Christian denominations and sects, each of which, with rare exceptions, judges itself to be the one true church. We have already suggested this fact by listing the division of the numbers of Christians among their denominations above. There are more than twenty-two major denominations of Baptists alone! The exceptions, groups that do not judge their denomination to be the one true church, are the "liberal" denominations that include, to give examples, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the Unitarian-Universalist Church.

The one billion Catholics in the world constitute by far the largest single denomination, and one of the oldest. It is only natural, then, that they generally hold the conviction that theirs is the one true church. All others are apostates! I do not mean that all Catholics believe this, for there are growing number of liberal Catholics who will fellowship with Christians of other denominations. Nevertheless, when pressed, the church hierarchy stands fast to the conviction that theirs is the one true church. The same can be said of the Eastern Orthodox denominations. Theirs are also ancient institutions and they claim to be the only church in true apostolic succession.

When we turn to Protestantism, the picture is of even greater fragmentation. Furthermore, many of the Protestants are just as convinced as the Catholics or the Orthodox Christians that theirs is the one true church. They cannot, of course, demonstrate a direct and unbroken chain of apostolic succession but they will claim it anyway, usually pleading that their predecessors in the chain were too few to make history, or that their baptism is in direct succession from the apostles. I have heard many an old time Baptist claim his denomination for the one true church, going all the way back to John the Baptist! The Campbellites, or members of the "Church of Christ" so called, likewise lay claim to being the one true church. After all, they will say, we are not called "the Church of Christ" for nothing!

The situation in the United States is unique due to its constitutional state-church separation and consequent freedom of religion. This results in a more liberal atmosphere because no denomination has to fear dominance or persecution by another. The differences are therefore less militantly maintained. Each can be more accepting and acceptable to the others without fear of being attacked. This results, ironically, in even more divisions because every persuasive preacher with a message has the freedom to gather a following and create his own denomination. It happens every day! For the most part, the old line Protestants, having nothing to fear from one another and having daily intercourse with one another on social, occupational and political grounds have become very accepting of their differences. They will even boast of them. For example, the Chamber of Commerce of a small municipality will seek to promote the city by appeals to the "many fine churches of great variety" to be found there. The ministers of the various denominational congregations will take turns serving as chaplain of the civic organizations, whose members come from the full spectrum of their local denominations. Frequently, bonds of friendship form across denominational lines and are much stronger than the denominational differences. Nevertheless, they are still divided when it comes to religion. They are of distinctly different religious families and this they acknowledge by carefully maintaining their denominational distinctions and names.

The divisions among Christians arise from many independent factors. Here we list only a few of the more obvious ones. They are:

- 1. Doctrine

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- 2. Race
- 3. Nationality
- 4. Economics
- 5. Education
- 6. Egotism
- 7. Politics
- 8. Worship

The doctrinal divisions have generally arisen when different individuals come to interpret the Bible differently. Usually egotism, together with political factors, also makes contributions. Race comes to the fore in nations such as the United States, where blacks and whites live in close proximity. National divisions are seen when we survey the church on an international scale and see the many distinct denominations that are tied to particular nations. This division becomes most notable when Christian nations make war against each other. The poor tend to divide from the wealthy Christians, motivated both by economic and educational factors. An ego driven and charismatic leader is often the spark that a new denomination needs to set it going as large numbers of Christians gather around him or her and distinguish themselves from others. Differing worship experiences have resulted, in the Twentieth Century, in the founding of a whole multitude of new Pentecostal denominations. Usually the other divisive factors also make contributions.

These are the major causes of divisions; there are other lesser ones and doubtless new causes of strife will arise to spark yet more denominations as the centuries pass. Of all this we can with full justification make one comment that seems incontrovertible: Whatever divides the Christians is valued more highly than whatever would unify them. Every split is a failure of love; every split is a failure in the common devotion to Jesus and his word.

In fairness we must also comment on the Ecumenical Movement that was effective in the Twentieth Century to heal many old wounds and promote unity within Protestantism. Many earnest Christians strove to overcome old quarrels and unify the church by the creation of bodies that could transcend denominational differences, such as the World Council of Churches. Unhappily, their results fell far short of their goals. Indeed, there are new divisions because of them, as some Christians split from their denominations to form others due, at least partly, to their opposition to joining with others. There are fewer independent denominations of Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians than before, but they are yet Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians!

There yet remains so many divisions, and different kinds of divisions, separating the different denominations that I can think of only one word fittingly called the key word: myriad.

### 3. Doctrine

We are not concerned here with the fact that doctrine is a major cause of divisions in the church, as just listed above. Nor are we concerned with the details of the different doctrines. Rather, we ask, What are the roots of doctrine in the church?

It is an easy question to answer, but the answer differs from one denomination to another. In Catholicism, doctrine issues from historic creeds, church councils, and the accumulation of Papal decrees through the centuries. For them, the church itself becomes the sole arbiter of correct

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doctrine. Orthodox doctrine claims similar sources. In Protestantism, it is usually the Bible that is the repository of doctrine, especially the New Testament epistles of Paul. From this the various denominations draw their confessions and statements of faith, with lesser if any dependence on the creeds. Among fundamental Christians, the Bible is taken to be the literal inspired Word of God, without error or contradiction. They then feel fully justified in quoting only the Bible as the source of their doctrines. The most liberal denominations, Unitarian-Universalists, for example, accord to the individual educated mind the ability to determine true doctrine. They allow for wide differences of opinion without a rupture of fellowship. At the bottom line, however, there seems to be only one doctrine in common to them, and that is the belief in the freedom to disbelieve!

Their many distinctive doctrines is one of their primary features. A good key word is therefore, diverse, as the doctrines themselves differ, and they derive from a variety of sources.

### 4. Administration (Authority)

There are wide varieties of administration among the different branches of the church. Here we do not get into the details but only comment on the ultimate authority and the manner in which the authority is disbursed. In most cases, Protestant as well as Catholic and Orthodox, authority to administer resides in a titular head – a bishop, Pope, Patriarch, or other executive through whom all authority flows from God to the church. The administrative structure is hierarchical in which a priest, pastor, or superintendent occupies the bottom level, immediately over a local congregation. Some have a "congregational polity" in which it is the congregation, meeting and voting democratically, that is the final authority to decide on significant issues. Pastors and others, usually called elders, presbyters or deacons, are given limited authority to act as guardians of the faith and practice, but are subject to removal by the congregation if they exercise their authority contrary to the wishes of the majority.

Christians consider God to be the ultimate source of authority in all cases. Where the denomination is hierarchical, authority issues from God through the Christ and the Spirit to the Patriarch, Pope, or bishop and flows through the hierarchy to the lowest level, which is the congregation. Where the polity is congregational, authority issues from God through Christ and the Spirit to the individuals in the congregation who then arrive at a consensus so as to maintain unity. Their priesthood is that of the believer in the church. When consensus fails, the congregation usually divides. They will sometimes then take their dispute to civil courts in efforts, not to decide who is theologically correct, but to determine who will retain the property of the congregation.

Even those denominations that boast of their congregational polity nevertheless give authority in some degree to the pastor and a local church board – deacons, elders, and the like. To the degree that they do this, they also have a hierarchical administration. The flow of authority then, in their minds, issues from God through the Christ to the pastor and board and finally to the church.

The two basic types of authority structures seem to take their form from the differing forms of civil government that have ruled the world in different times and places. The hierarchical denomination finds its original pattern in the Imperial government of the Roman Empire that ruled during the earliest centuries of church development. The congregational polity of course takes its cues from the rise of democratic governments in the western world during the past three centuries. Both types are highly compatible with their original environments, as the members of the church are also the citizens of the nation in which they reside.

We could therefore assign two key words to describe both types of administration: autocratic and democratic. Since we seek a single word, I will select varied.

## 5. Adjudication

Who is to settle a dispute? Everyone agrees that disputes should be adjudicated first by the individuals where the dispute resides. When two individuals disagree, it is only common sense to bring them together to iron out their differences. But frequently others become involved, and the dispute expands to include the whole congregation or perhaps becomes a dispute between congregations. What then?

It is natural that the resolution of disputes should proceed upwards in the same channels through which authority flows downwards, to be settled at the lowest possible level. This holds true in almost any denomination without regard to the type of administration. In a hierarchy, the appeal is first to the priest, then on to the bishop, the archbishop, and ultimately to the Pope or Patriarch. Under congregational polity, the appeal is often directly to the pastor or to the elders, deacons, etc., acting not as judges but as counselors. If no resolution is possible there, it goes to the congregation or to some committee thereof selected for the purpose. When no resolution is possible, a rupture of fellowship may result, in which one party to the dispute leaves or is expelled from the congregation. In some cases the congregation divides.

Without regard to denomination, when the dispute between individuals of a congregation does not directly involve matters of religion, property disputes for example, in almost every case the dispute will be taken directly to the civil courts. Who thinks of going to the pastor or priest to settle a dispute concerning how an inheritance is to be divided? Or to establish fault in an automobile accident?

It is difficult to assign one key word to all these different methods of adjudication, so I shall simply say, varied.

## 6. Recruiting

Here the focus is upon method. How does the congregation reach out to recruit or convert new members from a population of undecided individuals? "Undecided individuals" usually constitute a democratic society where there is freedom of religion, where every denomination has to acquire new recruits in the same way – through preaching and personal appeals to make converts! But this applies only where every individual has the right to decide for any denomination, or for none. Where an established state-church exists and the civil government issues from the same superiors as the church administration, the situation is vastly different. Here, the denomination simply claims every citizen from birth, and that is that! Large families are often encouraged by the officials and are usually the norm. And, historically, when an adjoining territory seems available by whatever means, including military, conquest is justified and all the conquered are forcibly converted for the sake of their eternal souls.

In all cases, the denomination recruits or retains members through a simple technique: Promise the ultimate enticement – eternal life – then, establish a very cheap price of admission and the maximum penalty for defection – expulsion from the congregation and loss of eternal life or, in some cases, temporal life.

Established denominations that move out of their home domains to promote missions and establish congregations in democratic states that enjoy freedom of religion, such as the Lutherans or Catholics in the United States, must inevitably engage in hypocrisy. They are always suspect, because there is nothing in their roots to keep them from seeking religious hegemony, and everything to move them to seek exactly that. Established church status must inevitably be their goal and religious freedom their nemesis, with which they co-operate only by the

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compromise of their principles, and only because of the ultimate hope of both political and religious triumph. Religious freedom, including the freedom to speak, to evangelize and to assemble for religious purposes, is truly a precious possession!

I do not mean that every individual Catholic or Lutheran seeks the death of religious freedom. Democratic influences in the democratic state are far too strong to so easily be defeated, even by an autocratic hierarchy. What I mean is that autocracy is the ultimate goal of the hierarchy, and when it can be achieved by any means it will be so achieved and the individual members of the denomination will not have the democratic roots to persist in opposition to their leaders. Apart from a very few apostate holdouts, they will only rejoice in their victory.

We see then that the methods of recruiting differ from one nation to another, and from one denomination to another, and from one period in history to another. They include primarily preaching, forced conversion, and natural birth. For a key word I must again select varied.

### 7. Worship and Ritual

A building serves as the focus of religious activity throughout Christendom. Almost every community has at least one "church" prominently and centrally located. These buildings serve both as educational and worship facilities. It is there that the members go to worship God together and celebrate their faith in various ritualistic ways. Here it is our purpose simply to list the common elements in that worship. These are:

- 1. Sacred music, including congregational, choral, and solo hymn singing.
- 2. Public, common prayer, including the Lord's Prayer
- 3. Eucharist or Lord's Supper
- 4. Collection of tithes and offerings
- 5. The sermon
- 6. The minister, often cloaked in "ministerial attire", specifically, a long robe.

These common elements that appear, with few exceptions, in the worship of every denomination, have differences in detail in almost every case. Their roots extend far back into history, to the Roman Empire, ancient Judaism, and pagan religion. Most denominational representatives will claim either the Bible or ancient church practice as the origin of their worship arrangements, but almost all are blind to the strong pagan and Jewish influences behind both sources.

Searching for a key word to describe the modern worship in Christian churches, the word "structured" come quickly to mind. We could also say with justification that the worship is varied, which is our selection so as to conform to the key word for the previous feature.

### 8. Relation to the world

I define the world here as the collection of all human beings outside the congregation, together with their institutions. The institutions of the world include, of course, many private organizations gathered for a multitude of different purposes, from education and medical care to sports, industry, and civic activity. There is one single institution that seems to transcend them all, which is the nation with its many subdivisions, including the constituent states and local government agencies. The various military branches also constitute different components of the nation and therefore of the world. They exist primarily for the national defense, but sometimes for the pure

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purpose of conquest and/or oppression. In nations where an "established church" exists, this institution constitutes a separate department of the government, and state levied taxes may be utilized to supply the church budget.

Political parties exist within each nation to promote specific national interests and provide means of selecting governmental staff persons through either appointment or elections. The Parties in a democracy provide a base for the promotion of sectarian causes within the government, and there is usually a multi-party system as in the United States. Of course, the members of the church of today, being also citizens professing patriotic duties, will generally also be members of the political parties.

Every nation lays claim to every person born within its geographic confines. Each individual is called a citizen and the nation commands loyalty and allegiance from every citizen. This includes, of course, all people associated with the church. The nation also claims the right to conscript its citizens to serve in the military forces in times of national emergency. There are other specific duties and responsibilities that every citizen is expected, sometimes compelled, to perform. Among these are voting, jury service and the swearing or pledging of oaths of allegiance. Aliens, however, are generally not expected to participate in these things.

There is also a national anthem that the citizens sing together in recognition of their devotion to the nation. There will also be, in any nation, a flag that symbolizes the entire nation and commands due respect from the citizens, just as they respect the nation. Singing the anthem, pledging allegiance, saluting the flag and displaying it respectfully are among the "patriotic duties" that citizens gladly perform.

The church of today relates to all this in a very positive way. The Christians who make up the various congregations are also, first of all, citizens of the nation. The church serves often to remind them of their civic and patriotic duties, even in a democracy where there is no administrative connection to the government. Therefore, most fundamentally, the same people who comprise the churches also comprise the nation.

We can expect as a result what is indeed the fact, that the modern church is one of the most supportive institutions of the nation. The national flag may be displayed before the congregation at worship, together with the Christian flag; the Sunday School will teach the Pledge of Allegiance, and the minister and teachers will promote patriotism along with the faith. The nation also supports the church in various ways, such as minting coins and printing bank notes that display the motto, "In God we trust," and in compelling oaths in courts of law, on the Bible and in the name of God. Politicians who hold high office find it expedient to join one of the many religious congregations in the land since this gives them a certain aura of godliness that helps win elections in a democracy, or to retain the loyalty of their subjects in a monarchy. Many laws are passed and enforced as needed to preserve the freedom of religion and the free exercise thereof in the church. There is therefore a mutually beneficial relationship between the two institutions that are, at root, different branches of the same tree, "the people." It is the people who together form a common pool from which both the nation and the church draw individuals as needed to perform their separate functions.

As we search for a key word to describe this relationship of the two institutions, the church and the world, we cannot find a better one than bound. The Church is bound to the world at the chest (or at the heart), and is not likely ever to be separated by any means.

## 9. Life

The attitude to life of the members of the modern church is precisely the same as the attitude to life of the citizens of the nation. This is true of necessity since it is mostly the same people who are involved in both. Proceeding from the ubiquitous "love of life" that pervades and energizes



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both institutions, we see why the church of today is often closely allied with the nation and the state in which it exists. The evidence of this alliance begins, in the United States, with the original Declaration of Independence that was written by Thomas Jefferson and published July 4, 1776. This is the Independence Day that the church in America celebrates as enthusiastically as any civic body in the land. It includes this statement:

We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.

The first mentioned right, the Right to Life, is therefore the first concern of the nation in its inception, and it remains so today as the citizens continue to memorize and quote these prized words from the Declaration. We cannot distinguish the men and women of the modern church from this first concern, since they prize these lines and continue to memorize and quote them throughout their lives, often in their congregations and religious schools. Precisely as the love of life is fundamental to the nation and all its concerns, so it is fundamental to the modern church in all its concerns.

The Declaration of Independence also seals this marriage of the nation with the modern church by its references to God. First, he is Creator. Then it closes with an appeal to the Supreme Judge of the world and a statement of "firm reliance on the Protection of Divine Providence." This established a firm union, in the public mind, between the dual interests of God and country that both supports and is supported by the modern church to this day, with no slackening of devotion. They are, we must justly say, the same side of the two coins!

There is nothing that demonstrates this union of the modern church and the world, that is, the nation, more vividly than the promotion by the church of The Boy Scouts of America. Although the Scouting Movement is independent of both the church and the state, it performs the most unique indoctrination function by establishing the unity of the two and their common interests in each young generation of boys. An official statement on the Boy Scout web site, [scouting.org](http://scouting.org), reads as follows:

The Boy Scouts of America was incorporated to provide a program of community organizations that offers effective character, citizenship, and personal fitness training for youth.

Specifically, the BSA endeavors to develop American citizens who are physically, mentally, and emotionally fit; have a high degree of self-reliance as evidenced in such qualities as initiative, courage, and resourcefulness; have personal values based on religious concepts; have the desire and skills to help others; understand the principles of American social, economic, and governmental systems; are knowledgeable about and take pride in their American heritage and understand our nation's role in the world; have a keen respect for the basic rights of all people; and are prepared to participate in and give leadership to American society.

We note the prime objective in developing American citizens . . . who have personal values based on religious concepts . . .

Then, the scout must learn and subscribe to the Scout Law, the last of which is:

A Scout is reverent toward God. He is faithful in his religious duties. He respects the beliefs of others.

Then, of course, there is the Scout Oath, as follows:

On my honor I will do my best

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To do my duty to God and my country  
and to obey the Scout Law;  
To help other people at all times;  
To keep myself physically strong,  
mentally awake, and morally straight.

The Boy Scouts of America have an admirable focus on education and character development of American youth. But it seems that a major focus is the creation and maintenance of a mental disposition that melds church and state, or God and country.

Then, the Public School enters in with the very same message and seals the indoctrination! Any young person, having been exposed to the influences of the nation, the church, and the Boy Scouts of America (or Girl Scouts of America) during the most formative years can only be so thoroughly indoctrinated in this meld that there is little chance he or she will ever seek a different view.

Now, if we ask, "What do these institutions, the state and the church of today, hold in common that blends them and their interests so universally?" we must recognize only one correct answer: the love of life. Therefore, for so long as both institutions exist in a democratic society, they will be happily married.

They are indeed more closely bound than in a mere marriage. Their union is more akin to that of Siamese twins. They are not just joined at the hip, or even the head, but are inseparably joined at the chest, that is, at the heart due to the love of life that rules there.

Seeking a key word to define the attitude of the Church of the modern world to life in this world, I have no choice but to mark it down as positive.

## Chapter V

# THE CHURCH OF PAUL

We cannot, of course, speak of this church from personal experience. All we know of it is to be discovered only in the Pauline Epistles and the Book of Acts in the New Testament. Here we briefly examine this church as seen in these sources, looking to the same salient features as in Chapter IV. I list these features here again by way of reminder:

- 1. Size
- 2. Divisions
- 3. Doctrine
- 4. Administration
- 5. Adjudication
- 6. Recruiting
- 7. Worship and ritual
- 8. Relation to the world
- 9. Life

## 1. Size

The church of Paul was very small because it had just been planted and was struggling to achieve growth within the powerfully entrenched pagan religions of the Roman world and the ancient Jewish faith. It was a baby that, like Moses, was born into a hostile environment and there was a real question whether it would survive. Here, therefore, we don't need to ask how big it was. We need to ask, rather, what was its attitude toward growth in the world, and its expectation of growth?

Just as in Chapter IV, there is no need here for an exhaustive survey because the end of our quest can be seen almost before we start. Let us go first to Paul himself and his attitude toward growth and expectation of the same.

His expectation seems to have been heavily influenced by Isaiah 45. We quote here vs. 22 & 23:

Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. By myself I have sworn, from my mouth has gone forth in righteousness a word that shall not return: "To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear."

This prophetic passage appealed to an element of universalism in Paul's mind. He knew, of course, that multitudes among the Gentiles disbelieved not only in Jesus but in God also. Nevertheless he anticipated a change in this situation before the last day that looked to the final judgment on all nations as anticipated above by Isaiah. He reasoned, rather inconsistently, that

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God's disposition is such as to have mercy on whom he will and display wrath on whom he will, while at the same time looking forward to a universal salvation,

For God has consigned all men to disobedience, that he may have mercy upon all. (Romans 11:32)

He said, "A hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles come in, and so all Israel will be saved." (Romans 11:25)

Then he proceeded to appeal directly to Isaiah 45:22,23 in saying,

For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God; for it is written, 'As I live,' says the Lord, "every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praises to God."

To Titus he wrote, For the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men. (Titus 2:11)

When he thought of the numbers that were to find salvation through the gospel and enter into the church, his favorite words were "many" and "all." Here are some of the most prominent examples:

But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. (Romans 5:15)

Then, as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man's act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be made righteous. (Romans 5:18,19)

For as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ. (Romans 12:4,5).

These few are representative of several other instances in Paul's letters where he reveals that, in his heart, there was the sure expectation that many, many persons were to respond to his gospel and enter into the church. And why shouldn't they? He was offering the most precious treasure imaginable – eternal life – and he was offering it as a free gift, absolutely without cost! This would require a vast transformation of the religions of the world, but this was no problem for Paul, to whom the world "was reconciled" in Christ. Believing as he did that the end was near – that the Lord was at hand – he was therefore impelled to expend his energy rapidly in an effort to place the message of his gospel before all men, so that all might be saved. And he was correct in evaluating the numbers, for the church proceeded to encompass the Empire so that, by the beginning of the Fourth Century, possibly a majority of its inhabitants were either in the church or heavily influenced by the church. Just as they remain to this day, they were and are many!

This is the flavor of the message regarding numbers throughout the New Testament epistles, including the Book of Revelation. In the Acts we have these examples:

And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith. (Acts 6:7)

And the hand of the Lord was with them (at Antioch) and a great number that believed turned to the Lord. (Acts 11:21)

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So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily. (Acts 16:5)

As I indicated above, the Book of Revelation carries the same expectation forward:

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no man could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, . . . Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and whence have they come?" And he said to me, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. (Revelation 7:9-14)

The church in the New Testament, then, was dominated throughout by this expectation, that they saw as quickly becoming a reality, that so many were to be saved and enter the church as constitute a great multitude, which no man could number. The operative key words for size tended to be "many," "all," and "a great number." The goal and expectation was the reconciliation of the whole world to God. Let us just assign the single key word of huge as in the previous chapter.

## 2. Divisions

Was the New Testament Church of Paul a united church? We can do no better here than to quote K. S. Latourette:

Actually, as the writers of the New Testament clearly recognized, the Church was far from fully attaining this ideal. It was badly divided . . . Even in the first generation of its existence the church was torn by dissensions. In one local unit of the church, in Corinth, there were factions between those who professed adherence respectively to Paul, Apollos, Peter, and Christ, and between rich and poor. As we are to see more particularly in a moment, the Church was deeply and bitterly divided between those who held that to become Christians, Gentiles must adhere to Judaism through the symbolic act of circumcision and those who maintained, with Paul, that this was completely to misunderstand and pervert the gospel. Before the first century of the Church was out, some were denying that Christ had come in the flesh, presumably foreshadowing movements, notably Gnosticism, which in the second century were to be major sources of division. Morally the Church was far from perfect. Some of those who wished to be regarded as Christians were adopting the attitude, technically called antinomianism, which was drawn from a misconception of man's response to God's grace and which was to recur again and again through the centuries, that the Christian need not be bound by any moral law. In at least one local congregation at the time of the common meal, some became drunk. We hear, too, of members of the Church being accused of fornication. In one congregation we have the spectacle, later to be almost chronic, of an outstanding member who was eager for power and control. (K. S. Latourette, *A History of Christianity*, v. 1, p. 112, © 1975; Harper, San Francisco)

This is not a pretty picture, and it was a true one in spite of the fact that in all his epistles to the churches, Paul stressed the great importance of unity and repeatedly rebuked those who were, in his opinion, responsible for divisions within the church.

For as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, so we, though many, are on body in Christ, and individually members one of another. (Romans 12:4,5)

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For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and all were made to drink of one spirit. (I Corinthians 12:12,13).

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:27,28)

We should acknowledge the heavy emphasis on love in all the epistles, especially those of Paul and the Pauline School. It is love that produces unity and perfectly harmony in the church, as indicated by this text:

And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. (Colossians 3:14)

We must also acknowledge that, in spite of his ability to talk the talk of unity and love, Paul comes forth from the pages of the New Testament as one of the primary causes of quarrels and dissensions in the church. We are all aware of the many divisive issues that he promoted. This is very clearly displayed in his dealings with the Jewish apostles who inherited the mantle of Jesus at Jerusalem. His position was absolutely uncompromising. This is not bad in every respect, for it may be that Christianity would never have been anything more than a small sect within Judaism apart from his firm position on the issues. Yet his most fundamental disposition was not one of love, and this slips out many times in his epistles.

As we have said before, so now I say again, If any one is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed. (Galatians 1:9)

If any one thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord. If any one does not recognize this, he is not recognized. (I Corinthians 14:37,38)

I have confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view than mine; and he who is troubling you will bear his judgment, whoever he is. (Galatians 5:10)

One can conclude from such statements that Paul was heroically contending for the faith "once for all delivered to the saints." One can also conclude that his defensive attitude, quick to make uncompromising judgments of those who disagreed with him, made a great contribution to the divisiveness that began in his generation and continues in the church to this very day.

The divided church is clearly evidenced in the Revelation. In every case, the messages addressed individually to the seven churches in Asia recognize the existence of serious and deadly divisions within them.

I can only conclude, based on the evidence throughout the New Testament, that the New Testament church of Paul, and of the apostles, was heavily divided in spite of the fact that the leaders recognized and preached unity and condemned divisions. Something was wrong, missing, from early in the history of the church. Perhaps also something was there that should have been missing, and we are still harvesting the fruits of divisiveness throughout the world.

I will not discuss them in detail here, but we do not have to look too carefully to discover that

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many of the factors that contribute to a divided church in the modern world, as discussed in the previous chapter, were also present in the New Testament church of Paul. I list them again by way of reminder:

- 1. Doctrine
- 2. Race
- 3. Nationality
- 4. Economics
- 5. Education
- 6. Egotism
- 7. Politics
- 8. Worship

Race and nationality were factors, though perhaps not so strong as today. Economics was also a factor, as indicated in, for an example, in the Epistle of James, where James rebukes the churches for making distinctions between the rich man and the poor man. (James, 2:1-7) We are hard put to find education and politics as divisive factors, but Egotism and Worship heavily divided some congregations. Paul was himself perhaps the chief egotist, and his churches were divided on the manner of their worship, as indicated in his rebuke of the Corinthians:

But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. For in the first place, when you assemble as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you; and I partly believe it, for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized. When you meet together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal, and one is hungry and another is drunk. (I Corinthians 11:17-21)

In our search for an appropriate key word to describe the divisions of the Pauline church of the New Testament, again, as in the previous chapter, *myriad* comes to the fore.

### 3. Doctrine

As in the discussion of doctrine in the previous chapter, here we are not discussing the contribution of doctrine to divisions in the New Testament church of Paul, but we are asking, "What are the roots of doctrine in that church?" From whence came it? Our best guide here comes, again, from Paul's epistles.

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. (II Timothy 3:14-17)

For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ. (Galatians 1:10-12)

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But as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him," God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For what person knows a man's thoughts except the spirit of the man which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit. (I Corinthians 2:9-13)

The scriptures (Law and the Prophets), the Christ (the risen Christ as he appeared to Paul), and the Spirit are all represented in the Epistles as the source of sound doctrine. In addition, Paul sometimes gives credit to "the word of the Lord", but in view of his statement to the Corinthians, and his failure to quote the words of Jesus, we see that what he must have meant by "the word of the Lord" was the word of Paul himself, as he said he received them from the risen Christ:

If any one thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord. (I Corinthians 14:37)

What other source does one need, when one has the mind of Christ? (I Corinthians 2:16) I can only conclude that, ultimately, the source of doctrine for the New Testament church of Paul was none other than Paul. "Paul" must be our key word here.

### 4. Administration

Again we must confine our discussion, as in Chapter 4, to the source of ultimate authority and to the manner in which that authority was disbursed. What was the source of authority in Paul's churches? How did it flow from the source?

Not only in Paul, but everywhere in the New Testament there is but one stated ultimate source of authority, which is God the Father. This authority flows from God through Christ the Son to the "body" of which Christ is the head. There are so many texts to establish this point that I do not even need to quote them. Anyone who reads the New Testament must have realized that this is true. One passage comes to mind immediately and I must share it as representative of the many:

I do not cease giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, . . . and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe, according to the working of his great might which he accomplished in Christ when he raised him from the dead and made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come; and he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. (Ephesians 1:15-23)

How, then, does the authority flow? Paul's favorite metaphor for the church is the human body, and he always has Christ placed at the head. The authority flows from the Father through the Son (who is the head), then from the head to the various members of the body. We see the exact mechanism when we read this:

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, then healers, helpers, administrators, speakers in various kinds of tongues . . . If any one thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord. If any one does not recognize this, he is not recognized. (I Corinthians 12:27 . . .



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14:38)

So, it is quite simple. From the Christ, the head, the flow is first to the apostles, then through various other offices, or functions, within the body. And, when it comes from the apostles, it must be from the Lord. Paul is an apostle, so that whatever he commands is of the Lord so that he becomes the channel of the Lord's authority. Thus he saw himself as fully authorized to exercise authority over the churches, which he did without reservation.

In the New Testament church of Paul, God the Father is the source of all authority, which issues from him through Christ the Son, thence to Paul the apostle, thence to prophets, teachers, etc. until the most menial member of the body has been invested. Its administration is hierarchical. This, however, is only the way that Paul presented it. How did the authority really flow, and what was its real source? As I have explained in Book II, Paul did not listen to Jesus, therefore he must himself have been the source of all authority in the New Testament Church of Paul. The key word here is "Paul."

### 5. Adjudication

Paul's church at Corinth had a practice that made him very unhappy. They were taking their disputes to the civil courts, and when Paul learned of it he blasted them as we see in I Corinthians 5:1-6:8 (quoted in part below). This is a rather long passage that you can refer to directly, and here I will quote selected verses interspersed with appropriate comments. It had been reported to Paul that one of the church members, a man, was consorting with his "father's wife." The church had taken no action except that there is some implication that they had met and decided to do nothing. So Paul rebuked them:

And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you. (I Corinthians 5:2)

Then he proceeded immediately to reveal that, in his mind, he, Paul, was himself the ultimate judge in such matters. In this case, he had passed his judgment already without giving the accused a hearing:

For though absent in body I am present in spirit, and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment in the name of the Lord Jesus on the man who has done such a thing. (I Corinthians 5:3,4)

Then he, the judge who has already passed judgment, instructs the church on how to proceed to administer his judgment:

When you are assembled, and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. (I Corinthians 5:4, 5)

I have labored over this instruction zealously, but have been able to come to no other conclusion but that Paul has passed a death sentence on the man. I realize that in modern terms this seems an extreme interpretation, but we must evaluate these words in the milieu of a First Century Jew whose past zeal for the revered law of his people included a disposition to enforce that law in every detail, including its command to stone adulterers and false prophets (Did he not assist in the stoning of Stephen?). The Law was very clear as to the prohibition of this offense:

A man shall not take his father's wife, nor shall he uncover her who is his father's. (Deuteronomy 22:30)

Cursed be he who lies with his father's wife, because he has uncovered her who is his father's. (Deuteronomy 27:20)

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These commandments come after this one:

If a man is found lying with the wife of another man, both of them shall die, the man who lay with the woman, and the woman; so you shall purge the evil from Israel. (Deuteronomy 22:22)

The father's wife was, of course, "the wife of another man." I believe Paul surely had these injunctions in mind, though he may not have expected the church to carry out such a drastic penalty. Nevertheless, he intended that they "purge the evil" in one way or another. He interjects a brief summary at the end of Chapter 5:

For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. "Drive out the wicked person from among you." (I Corinthians 5:12,13)

In Paul's churches, Paul himself is the Supreme Court. He passes judgment without giving the accused a hearing, and he does it in the name of the Lord Jesus. Furthermore, he is also present with the congregation when it meets to apply the penalty of his judgment, when "my spirit is present." All such matters are to be adjudicated within the church, not in the civil courts. But the Corinthians had been going to the civil courts also, probably because, prior to becoming Christians, that was their practice. Paul blasts them on this count also:

When one of you has a grievance against a brother, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints? Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, matters pertaining to this life! If then you have such cases, why do you lay them before those who are least esteemed by the church? I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no man among you wise enough to decide between members of the brotherhood, but brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers? To have lawsuits at all with one another is defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded? But you yourselves wrong and defraud, and that even your own brethren. (I Corinthians 6:1-8)

So, we have a very clear picture of adjudication in the New Testament Church of Paul. It must be confined to the church, where first someone must be found who is "wise enough to decide" so that disputes do not go outside the congregation. In the hard cases, Paul decides, serving as the supreme judge who is authorized to issued decisions in the name of the Lord Jesus! He has been in some contact with the words of the Lord here, but in the final analysis, the judge in every judgment is Paul himself. Our key word here must, as in the prior feature, be Paul.

## 6. Recruiting

All the early missionaries were Jews and they followed the natural course by first going to the synagogue in every city to bear witness to their gospel. Being Jewish themselves, it was a familiar setting; further, they were loyal to the same God as the Jews, and it was easy to find opportunities to witness in that setting. They drew on the same roots, and the basis message was that the Messiah for whom Israel had waited so long had finally arrived in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. They were impelled by a sense of urgency, believing that there was a limited time to witness prior to the Lord's return, and it was necessary for them to carry the message to the entire world as quickly as possible.

They always seemed to find, on first hearing, a few in the synagogue who wanted to hear more. These were very often the Gentile "God fearers" because the universal nature of the message appealed to them even more than to those of the traditional Jewish faith. Further, the earliest missionaries, the Apostles, Barnabas, Paul, and Apollos to name a few, were not requiring the

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onerous admission rites characteristic of the Jewish synagogue. Primarily, the males did not have to be circumcised to acquire full status as members of the new movement. They could continue to worship the same God and even counted themselves the true inheritors of the promises of that God.

As to the Jews who were not persuaded, they opposed the missionaries and sometimes took violent action against them. Typical was the Jews at Corinth, where they "opposed and reviled" him. He shook out his garments and said to them, "Your blood be upon your heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles." (Acts 18:5f) He only went next door to the synagogue, to the home of one Titus Justus, a Gentile who received him warmly, and we are even told that the ruler of the synagogue, one Crispus, believed with all his family. We are left to suppose that he also left the synagogue and went next door. Paul remained, for some eighteen months, "teaching the word of God among them."

We can well imagine that the loyal Jews in the synagogue were not at all happy about this, so they finally seized Paul and brought him before Gallio, the proconsul of Achaia, who refused to hear the case. After only a few more days, Paul left them and sailed for Syria. Did he flee for his life? Undoubtedly that was a factor. The loyal Jews in the synagogue must have been very frustrated in their efforts to be rid of him and they might have felt well justified in taking up stones against this interloper who was leading so many people astray, just next door!

In spite of all the conflicts and confusion that resulted wherever the Christian missionaries appeared, their work continued to prosper, but primarily among the Gentiles. Their universal message, their testimony to one God of all men, and their cheap admission price must have been very appealing to many of the Gentiles who were having doubts as to the validity of their polytheism. Paul's message at Athens, delivered in the Areopagus, demonstrates this universal appeal:

The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all men life and breath and everything. And he made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel after him and find him." (Acts 17:24-27)

By comparison with the religions of the pagan world to which the early missionaries took their message, it was to many ears most wonderful. So, the missionaries continued to rush across the world from city to city, winning a few in each place then rushing on. Those left behind assembled according to the norms of the new religion and broadcast the message throughout their city and its territory. There was, as it were, a spiritual vacuum in the world and the missionaries filled it. It was a formidable beginning for a formidable religion and the Mediterranean world and its environs, at least the metropolitan areas, were covered in the space of a generation of two. We do not know the details of those years because they were not documented, or the documents have been lost, but when the documents began to appear in the second and third centuries they reveal a world thoroughly seeded with the message of the New Testament church of Paul. They truly responded to the command of Jesus issued in the Great Commission:

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:19,20)

For a key word here, we could select from among several, witnessing, preaching, missions, etc. But since we seek a single word, witness should serve well.

## 7. Worship and Ritual

The New Testament church of Paul had few if any buildings, but the firm evidence from the Scriptures is that they met to worship in diverse places, primarily in the homes of members of the congregation. The house of Titius Justus, next door to the synagogue at Corinth that was mentioned above is a good example. Another example is seen in the introduction to the letter to Philemon:

Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our beloved fellow worker and Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier, and the church in your house: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Philemon 1:1-3)

So much for the place of worship. What did they do in the course of their worship? Here we have good evidence from Paul's epistles, including the following list:

When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. (I Corinthians 14:26)

In Chapter IV we gave the following list of worship activities in the church of today, which I show here again for comparison:

- 1. Sacred music, including congregational, choral, and solo hymn singing.
- 2. Public, common prayer, including the Lord's Prayer
- 3. Eucharist or Lord's Supper
- 4. Collection of tithes and offerings
- 5. The sermon
- 6. The minister, often cloaked in "ministerial attire", specifically, a long robe.

These lists compare rather well. Item 1, Sacred music, corresponds to the first item listed in Corinth, "each one has a hymn." Item 2 from our list is missing at Corinth. No mention of prayer! (He mentions both fasting and prayer in I Corinthians 7:5) This may have been an oversight, for in his First Letter to Timothy, Paul urges thusly:

I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands, without anger or quarreling; (I Timothy 2:8)

Here he was not specifically discussing public worship, but I think it safe to assume that he meant it to be included. However, there is no record anywhere in the New Testament of either individual or public offering of the Lord's Prayer.

Item 3, Eucharist or Lord's Supper, also fails to receive mention in Paul's list. He included this in I Corinthians, however, where we have the first description of the Lord's supper that appears in written form. Here is the text:

When you meet together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat . . . So, then, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another – if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home – lest you come together to be condemned. (I Corinthians 11:20-34)

The Acts informs us that they came together to eat a common meal, possibly because they had all things in common, including their table. There is no record there of the Eucharist, and it is uncertain that Paul intended to be giving instructions for worship when he described it to the

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Corinthians. We have to leave a question mark as to whether this was a part of the public worship of the New Testament church of Paul. But if it was not observed, they did indeed observe a common meal when they came together, so we will conclude here that there was a correspondence in this item.

Item 4, Collection of tithes and offerings, also is not mentioned in Paul's list of worship activities. Nevertheless we will assume that there was, at least in some cases, a correspondence, based on this text:

On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that contributions need not be made when I come. (I Corinthians 16:2)

Item 5, the sermon has no mention as such, but we do have mention of "a lesson" and "a revelation" and "an interpretation" that could very well constitute sermons, in at least some cases. The "revelation" may more properly correspond to what we today would call a prophecy, and there are many congregations that provide opportunity for individuals to prophesy. Item 6, the minister, either with or without his robe, is hard to place in Paul's churches. We should note that Paul's list is of those things that "each one" contributes to the meeting, and there is no indication that any one person was assigned the task either of leading the worship or delivering the sermon, though I think it safe, in view of the many New Testament references to preaching and teaching, that both of these activities were pursued in the New Testament church of Paul.

Paul's lists also includes "tongues" that are not mentioned in my list from Chapter 4. Perhaps it should have been included, then we would have the perfect number, seven items instead of six. In Paul's churches everything, including tongues seems to have been spontaneous contributions as the Spirit moved the individuals in the congregation. We note, however, that at least in the church in Corinth, this spontaneity had resulted in much disorder, with different individuals speaking simultaneously, and Paul was seeking to bring them to order. Perhaps the structured services such as the church in the modern world displays grew out of the necessity for bringing order to the worship experience.

As I search for a key word to describe the worship experience in the New Testament churches of Paul, the word spontaneous comes first to mind, but then I see that he has both prescribed and proscribed elements of worship, so perhaps a key word candidate is structured. But these actions on Paul's part constitute a binding of this feature in his churches, so instead of structured I will choose a smaller word, "Bound."

## 8. Relation to the World

Under the Old Covenant, the people of Israel made a concerted effort to separate themselves from the Gentiles. It was essential, to prevent their backsliding into pagan ways and beliefs, to maintain a sharp separation. When Joshua led them into the Canaan, they proceeded to maintain this separation by any means, including the slaying of their pagan foes that inhabited the land before them. The fact is, however, that after all was said and done, they had indeed maintained the separation, but had in the process established but one more nation of the world, equivalent to a pagan nation that, like them, was created and sustain by bloodshed.

Modern Israel was created and maintains itself by this same worldly means.

When the first apostles moved out into the pagan world with their gospel, they sought to create and maintain precisely this same separation and relation to the pagan world. As in the case of ancient Israel, their motive was to maintain the purity of their life and doctrine. The apostolic message to the Corinthian church is the best example of how they thought about these things:

Be not mismated with unbelievers. For what partnership have righteousness and iniquity? Or

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what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will live in them and move among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore come out from them, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch nothing unclean; then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." (II Corinthians 6:14-18)

It is as clear here as it was in the days of Joshua that the intention of this separation was to separate the early Christians from their former pagan ways and idol worship. It was not a separation of Israel from pagan ways, but the separation of the church, the "new Israel" from the same sort of influences. It is precisely the same separation that the Church in the modern world maintains – a separation on the basis of religious and moral principles, yet one that leaves the individual free to maintain an association with the larger world and its patterns.

To its credit, the New Testament church did not succumb to the militarism of either the world or their Israelite predecessors in Canaan, for history bears them witness that they were close enough to the Lord to refuse military service. But they nevertheless maintained a fundamentally positive attitude toward the world and eventually succumbed completely to the world and its attachments by becoming, within four hundred years, the powerful church of early Catholicism, that not only was not separate from the world, but ruled the world in a worldly way, including first of all by the sword. Symbolic of the union that the church in the New Testament maintained with the world was the appearance of the symbol for Christ on the shields of Roman soldiers in the army of Constantine as he gained the victory in the Battle of the Mulvian Bridge. By that date, October 27, 312, there were many Christians serving in the army.

The seeds of the ultimate melding of the Church with the world were sown in the days of the Apostles. I believe the prime influence for this was that, from the beginning, the New Testament Christians failed to understand the Kingdom of God as Jesus taught and instituted it. They thought that God was going to give them the whole earth for their "Kingdom of God" just as he had given to Israel the Land of Canaan for their "Kingdom of God." This mood yet dominates the church in the modern world as I explained in Chapter 4. They finally came to believe that it could be instituted by military means, as in the days of Joshua, and thus they proceeded to claim the power of the Roman Empire when Constantine opened it up to them.

Perhaps Paul was more instrumental than any other single person in cementing this attachment to the world by his failure to realize the true nature of the distinctions that set the children of the world apart from the children of God. I say this because he maintained his Roman citizenship and utilized its privileges without hesitating. We see this by his example in Acts 22:27,28:

So the tribune came and said to him, "Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?" And he said, "Yes." The tribune answered, "I bought this citizenship for a large sum." Paul said, "But I was born a citizen."

Paul maintained and exercised the privileges of citizenship. Naturally the New Testament Church of Paul did the same without hesitation, and thus began the joining, at the chest, of the Church and the world. The individuals that compose the Church remain cemented to the world's most fundamental institution, the state; therefore their institutions, including the Church, also retain what is more than just a relationship, but an actual identity with the world.

The New Testament Christians were not becoming "not of the world" but were only separating themselves from their pagan neighbors in the expectation that God would move the nations of the world to become of them. Thus would come the Kingdom of God in all its glory. Of course, in view of the numbers that I set before you above, they have largely succeeded in achieving their goal. This is nowhere more obvious than in the democratic states of Twenty-first Century Christendom where the preaching of loyalty to both "God and country" is the norm. The creeping worldliness

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that began in the New Testament church of Paul and the apostles therefore was not in the least reluctant to take on the trappings of the world. One of our modern historians said it best:

Rome died in giving birth to the Church; the Church matured by inheriting and accepting the responsibilities of Rome. (Durant, Caesar and Christ, p. 619, Simon and Schuster, © 1972)

There is a common theme that began in this New Testament Church of Paul and yet continues to dominate the thinking of churchmen worldwide, which is that the Christ will return to establish the perfect rule of God on the earth. They saw that this was God's gift to the early Israelites as they set up the Kingdom of God under David and Solomon; it must, they thought and still think, be repeated when Christ returns to rule the entire world. The minds of churchmen remained bound, therefore, to the system of the world in the New Testament Church of Paul and those minds continue to be so bound to this day.

The key word that best defines the relation of the early Christians in the New Testament Church of Paul to the world is bound." It is same word that describes the relation of the Modern Church to the world as set forth in Chapter IV.

### 9. Life

There is considerable evidence in the New Testament that Paul and the members of his churches sought to maintain an attitude of detachment from the life of this world. Many early disciples gave up their lives in this world for the sake of Christ, and so gave an eternal testament of their hatred of that life. Yet, there is almost complete absence of the rhetoric one would expect of those who maintained the attitude, with Jesus, of the hatred of life.

Paul did once write:

But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may accomplish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. (Acts 20:24)

Nevertheless, it clear that he failed to realize the enmity that exists between the attitude of the love of life and that of the hatred of life, as is clear in this quotation:

. . . while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. (I Timothy 4:8)

This reveals the belief in his mind that the godliness that comes from the acceptance of the gospel and discipleship to Jesus has a positive relation to both the life in this world and the life eternal. That this is Paul's basic stance tends to be confirmed by the fact that he appealed to his Roman citizenship to avoid a beating or perhaps to save his life after his arrest at Jerusalem. (Acts 22:22-29)

There is only one more reference in the entire New Testament that gives any evidence that members of the New Testament Church recognized the crucial significance of a proper attitude toward life described in the Great Principle of Jesus:

And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives unto death."

That this is the sole direct reference to the Great Principle outside the gospels demonstrates conclusively that the New Testament Christians maintained a positive attitude toward life in this

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world, following the influence of their founders, especially Paul. Chronologically they were still very close to their Lord, and had communication with those that had known the Lord and heard him teach. His Great Principle must then have been communicated to them, but only a few realized its significance so as to seal their faith in martyrdom. Paul could have done the very same, on numerous occasions, from the day of his arrest in Jerusalem to the times he saved his life from shipwreck. The record always shows Paul saving his life, never losing it. It does not even preserve for us how he finally died. Considering the crucial issue that was at stake, Paul had many opportunities to die a martyr, and by such a death would have given a glorious witness to the Great Principle of his Lord. That the Church has not preserved for us a reliable record of the manner of his death indicates very strongly that the Church did not comprehend the Great Principle. The shadowy tradition to the effect that he died a martyr at Rome in the latter sixties has no real substance. Were the tradition founded in truth, the early disciples would have moved heaven and earth to see that it was enshrined in the scriptural record. Why did Luke not complete the story in the Acts? We don't know but if, after all he endured, Paul yet died a coward, denying the faith, Luke would have had a very good reason to stop the story where he did.

As the key word, then, we can say with a fair degree of confidence that the attitude to life of the New Testament Church of Paul was positive.



## Chapter VI

# THE CHURCH OF JESUS

We must confine our search to the four gospels of the New Testament to find this church, for it is only there that we find Jesus. Well, if you insist, I will give you also the first eleven verses of Acts, but no more. Now, will you be surprised if I tell you that such a church cannot be found there?

It is true, if we confine our quest to an entity described by the New Testament Greek, *ekklesia*, that there is no such church in the gospels. I have described above how the word is not to be found in the gospels except on two occasions described in Matthew only. In one of these Jesus was plainly designating the synagogue, perhaps also in the other, although I prefer to believe the other reference was to the assembly of the saints at the last day.

What's in this word, church? In so far as the Truth is concerned, not much. So let's drop it from our discussion except as necessary to the title of this chapter, and look for that which we intend the word to convey . . . to the fellowship of his disciples. Yes, the gospels definitely describe the fellowship of his disciples, and Jesus, while using different terms, definitely and clearly describes it. So, what we are going to do in this chapter is to examine the salient features of this fellowship of disciples under the same headings as in the previous two chapters. I list them here yet again as a reminder.

1. Size
2. Divisions
3. Doctrine
4. Administration
5. Adjudication
6. Recruitment
7. Worship and ritual
8. Relation to the world
9. Life

What are the characteristics of these salient features of the fellowship of Jesus' disciples as described in the gospels?

## 1. Size

The fellowship of his disciples was very small when Jesus left the world. There were the eleven apostles, plus a few others that are named in the gospels, persons such as Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Luke tells us that there were "about a hundred and twenty" in the company of disciples when they came together to select a replacement for Judas. We can take leave to question this number, since it is conveniently rounded off to 10 x 12. This figure may therefore be only a symbolic one indicating 10 disciples for each of the twelve tribes of Israel. The number would not have changed much when the Day of Pentecost came and the Holy Spirit fell upon them. It is then that we are told that they baptized "about three thousand souls." We can also question this figure, which is also a convenient multiple of twelve.

Yet there was a time, during the days of his ministry, when Jesus' followers numbered in the thousands. His miracles of feeding succored as many as five thousand men besides women and children. But the crowds did not come because they were interested in what he was saying, at least not many of them. He later rebuked them, saying:

Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves." (John 6:26)

Indeed, the multitude were impressed so much by his miracle of feeding that they were convinced that:

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This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world!" (John 6:14)

Then they sought to take him by force to make him king, but Jesus withdrew again to the hills by himself. (John 6:15)

What happened? Jesus came to bring the kingdom; he had been proclaiming all along that it was very near. Here it was! But Jesus avoided the draft only to go off by himself to pray.

During his triumphal entry into Jerusalem there was a large crowd, called by Luke "the whole multitude of his disciples" surrounding him, following and going before and saying,

Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest! (Luke 19:38)

What happened?

If we go back to his first sermon, delivered in the home synagogue at Nazareth, we see a congregation of many persons who were powerfully swayed by the wisdom of this native son. But shortly afterward they were dragging him outside and trying to kill him.

What happened?

Every time Jesus was on the verge of assembling a great multitude of disciples, he turned away from them or they from him so that after his crucifixion there were only about a hundred faithful ones. And you noted above, of course, how these people were set to make him their King. Didn't Jesus come to bring this very kingdom?

What happened?

Jesus wanted them. He wanted them every one. He loved them and would have gladly received them into his kingdom. Near the beginning, he proclaimed that the fields of Israel were white unto harvest. The multitudes of people were there; the King was there.

What happened?

After Jesus told his disciples that they must eat his flesh and drink his blood, there was an immediate falling away. This was predictable because this was one of the most offensive things he could have said to Jews. John informs us of the result:

After this many of his disciples drew back and no longer went about with him. Jesus said to the twelve, "Will you also go away?" Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life and we have believed and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God." Jesus answered them, "Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?" (John 6:66-70)

What can be happening here? Every time he is about to have a real impact on society, to really bring the kingdom, he shoots himself in the foot! And in the above quotation it seems that he was not at all concerned to keep even the twelve, for he immediately branded one of them a traitor. Later, after Jesus had given a sort of confirmation talk to the twelve, he added,

I have said all this to keep you from falling away. (John 16:1)

But then he continued, on the way out to the Mount of Olives that fateful night,

You will all fall away because of me this night; for it is written, "I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered." But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee. (Matthew 26:31,32)

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Brash Peter, of course, denied that anything could cause him to fall away . . . but he did.

What happened?

Remember we are speaking here of the size of the fellowship of disciples, and how it was that Jesus seemed to be doing everything contrary to his intention to bring the kingdom to Israel. The fact is, Jesus knew from the very beginning that the fellowship of his disciples must be few. We know his response when he was asked, "Lord, will those who are saved be few?"

Strive to enter by the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. (Luke 13:24)

In the Sermon on the Mount he stated most clearly,

Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few. (Matthew 7:13,14)

Near the end, when Jesus looked upon the beloved city, he wept, saying,

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not! Behold, your house is forsaken and desolate. (Matthew 23:37,38)

Then we read this from Luke:

And when he drew near and saw the city he wept over it saying, "Would that even today you knew the things that make for peace! But now they are hid from your eyes. For the days shall come upon you, when your enemies will cast up a bank about you and surround you, and hem you in on every side, and dash you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation. (Luke 19:41-44)

It appeared that at one point, Jesus could have had that city with all its multitudes, and he truly wanted them – witness his tears over the doomed municipality – but there was a problem – it was a lack of knowledge and of willingness to learn. Every time he sought to inform them, his words only offended them. They did not know the time of their visitation, they did not know the way of peace, and they were unwilling to learn.

And most significantly, Jesus refused to compromise the integrity of his gospel one whit for the sake of persuading a single soul.

What happened?

Here is what happened: Whenever Jesus saw the multitudes coming to him, he could see that they came from motives that were not the least compatible with his "way of peace." He taught them; he sought to persuade them; he performed his wonderful miracles before them, but they refused to hear, to really hear him. The only way he could get their attention was to offend them with words so shocking they could not fail to hear. When they turned away, it was to their condemnation. Finally, they killed him in a vain effort to silence those words.

Size? The Fellowship of Jesus' Disciples was always very small; the multitudes were never a part of it. There were many times when even the durability of his closest disciples could hardly survive all the offenses. He knows what is in men; he knows our love of life, and he is under no delusion as to the numbers of sheep that will assemble before him on the last day. He knew, he knows, and he thus informs us, that the Fellowship of His Disciples in the world will always be very, very small. It was very small when he ascended into heaven; if we can believe him, as I am persuaded

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we can, it is yet a very small number today.

Paul made the cost of discipleship very low: "the free gift". But Jesus made it mountainous:

If any one comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple . . . . So, therefore, whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple. (Luke 14:26-33)

Can we begin to understand why the numbers are few in this categorization? Paul put only Jesus on the cross to pay the price of salvation. Jesus puts every disciple on a cross! What a contradiction!

And the kingdom? He knew that it did not depend in the least on the multitudes. He would, by himself and alone on a cross, bring it irreversibly into the world! And this while the few faithful disciples slept as he agonized in Gethsemane!

We can say without hesitation that the key word to describe the size of the Fellowship of Jesus' Disciples is "little." Jesus designated it his "little flock." (Luke 12:32)

I do not mean that it was small only because it was in its beginnings; no, it could have been huge even then. It was small because his sieve was very fine, and only the few could penetrate it. Furthermore, Jesus' expectation was that it must always remain small, "few" must always be the appropriate key word to describe its numbers, while "little" describes its size..

The way is hard and the gate is narrow that leads to life, and few there be that find it.

## 2. Divisions

Whenever Jesus made a statement in Truth, I take it that the Truth is eternal and the statement is true forever. Therefore there have never been, are not now, and will never be divisions within his Fellowship of Disciples. This must be, since he said clearly,

And I have other sheep, that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd. (John 10:16)

This was a focus of his prayer to the Father shortly before the end:

I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that thou hast sent me and hast loved them even as thou hast loved me. (John 17:20-23)

The Lord Jesus made this one of his most earnest prayers, that his small band of disciple in the world should be perfectly one.

What is the key to this unity? How is it that the disciples, though few, are nevertheless from every nation and yet they are perfectly united? Understand clearly that we are not speaking here of unity as a goal, for Jesus has plainly stated that there shall be one flock and one shepherd. This unity is not goal, it is reality. There are at least three things to be listed as the keys to unity; they are love, the shepherd, and the word.

Everyone understands that love is a binding force that draws persons together. When it is the love of God that infuses the heart, it overcomes all divisions. I think that everyone will agree on

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this or at least give lip service to it. Nevertheless, among the millions of churchmen throughout the world, all agreeing that love is the force that binds, there is no unity, but a great plethora of division. Obviously then, it is one thing to speak of the love of God and the love of the Fellowship of Disciples in the world – yet something else altogether to really experience it so as to produce the perfect unity for which Jesus prayed. It is too easy to give lip service to love without actually putting it to work.

How do we do that? How do we put this love to work?

This brings us to the shepherd. When he said, "so there shall be one flock, one shepherd," he was telling us how to put love to work to create a unity of the flock.

We can only be united if we have the same shepherd! The sad fact is that the many Christians throughout the world, divided from one another on so many different grounds, yet earnestly contend for Jesus as their shepherd. So, there must be something amiss with this contention. If Jesus were truly their shepherd, they would be united!

We can get a clue here as to what it is amiss when we see that almost every denomination of Christians also profess other shepherds. The very word pastor is Latin for shepherd. So, everywhere there is a pastor, there is a shepherd, and the members of his flock listen to him regularly. They rationalize this situation by defining the pastor as an "under shepherd" while claiming Jesus for their chief shepherd. This cannot be true, however, because if Jesus were truly their chief shepherd, they would be united, perfectly one!

Can the problem here be the under shepherds? Yes, but why? Clearly, the problem is in the numbers. Jesus said there should be only one shepherd to tend the one flock. The flock is few in numbers; the shepherd, one in number! Can you hear him?

This brings us to the third key to unity, the word of Jesus. Do you note, in John 10:16 above, how it works? "I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice." This is the final explanation for the unity of the little flock. They love the Lord, they look to him as their one and only shepherd, and they heed his voice.

We can claim to love, and it may be authentic within the bounds of its limitations. We can claim Jesus for our chief shepherd, and that may be the real intention of our hearts. But the simple fact is that the churchmen and churchwomen don't listen to this shepherd – they are too busy listening to other shepherds, to the stranger and others. The sheep of the little flock, however, are deaf to the strange shepherd. How do I know? Because my shepherd said it, and I have listened.

A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers. (John 10:5)

The unity that exists in Jesus comes from having only one shepherd, from heeding only one voice, and from manifesting love for him by listening to that voice and abiding by it. He said:

If you love me, you will keep my commandments. (John 14:15)

Here is how it works:

If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. (John 14:23)

Isn't that simple? Not one complicated thing about it! There is, of course, another player in this, the Holy Spirit. We must yield to him, and:

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that

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are to come. (John 16:13)

But this does not complicate the situation in any way, because the Spirit and the Word of Jesus are one. They come together, they abide together, and within them there is always a unity. Jesus explained it this way:

It is the Spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail; the words that I have spoken to you are Spirit and life. (John 6:63)

I conclude that one can neither separate the Spirit from the Word of Jesus, nor the Word from the Spirit. If you have received his words and abide by them (the evidence that they are received) you have received the Spirit. There is no other way to receive the Spirit. Conversely, you have not received the Spirit if you have not received the Word. I must emphasize again at this point that the Word here consists in its entirety in the words that Jesus uttered in the world. Jesus went on to explain it this way:

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. (John 16:13,14)

Therefore we know the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, will speak to us whatever he hears, but he only hears the words of Jesus, because, "he will take what is mine and declare it to you."

We must conclude, then, that the fellowship of disciples in Jesus are and have always been united in one, and thus will they ever be. The bond of their unity is love for the Lord, which, when truly present, opens their hearts to the words of the One True Shepherd through the work of the Holy Spirit, and they become perfectly one. They never need to seek unity among themselves. They are one!

There is only one key word that can properly describe this salient feature of the fellowship of disciples of Jesus: none. They are not divided. There are no divisions to separate them; never have been, are not now, and never will be!

### 3. Doctrine

What is the source of doctrine in this small, undivided Fellowship of Disciples? Haven't we answered that question already? If hearing and receiving the words of Jesus explains why they are so few, and also why they are not divided, the very same words must also be the source of all true doctrine. True, the Holy Spirit administers the words, but the Holy Spirit is not the source:

For he will not speak on his own authority. (John 16:13), and

He will take what is mine and declare it to you. (John 15:15), and

If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free. (John 8:31,32)

All sound doctrine comes then only through abiding in the words of Jesus of Nazareth, which explains why the Fellowship of his Disciples is perfectly one. They agree in all things because they listen to one and the same shepherd. To repeat once more, these words of Jesus are the words spoken by Jesus of Nazareth, the words that issued from the mouth of that one historical person long ago. We find them only in the gospels of the New Testament. They are not in Paul's epistles, nor those of James, John, or Peter. They are not in the Acts or the Revelation. (Oops! I

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gave you the first eleven verses of Acts, didn't I?)

So we come quickly to the key word that is the source of doctrine for the fellowship of the disciples of Jesus: it is Jesus. He is their only teacher and guide. He is the only source of doctrine and it comes directly from him through his word, and the aid of the Holy Spirit.

### 4. Administration

What is the source of authority in the Fellowship of Disciples of Jesus, and how does it flow? This is an easy question to answer if we are truly open to the words of Jesus, for he gives us a simple, concise, and straightforward answer:

For I have not spoken on my own authority; the Father who sent me has himself given me commandment what to say and what to speak. And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has bidden me. (John 12:49,50)

The reason, of course, that the words of Jesus can be the basis or unity in the fellowship, as I explained above, is that they are so simple and clear that there is no room for disputes about their meaning. So, here, Jesus tells us that the Father is the source of his authority, and the words he speaks he received from the Father.

Now, the key to administration is found particularly in how that authority flows. Jesus stated that he is both Lord and Master (teacher):

You call me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. (John 13:13,14)

Furthermore, he also said:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. (Matthew 28:18)

Therefore we know that the path of authority moves directly from the Father to the Son, Jesus. Where does it go from there? This is the key question in all of this, for if the authority moves from Jesus to the Pope (Holy Father), or the Patriarch (ruling Father), or the Pastor (shepherd), or the Bishop, or even the congregation, then we have a confused situation because there are many of these all claiming to be in the direct line of authority. There will furthermore be divisions among us, for some of us will be listening to one channel, some to another, and these channels seldom speak the same things. That is why they are different, divided channels. Again, let us go to the voice of Jesus:

But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brethren. And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. Neither be called masters, for you have one master, the Christ. He who is greatest among you shall be your servant; whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted. (Matthew 23:8-12)

You know that those who are supposed to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them and their great men exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you, but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. (Mark 10:42-44)

Do you hear him? The disciples have only one master, the Christ. They do not exercise authority over one another, but each one submits himself or herself to the other. Now, this is a fact,

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because the Lord said it. We can conclude with full assurance that wherever authority comes through one of the disciples to others, or through many disciples to others, there is not the Fellowship of the Disciples of Jesus, because it doesn't work that way.

Then how does it get to the disciples? Mustn't it be channeled through one or more of them? If you are now asking this question, you haven't really heard him, have you? Look at his words. All authority is his. He is the only Teacher and Master. He is the only Lord. God is the only Father. Therefore, the flow of authority in the Fellowship of Disciples must be directly from Jesus to each individual disciple. There can be no intermediate channels through which authority flows to the individuals.

The key word here then, that best defines the source and flow of all authority to the Fellowship of Disciples must be Jesus. There can be no other links in the chain of authority. Jesus is himself the sole administrator of his Fellowship of Disciples and the flow goes directly to each individual. There are really two key words to consider here: the source is Jesus and the flow is direct. But we will specify only Jesus because we require a single word.

### 5. Adjudication

Who decides? When there is a dispute within the Fellowship, the Word of Jesus must decide, for he is the sole source of authority. There is no chain, either descending or ascending, between him and the disciples.

But the varieties of disputes are limitless in number and, simple as is the Word of Jesus, there will be times when it is not immediately obvious how his Word applies. One disciple may see it one way, another disciple another way, and so they cannot agree. Jesus knew these possibilities, of course, and he provided a simple rule for deciding every case where there is disagreement among the disciples. It is this:

- (1) If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. (Matthew 18:15)
- (2) But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. (Matthew 18:16)
- (3) If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the assembly. (Matthew 18:17)
- (4) If he refuses to listen even to the assembly, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector (Publican). (Matthew 18:17)

This simple, four-step procedure is the rule for the adjudication of all disputes within the Fellowship of Disciples. There is no one person in charge, no single individual who is to direct the outcome. The Lord Jesus is and remains the only authority as the Fellowship of Disciples follows his rule for adjudication of disputes. Within the authority of his Holy Word and under the guidance of his Holy Spirit, and immersed in his Holy Fellowship, moved by his perfect love, every effort is made to save the offending and abstinent party. But he must be excluded if the four steps cannot reach him. He does not listen to the words of Jesus, Jesus is not his Lord, and he must be confronted with this reality.

Jesus is by this means the sole adjudicator. So, the key word here is, again, Jesus.

### 6. Recruiting

There are three things that we must put foremost in our minds as we consider the subject of



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recruitment in the Fellowship of Disciples as they appear in the gospels:

- 1) Jesus sends his disciples out into the world to be his witnesses . . . to the ends of the earth. (Acts 1:8)
- 2) We are to make disciples of all nations, so that they will "observe all that I have commanded you." (Matthew 28:19:20)
- 3) This will be done in accord with his command, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. (Mark 16:15) This is, of course, the true and only gospel of the Kingdom as delivered by Jesus, which springs from the application of his Great Principle.

We fulfill the task of recruiting new disciples when we carefully follow this plan. We must emphasize that it must truly be Jesus who sends us, that we must truly deliver to all nations all that he has commanded, which puts his words in the heart of the task. Further, it must be the true gospel according to Jesus that we teach, and it must be set forth in the same manner as Jesus himself set it forth, without compromise to enhance the numbers. The multitudes are going to be offended by it. The key word here is witnessing, or witness to keep it short. It is by preaching that his disciples are his witnesses. It is through their witness that they inform others to observe all he has commanded them, and by which they make other disciples.

## 7. Worship and Ritual

We will here search for evidence of the elements of worship defined in the prior two chapters. We list them here again for your convenience and then proceed to comment on each one.

- 1. Sacred music, including congregational, choral, and hymn singing.
- 2. Public, common prayer, including the Lord's Prayer
- 3. Eucharist or Lord's Supper
- 4. Collection of tithes and offerings
- 5. The sermon
- 6. The minister, often cloaked in "ministerial attire", specifically, a long robe

1) Sacred music, including congregational, choral, and hymn singing. This was an element in their worship together with Jesus, which we learn by reference to the accounts of the Lord's Supper, Matthew 26:30: "And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

2) Public, common prayer, including the Lord's Prayer. There is no evidence that this was part of their common worship. They prayed individually, and Jesus prayed individually, in keeping with his command to pray in secret. (Matthew 6:5,6)

3) Eucharist or Lord's Supper. If Jesus' last meal with his disciples was a time of worship, then we must include this in the list of worship activities. However, there is much evidence that this was a common meal such as the Jews observed on the Passover, not intended to become a part of the worship of the Fellowship of Disciples. In support of this, we have the absence of any such observance in the New Testament Fellowship of Disciples.

They indeed observed a common meal or "love feast" when they came together, but we do not see this in the Fellowship of Disciples as it appears in the gospels, unless we specify such an event as the breakfast with the Lord by the seashore after the Resurrection. This was surely a

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special occasion so we cannot draw any firm conclusions.

4) Collection of Tithes and Offerings. There is no record of this, as an element of worship, in Jesus' Fellowship of Disciples.

5) The sermon. There were sermons, the most notable of which was the Sermon on the Mount. But this was not delivered at what we today would define as a service of worship. It was more like a political rally, as multitudes of people gathered to hear the speech of a man who would possibly become their king.

6) The minister cloaked in ministerial attire. There was certainly no such person in the Fellowship of Jesus' Disciples

I conclude that we cannot say anything for certain about the order of worship of the first Fellowship of Disciples. They did certain things that are elements of a modern worship service, but they are not defined as such. Jesus never specified what we must do in a common, or public worship service. There are certain things that he specified that we are not to do in public, specifically fasting, the giving of alms and prayer. We must also be careful to keep our motives pure when we practice any act of piety, lest we be doing it in order to be seen by men. (Matthew 6:1)

Jesus went to the synagogues, there to worship with his fellow Jews, and he seemed to assume that his disciples would continue this practice, else how could he prophesy that they would be thrown out of the synagogues? (John 16:2) The evidence in the gospels is that the elements of worship in the synagogues included alms giving, the reading of scripture, teaching, prayer, and prophesying and probably also the singing of hymns. It would seem, therefore, that the elements of worship that began to appear in the Acts and that are retained to this day in meetings for worship were carried over from the synagogue. Jesus may have assumed that they would be thus preserved, less those elements he proscribed. This would explain the absence of any specific order of worship from his lips.

There may be another explanation for this absence. Jesus said:

For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them. (Matthew 18:20)

He would be in their midst in that his words would be ruling in their hearts, and would therefore lead them in the performance of their worship. Could he have been relying on a spontaneous expression of worship in each gathering, apart from any formal order of the elements of worship? When he is always meeting with his disciples, it is completely unnecessary to have a prescribed order of worship. He will personally lead them in every instance!

Jesus did not prescribe the elements of worship. At the very least, we can conclude that this was not and is not important to him. If it were, he would surely have dealt with it. He did certainly proscribe specific elements that were a part of the synagogue service, and these must never be included when we meet together.

Our key word here could therefore be spontaneous, but to shorten it and use one of Jesus own words, we will select free. His presence in the assembly will be manifest by, among other things, the absence of the things he has proscribed.

## 8. Relation to the world

There are two utterances of Jesus that define the relation of the Fellowship of Disciples to the world:

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My kingship is not of this world; if my kingship were of this world, my servants would fight, that I might be handed over to the Jews; but my kingship is not from the world. (John 18:36)

If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. (John 15:18,19)

John 18:36 was spoken to Pilate in answer to the question, "Are you the king of the Jews?" (John 18:33) He gives, as the telling evidence, the statement that his kingship is not of this world and that his servants, his disciples, do not fight to deliver their king. The telling characteristic of the kingdoms of the world must be, then, that they do fight for their king, for their kingdom or for their country. I have shown elsewhere that the fundamentals of the world never change, so that it remains true that those kingships, or powers, that are of the world manifest that bond by fighting. We know therefore how to identify a state or any other body that is of the world: its servants fight! The servants of Jesus, his disciples, do not fight, not even to maintain his kingship, because it is not of the world. The statement of John 15:18,19 above then explains the whole: the disciples, like the kingship of Jesus, are not of the world. Furthermore, the not-of-ness of the disciples is not a friendly separation, because the world hates them, just as it hated Jesus and put him to death. Neither Jesus nor the disciples can maintain a friendship with the world, as separate entities, because the separation is of such nature as inevitably creates hostility. There can be no covenant of peace between the disciples and the world. James, the Lord's brother, wrote truly:

Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. (James 4:4)

If the members of the little flock of disciples will not fight for their king, they surely will not fight for the nation of the world! Everywhere, therefore, we see that the example of the disciples is one of peace. Whatever must occur in the world around them, they, unlike Jerusalem, know and hold to the way of peace.

I do not mean that every pacifist is a disciple of Jesus. There are times when citizens of the state find that pacifism is the most effective way to fight for their "king" or state authority, or world goals. Gandhi and King are the prime examples of this. Even when "Christians" practice pacifism in the name of Christ but do it to gain a worldly objective, such as racial integration, etc., they do not bear witness to the kingdom of God. They fail to understand that the disciples of Jesus refuse to fight for a specific reason: his kingship is not of this world. Their treasure is not on the earth.

Jesus went to the heart of this non-relationship with the world when he responded to the question about giving tribute to Caesar:

But he perceived their craftiness, and said to them, "Show me a coin. Whose likeness and inscription has it?" They said, "Caesar's." He said to them, "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. (Luke 20:23-25)

I have discussed this in detail elsewhere. Here let me only repeat that the obvious implication is that the bearing of an image is the mark of possession. It is so for coins, it is likewise so for human beings. We bear the image of God. We do not belong to Caesar! Therefore, the disciples of Jesus are not citizens of the state, not subject to the state nor bound to the state in any way whatsoever. They do not fight because his kingship is not of this world.

The state authority can never understand this, and will forever assume, mistakenly, that such a person, a disciple of Jesus, is some sort of threat to the state. This is one root of the inevitable hostility that exists between the kingdom of God and the nations of the world.

We look now for a key word to define the relation of the Fellowship of Disciples to the world. "Separate" is a good word, and it is certainly true. It does not go far enough to be adequate,

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however. A better word is alienated. Peter surely understood this, for we find him writing,

Beloved, I beseech you as aliens and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh that wage war against your soul. (1 Peter 2:11)

But our Lord has a better one even than that. We find it in his saying,

If the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed. (John 8:36)

Therefore, let us select free as our key word here.

## 9. Life

The only correct attitude to life for the Fellowship of Disciples is forever enshrined in what I often refer to as The Great Principle. I cannot set it before you too often, so here it is once more:

He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. (John 12:25)

This explains why Jesus went to the cross; it explains why the Holy Martyrs went willingly to the wild beasts or to the flames. It is the only correct explanation for the pacifism of Jesus and his disciples. It is not that they despair of life. No, it is because of their supreme zest for the eternal life of the Father. They constantly remember the promise of their Lord, which in faith I deem to be true:

. . . whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. (John 11:26)

The keyword that most properly defines the attitude to life of the Fellowship of Disciples is, therefore, hate. The consuming nature of life in this world is such that it does not permit a neutral attitude. If we do not love it, we must hate it, for it truly works to destroy our souls. I would only state in closing that this hate does not mean to despise all things that pertain to life. Hate is the scorning of a bond, and it means that the Disciples of Jesus have broken the bond of love that bound them to life, and now are bonded to life eternal.

## Chapter VII

## COMPARISONS AND CONCLUSIONS

**KEYWORD COMPARISON CHART**  
 BASED ON THE PREVIOUS THREE CAPTERS, COMPARING THE  
 CHURCH OF TODAY, OF PAUL, AND OF JESUS

#	FEATURE	CHURCH OF TODAY	CHURCH OF PAUL	CHURCH OF JESUS
1	SIZE <sup>(1)</sup>	HUGE	HUGE	LITTLE
2	DIVISIONS <sup>(2)</sup>	MYRIAD	MYRIAD	NONE
3	DOCTRINE <sup>(3)</sup>	DIVERSE	PAUL	JESUS
4	ADMINISTRATION <sup>(4)</sup>	VARIED	PAUL	JESUS
5	ADJUDICATION <sup>(5)</sup>	VARIED	PAUL	JESUS
6	RECRUITING <sup>(6)</sup>	VARIED	WITNESS	WITNESS
7	WORSHIP <sup>(7)</sup>	VARIED	BOUND	FREE
8	RELATIONSHIP <sup>(8)</sup>	BOUND	BOUND	FREE
9	LIFE ATTITUDE <sup>(9)</sup>	POSITIVE	POSITIVE	NEGATIVE

(1) Includes both actual size and attitude to size.

(2) This describes the actual condition.

(3) This row specifies the actual source of doctrine.

(4) Specifies the source of authority and how it flows.

(5) This row identifies the source of authority for the decision making process.

(6) Specifies the method of recruiting.

(7) The manner and order of worship is defined by these words.

(8) This row defines the relationship of the church to the world in each case.

(9) "Positive" is equivalent to love, "negative" is equivalent to hate.

## Conclusions

**Feature No. 1**, size, by itself proves that neither the church of today nor the church of Paul can be identified with that of Jesus, which I have termed the Fellowship of Disciples. Jesus spoke of his "little flock" and proclaimed that its numbers must always be few as specified in Chapter VI. A marble is not a mountain, and there is no method whereby one can identify the marble of Jesus with the mountains of Paul and the church of today. While the Church of Paul was not yet huge, the attitude of Paul looked to a huge church. This can only be because he ignored the words of Jesus and thereby initiated the attitude toward size that prevails to this day. The doctrine of Jesus established a narrow gate on the hard way through which only a few could pass. The doctrine of Paul, perpetuated by the church of today has established a wide gate on the easy way through which every one can pass! Jesus is a stranger to Paul, and Paul a stranger to Jesus.

**Feature No. 2** constitutes a second proof that neither the church of today nor the church of Paul can be identified with the church of Jesus. To repeat for emphasis, Jesus stated that there was to be only one flock. His word is true, therefore there cannot even be as many as two flocks among Jesus' Fellowship of Disciples. Yet in both Paul and the modern world, they are myriad. Jesus therefore is building only one flock, or assembly, but Paul and his associates began the process of multiplication whereby the number of flocks today is astronomical. Jesus is a stranger to Paul, and Paul a stranger to Jesus.

**Feature No. 3**, the source of doctrine, again illustrates the sea change that began with Paul. Jesus was and is the sole source of doctrine for the little flock. Paul made himself the source of doctrine in his churches, other's followed suite so that today every congregation listens to whatever source is most persuasive at the moment. Yesterday it was not only Paul but also Luther, Calvin, Knox, Wesley, Pope, Patriarch, or whoever happened to be most persuasive, and so it continues today. Jesus is seldom heard, and therefore cannot be identified with the source of authority in these churches. If they were listening to him, the contrasts of the first two features could not exist. Jesus is a stranger to Paul and Paul a stranger to Jesus.

**Feature No. 4**, administration, only confirms the conclusions drawn from No. 3. Jesus is the sole administrator of his little flock of disciples, but Paul established his own administration, named the offices and defined the source of authority and its flow. This began a process that has continued as more and more leaders have made their contributions to the administration of the church in every age. Following Paul's example, many have made themselves the shepherds of their own flocks, but have not heeded the voice of Jesus. Jesus is a stranger to Paul, and Paul a stranger to Jesus.

**Feature No. 5** examines the adjudication of disputes. Jesus is the only source of authority for the Fellowship of Disciples, and it is to him that the sheep of his little flock look to resolve every dispute, either directly or through following the adjudication procedure that he specified. This only demonstrates once again that neither the church of today or the church of Paul can be the church of Jesus. Paul began different processes, and therefore he is the first stranger to enter the field. Jesus is a stranger to Paul, and Paul a stranger to Jesus.

**Feature No. 6**, recruiting, defines the method or methods used to convert sinners and add them to the church. This is the only feature of the nine selected for discussion where Paul conforms to Jesus. As an exception, it only proves the rule and is easily explained because Paul had to begin where he was with what he had. This meant that he found it necessary to persuade and convince by the method of personal witness that Jesus had pursued. If only he had truly witnessed to Jesus, all the features of his church would conform to those of Jesus. He pursued of necessity the method prescribed by Jesus, but because his gospel was so very different, all

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the results are also different. What if Paul had possessed the worldly authority of a Pilate, a Herod, or a Caesar? This man, who called down curses on those who were preaching a different gospel, would surely have utilized every means at his command to suppress their voices and compel every man, woman, and child to be baptized. It is fundamentally impossible to compel entry into the little flock of Jesus because everything depends upon the free choice and will of the individual. This would have been no hindrance to Paul, who wrote:

So it depends not upon man's will or exertion, but upon God's mercy. . . . So then he has mercy upon whomever he wills, and he hardens the heart of whomever he wills. (Romans 9:16,18)

We have no grounds for praising Paul because this feature of his ministry and church conformed to Jesus; he had no choice. In the interval between Paul and today, the history of Christianity has confirmed this conclusion as the church of Paul has expanded into the world and pursued every worldly method at its command. These include persecution, the decrees of emperors and other monarchs, the sword and the baptism of hapless infants to gain new recruits. I recognize that there are persons in the church of today who confine their recruiting method to that of Jesus. Only Jesus knows, but I have hope that they are sheep of his little flock. If they are, however, all features of their fellowship must conform in all points to that of Jesus, and they must be found preaching the same gospel. As to Paul, I find no reason even here to void my previous conclusions: Jesus is a stranger to Paul, and Paul is a stranger to Jesus.

**Feature No. 7**, worship, continues the disparities of all other features except No. 6. The church of today manifests a great variety in the manner and order of worship when they assemble, and also individually. A few congregations express much freedom in the details of this feature, but most do not and I have concluded that "varied" is the only appropriate key word. Paul's churches often sought a true freedom of expression under the leadership of the Spirit, but he often found it necessary to take charge and issue edicts as to how they were to comport themselves in worship. Those who responded found that both the order and manner of their worship were bound, so that we can only conclude that the worship of Paul's churches was bound to a certain order and manner of expression. Jesus is a stranger to Paul, and Paul is a stranger to Jesus.

**Feature No. 8**, relationship to the world, returns to the radical digression of the first two features. I have shown above, in Chapter IV, how the church of today is tightly bound to the modern world. Chapter V demonstrates the same for the church of Paul. But the Fellowship of Jesus' disciples is absolutely free from the shackles of this world as expressed in Chapter VI above. It is free, as only the Truth can make one free. The binding of the church and the world began with Paul insofar as the sparse records can determine it. Jesus is a stranger to Paul, and Paul is a stranger to Jesus.

**Feature No. 9**, life (attitude to life in this world), clearly establishes both the church of today and the church of Paul as having no positive relationship with the church of Jesus, which is the fellowship of his disciples. Here, at the very foundation of the gospel according to Jesus, Paul's gospel, Paul's churches and the churches of today show no acquaintance whatsoever with Jesus. They have utterly ignored The Great Principle of Jesus. They have failed utterly to realize its essential correlation with the Great Commandment to form the Great Correlate. Do we really need to say it again?

**Jesus is a stranger to Paul, and Paul is a stranger to Jesus!**

## CHAPTER VIII

# WHAT, THEN, SHALL WE DO?

The circumstances in both the church and the world, and with regard to the relationships of the church within the world as I have analyzed them in the preceding chapters, will raise this question in the hearts of the sheep of his Little Flock. What can we do?

Shortly before the end of his earthly experience, Jesus approached his beloved Jerusalem from the descent of the Mount of Olives and paused to behold the panorama seen, much as today, across the Kidron Valley. Then, overcome by emotion, he burst into tears and was heard to say:

Would that even today you knew the things that make for peace! But now they are hid from your eyes. For the days shall come upon you when your enemies shall cast up a bank about you and surround you, and hem you in on every side, and dash you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave one stone upon another in you because you did not know the time of your visitation (Luke 19:42-44).

Behold, how he loved them – that beautiful city of the deaf! Today, he loves the church no less, and weeps for it no less than for Jerusalem. The sheep of the Little Flock must not repeat the mistake of the early Christians, who permitted the unbelieving Jews to push them out of the synagogue, only to found a new but similar institution. It was inevitable that they be expelled from the synagogues, but the founding of the church was inexcusable. If the sheep follow the same pattern they will but persevere in establishing one more level of religious institutions in the world, while the church, like the historic synagogue, will continue in the darkness, without hope, because they have not listened to the Good Shepherd. Shall the sheep thus abandon the church to the darkness that envelops it, exactly as it shackles the synagogue? And what of the new level? Will it not also sink into twilight and error, as did the church?

No, the Lord requires a new and different battle plan. We can exist in the church much as a political party or a labor union in the nation – as a fellowship entity without capital, but dedicated to the task of calling both the church and the world to join the Little Flock of disciples, of those who have heard the Good Shepherd. I was for many years in the church. I found there many wonderful people, truly seeking to please their Lord, yet foundering because their shepherds have misled them. Therefore, I urge those sheep of the Little Flock that find themselves in some congregation to witness first to their friends in the next pew. When you are solitary, as I have been, one must not let the need for social acceptance by other members of the church dictate our witness. Set the words of Jesus before them, and pray for them. A few may respond and in any case you will have been faithful to our Lord. You will not be alone, for the Lord has promised to be with us to the end of the world!

We should not anticipate that the faith I have described herein will go unchallenged. The first challenger will most likely be the pastor! Jesus told his disciples that the days would come when they would be beaten and cast out of the synagogues, yet it is clear that he expected them nevertheless to prevail in laboring for the salvation of their sisters and brothers according to the flesh, the very ones who were to beat and expel them. So he would have us to labor within the churches, bearing testimony to the Truth, the love of the Father/hatred of life correlate, as we seek to spread the light of the Gospel of the Kingdom. We do this by calling our brothers and sisters in the churches to heed the pure Word of Jesus, and thus to join the Little Flock. The sole



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test of membership therein is the hearing of his voice.

There will be many times, perhaps every time, when this disrupts fellowship in the institution, a thing for which we should be prepared. But, if fellowship is to be ruptured, it should be done by those who refuse to hear the Good Shepherd, not by the sheep of the Little Flock. We can have true fellowship only with true fellow-sheep. To be put out of the church can be a heart-rending experience, just as it was for those early disciples who were put out of the synagogue. It will doubtless happen to many of us, but we must never evade the fray for fear of it. Better to be put out of the church than out of the Little Flock! I say this from personal experience! Do not fear to be called a troublemaker, for thus were Jesus and the early disciples maligned by the synagogue. Rejoice instead that you have been counted worthy to suffer abuse for the sake of the Name.

Think of the Little Flock as sheltered in a sheepfold atop a hill, such that a great leap is required to enter directly into it. And there is only one legitimate entry, the way guarded by the gatekeeper who is our Good Shepherd. This "great leap" was perfectly illustrated by the Prodigal Son in our Lord's parable, who with one resolution set his feet on the high path to his Father's house and redemption. Yet we must never cease holding to the glorious Word of Jesus our Lord; and when we are expelled from the church, as many have been and will be expelled, let it ever be because of our testimony to the Word.

Let me illustrate a probable cause of such expulsion, for I want everyone to be perfectly clear as to what I mean. A war has started, a patriotic war in which the country is in grave danger. The youth of your church are being drafted into the armed forces and trained to destroy the enemy. The pastor is strengthening the national resolve by delivering sermons designed to unite the church in the great patriotic cause. The church is blessing the young men and women as they go off to war, and praying for their victory and safe return. The Sunday School lessons inspire heroic fervor by telling how Saul slew his thousands, and David his ten thousands in the service of God. This cannot go unanswered, for Jesus said:

Love your enemies (Luke 6:27), and

Do not resist one who is evil (Mat. 5:39).

So the battle must first be joined inside the church before ever it is joined in the field! This is but one of many such issues, and we must not let them pass! To do so is to surrender our fellow church members to the chains of everlasting darkness, which is the love of life.

Suppose then that the worst happens (or is it the best?) – as a result of your calling others to heed the pure Word of Jesus, you are excluded from the church, just as the early Christians were excluded from the synagogue. What then shall you do? Let Jesus answer this question:

Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you and revile you, and cast out your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets (Luke 6:22,23).

You see, then, how this is a blessed fate almost better than death, one that should inspire one to leap for joy, knowing that the result is great rewards in heaven!

The sheep of the Little Flock need fellowship together; they need to meet together, in homes and other private places, without capital and without authoritarian administration, to study the Word together under the tutelage of our Lord. Let them be servants, disciples and friends together in the bonds of love, and let them labor for the salvation of the church and for their neighbors in the world. This is the supreme expression of loving your neighbor as yourself – to suffer adversity in order to maintain the purity of the Word for the sake of those who are being saved. But having been excluded from one church, let them avoid at all costs the creation of another one. Let them

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not buy or build edifices; let them not create officers and administrations; let them not cease to pray, individually, for the salvation of those who have excluded them, for by doing so, the excluders have also excluded the Lord.

The children of light, the sheep of the Little Flock, are called to perform a service for the Lord that is fraught with all spiritual hazards. Anyone can immediately see that there will be powerful temptations confronting them in their struggle for the soul of the church. Perhaps foremost of these is the temptation to proud arrogance. When those who hear the voice of Jesus can see so clearly the way of the cross while suffering the opposition of the churchmen and churchwomen about them, it will be easy to fall into a trap of "better-than-thou-ism." If they succumb, they will be far more perfidious than those who only want to maintain the status quo, and will end up in a far deeper darkness. There needs to be prayer without ceasing for a spirit of genuine humility that considers others better than oneself, that never exalts oneself above the person in the next pew. We can judge no one else; we can hardly judge ourselves! Because we know ourselves better than anyone else knows us, and better than we can know anyone else, let us be content with the judgment of introspection. If we are honest, we will seldom fail to see our great failures and these will certainly humble us and dash any tendency to put on the "I know I have been saved, and you haven't." attitude. We have faith that we are being saved, but we do not and cannot know it; if we did know it, then we could have no faith, because that kind of faith, and that kind of knowledge, are mutually exclusive by definition.

I have only expressed my feelings here, and I do not want anyone to look to me for the Lord's will in any case. After a lifetime in the hard way, I can counsel and comfort, but only Jesus can tell us what to do. None of us can find this except through the words of Jesus! Every individual in every case, no matter the circumstances, must seek their light in him who is the light of the world, through abiding in the words of Jesus of Nazareth. In some cases he may want you, out of love for your neighbor, to remain in or to join a congregation that goes by the name of church. If you are already there when his word takes possession of you, he may want you to remain for so long as the church will accept you. Or, in another case, circumstances may be such as to leave only one course of action: get out of that congregation as soon as you possibly can! If you are outside the church and not a member of any congregation when he possessed you, he may want you to join one and there seek to manifest his living Word. In other circumstances, he may want you to remain separate from any congregation and seek fellowship in small groups outside any church. Only one thing is certain: he always wants each one of us to continue in the Living Word of Jesus of Nazareth, which is our salvation.

Now in all honesty, I myself cannot imagine any set of circumstances that would result in his wanting any one of his sheep to join in with a crowd of goats who are following the strange shepherd. When I recall those long ago years when I struggled to maintain a bond with the church, I often think how much grief I might have avoided had I just come out from among them as soon as I recognized the problem. Nevertheless I did witness and the thought that perhaps even one of God's children may have found their hope in the hard way as a result of that witness greatly consoles me. I cannot say that he would have had me do any other thing. Today, I witness from outside. Jesus led me out, and I cannot imagine his ever leading me back in. But he is with me. His rod and his staff, they comfort me.

## CHAPTER IX

# THE IDEAL FELLOWSHIP

The Fellowship of the Little Flock aspires to an elusive goal. We are unlikely ever to achieve it in this world, but the effort should never cease. It will surely help if we know where we are going, and can image a vision of what we should be while we trust in the Love of the Father to forgive us our grave failures and to inspire us to press on. The preceding discussion forms a base for the clarification of one man's vision of how the Lord would have the sheep of the Little Flock comport themselves in fellowship during their pilgrimages through the world.

## Devotion to the Word

Of first importance is an unwavering devotion to his Word, the Holy Words uttered by Jesus and recorded for us in the Gospels. These words are unique in the world in that they constitute a living body of Truth, and it is in them that Jesus is personified. In them he and the Holy Spirit and the Father continues to be with us in the world, and through our devotion to them, we continue to be with him. When, together, we truly listen to him, the darkness is dispersed and all dissension evaporates. We enter into Christ when we enter into his Word; he enters into us when we receive his Word into our minds and hearts. It is through his Word that we realize all Truth, and comprehend his presence in our midst. Judas (not Iscariot) once asked Jesus, "Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?" Then Jesus replied:

If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him (John 14:23)

Isn't that simple? If we love him we keep his Word, then he lives with us and makes his home with us – not only the Son, but also the Father! Like a tree, this True Tree of Life constantly bears fruit that nourishes and sustains the spirit of life that is in us, and we want for nothing. That is, provided we are gathered around it and under its branches, feeding daily, constantly, on its glorious fruit, the Words of Life. We need no leader other than the Word; we need no teacher other than the Word; we need no spirit other than the Holy Spirit that mediates the Word to us, for the Spirit and the Word are one. Remember what he said?

. . . the words that I have spoken to you are Spirit and life. (John 6:63)

They are indeed words of Life. They are beautiful Words; they are wonderful Words. At Jacob's well, in Samaria, Jesus told the Samaritan woman:

Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again; but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life. (John 4:13,14)

So it is that his Holy Words, like a spring of water inside us, wells up to produce Truth such that we need never thirst again.

I am focusing on the Holy Word, the utterances of Jesus, because they are the essence of our fellowship in him, and with one another. In the pure light of his Word we cannot help but be

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unified in the bonds of love. We cannot fail to see the Way when he enlightens it for us, nor can we fail to love and labor for one another. Neither can we fail in the divine calling, the proclamation of that same Word in the world. Why seek we authority, administrations, commissions and like things that characterize the churches in the world, when He has provided them all in abundance, through the ministrations of his Holy Word? Why seek we other shepherds, when we have the Good Shepherd? Why seek we teachers to confuse us about the Bible, when he is the perfect teacher of all Truth? Why seek we other fathers in the church, when we have one Holy Father, even the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ? So let us hear him! So let us gather round him and drink up the water that wells up into everlasting life. You need go no further than the gospels of your New Testament for that!

### A Portrait from History

The failure – the utter failure in Christendom -- of the confessors of the Name to listen to the words enunciated by Jesus of Nazareth has led to such terrible tragedy that there is no way for mere words to express the horror of our deficient heritage. A picture comes into my mind that illustrates it, a picture from the history of the church; and perhaps, if we had been there, might have sufficed to drive us in quest of Truth. But I doubt it, since it did not have that effect upon many others.

It is the morning of October 27, 1553. The setting is the road from Geneva, Switzerland, to the hill of Champel, just south of Geneva. Two men are riding in a carriage, escorted by men of arms. One of the two is William Farel, an associate of John Calvin, the famed reformer in the administration of Geneva. The other is Michael Servetus, bound and condemned to death for heresy by the Geneva Small Council, at the urging and prosecution of Calvin. His "crimes" were two-fold: Unitarianism (denial of the Trinity) and rejection of infant baptism. As they progressed on the way to the execution, Farel besought the condemned man to confess his crime and seek divine mercy. Servetus denied his guilt and besought God to pardon his accusers. Arriving at their destination, he was fastened to a stake by iron chains, all the while pleading for mercy, and burned to death. It is reported that he shrieked with agony when the flames reached his face, and died after half an hour of burning. (The Reformation, by Will Durant, Simon and Schuster, 1957, p 484).

John Calvin and William Farel, to whom the whole Bible is the literal word of God – and this was the fruit of it! It is not that Calvin was carried away with the fanaticism of a moment of religious rage. No, this was an act he had determined beforehand. As early as February 1546, he had written to Farel: "Servetus has just sent me a long volume of his ravings. If I consent he will come here but I will not give my word, for should he come, if my authority is of any avail, I will not suffer him to get out alive." (Durant, p. 481) Writing later, in defense of the murder of Servetus, he said, "God himself has explicitly instructed us to kill heretics, to smite with the sword any city that abandons the worship of the true faith revealed by Him." (Durant, p. 485) He sustained his position by appeal to the decrees of the Old Testament, from Deuteronomy, Exodus, and Leviticus. What a pity he did not listen to Jesus, who had earlier prophesied this terrible action when he said to his disciples:

The time will come when those who kill you think they do God service (John 16:2).

What a pity he did not listen to Jesus so as to hear him say:

Let both grow together, (Matthew. 13:30) and

Do not resist one who is evil (Matthew. 5:39).

And these men, John Calvin and William Farel, were very successful in founding, at Geneva, their vision of the "ideal fellowship," and were among the founders of the Reformed and Presbyterian churches in Europe and America. With founders like these, is it any wonder that Christendom

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has gone astray? This is a superlative example of that which results when religious men approach the Holy Faith in the conviction that the entire Bible is the literal Word of God. They become so enamored of their "Truth" that there is no room in them for the Words of Jesus, which are true and literal words of God.

### Objections

Many do not share my confidence in the Words of Jesus as recorded in the Four Gospels of the New Testament, and as set before you here as the source, the power, and the inspiration of the "ideal fellowship" of disciples. Among them are those who object on the basis of language. This is an honest and reasonable objection, and I quite understand it, having entertained it myself some long years past. It is argued that Jesus enunciated his words in the Aramaic language of First Century Palestine. There is no record that they were ever written in their original language, and the evidence indicates that they must have been preserved only in an oral tradition drawn from the memories of the first disciples. Not until some thirty-five years later when Mark's Gospel was written do we see them recorded, and our oldest copies of the recordings are in ancient koine Greek, not in Aramaic, and these are copies of the originals. The earliest copies date from about the third century. There are numerous ancient copies, and many of them differ, and they are not uniform. To understand how easily errors can creep in, we need only note that all the ancient manuscripts were laboriously copied by hand, by men with the same propensities to make mistakes as we yet possess.

Then, today, most of us learn of his Word by exposure to English versions heavily influenced by that of King James, which was translated not from the Greek, but from a Latin translation of the Greek manuscripts. So how can we possibly place any confidence in text that has passed through so extensive a gauntlet of abuse by frail humans intent on making it relevant to their needs? First in Aramaic, then through perhaps a generation of verbal transmission before being recorded in Aramaic, and later translated into Greek, or perhaps directly translated into Greek from the oral tradition and recorded. Then after hundreds of years, translated again from non-uniform copies of copies of copies, etc., into Latin, then more generations into English and other languages! What assurance can we have, after two thousand years, that the language of the Four Gospels represents in any way the very words of Jesus? And besides all this, there are many other gospels and written records concerning Jesus and his utterances in additions to the four, and when we look at them, we find contradictions, additions, omissions, and radical deviations from the language of the New Testament, in addition to much uniformity.

English, Latin, or Greek words cannot of course be the very words of Jesus if those were Aramaic. But it is not in that sense that I speak of his very words. The Greek *logos*, translated into English as "word," also means "idea." What are words, anyway, except the expression of ideas? So when I speak of "the very words of Jesus" I mean "the very ideas of Jesus" in whatever language, because the idea is what is essential. The form of the word they may take is immaterial. I also mean to distinguish the utterances of the man, Jesus, from the balance of the Bible, which, though written by inspired men, is not the infallible Word of God on par with the utterances of Jesus.

### Assurance of the Word

So the ultimate question is, "What assurance do we have that the words we have in the oldest Greek manuscripts, and hence in English translations that are as exact as possible, represent the very ideas of Jesus?" We have much assurance, and I enumerate some of it here.

- (1) Jesus provided for the protection of his Word through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. I have related above how the ministry of the Holy Spirit was to focus on the Word so as to assure that it would be accurately reported in the world. Jesus stated that the Holy Spirit was to come and teach the first disciples all things, bringing to their remembrance all that

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he had said to them. Therefore, the accuracy of the message was not to depend wholly on the recollections of fallible men, but was entrusted to the protection of the Holy Spirit. We should acknowledge also that Jesus must certainly have repeated his message to his disciples many times, until it was drilled into their memories, as was the custom of teachers of that age. We should conclude from this that the ministry of the Eternal Spirit did not terminate with the inspiration of the first disciples, but that it has continued unceasing to the present, so that the Word has been protected throughout the centuries as it has been transcribed and translated from one language to another. The switch from one language of men to another would be no problem to the Holy Spirit, who made his capabilities in this field known on the Day of Pentecost, when men from many nations heard the disciples, inspired by the Spirit, speaking in their various languages (Acts 2:5-13). The disciples were all Galileans, apparently speaking in their native Aramaic, yet men from many nations understood them in their native tongue.

- (2) Jesus assured us of the perpetuation of his Word, until heaven and earth pass away. I have repeatedly emphasized his prophecy that his Word, unlike heaven and earth, would not pass away. The very fact that it remains before us to this day is therefore great assurance that Jesus knew whereof he spoke. The Holy Spirit continues to protect it with the result that it continues to be preserved. We have assurance that it will stand long after heaven and earth have fallen. It is quite impressive to read the words of ancient philosophers, and there are a few whose words have lasted to this day. But did the philosophers announce to their contemporaries that their words were to survive heaven and earth, as did Jesus? Among all so-called philosophers, I think Jesus knew and announced assuredly that his Word would stand forever. It still stands. This alone is very impressive.
- (3) We depend upon not one gospel, but four. So Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, provided a plurality of witnesses and they tell substantially the same story. There are many differences, especially between the fourth Gospel and the synoptics, yet they are not contradictions, but rather augment, complete, and reinforce one another. The fact that they are not uniform is in itself a source of assurance; it tells us that we are not the victims of a literary scam according to which someone copied uniform versions of an early text, or later modified them to insure conformity. The differences are precisely those one should expect from earnest men laboring independently but under the impress of the Holy Spirit to accurately record, transmit, and translate the very words of Jesus.

The Fourth Gospel may seem a problem to some because it differs greatly from the others, not only in the text, but in the literary flavor of the entire book. It includes very many sayings completely omitted by the others, and omits most of their content. The sequences of events differ so much that clearly there was no effort at coordination. There is no nativity story in the Fourth Gospel; there is no wedding at Cana in Matthew, Mark, or Luke. Indeed, the author of the Fourth Gospel seems not to have been much concerned with the telling of a sequential story, but rather with recording many utterances of Jesus, each set in an appropriate place in his earthly sojourn. Yet after all this is acknowledged, we must state that the message is thoroughly consistent with that of the other Gospels. We must also acknowledge that neither does the order of major events differ in John. The Baptist, for example, appears at the beginning, the Crucifixion at the end of the story. The order of the Holy Week events is exactly the same in all four gospels. The textual differences are vividly illustrated by reference to the hatred-of-life sayings. In the Fourth Gospel and at one point in Luke, hatred is precisely the focus:

He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life (John 12:25).

If anyone comes to me and does not hate . . . even his own life, he cannot be my

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disciple (Luke 14:26).

But in Matthew and Mark, and elsewhere in Luke, the focus is on saving, finding, or losing:

He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it.  
(Matthew 10:39)

For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake  
and the gospel's will save it. (Mark 8:35).

For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my  
sake, he will save it (Luke 9:224).

Yet all the utterances are perfectly consistent, each augmenting, enforcing, and expanding the others. The major differences, I believe, are easily explained when we pause to acknowledge that the Fourth Gospel was probably written last, perhaps thirty years after the others, sometime around the turn of the First Century. Let us assume at this point that the writer was not John, but the beloved disciple (whom I identify as Lazarus whom Jesus raised from the dead), who would have been maybe ninety years old (but probably not much more than seventy). He would almost certainly have read Matthew, Mark, Luke and the non-canonical gospels that had been written by that time. No doubt, as one of the last survivors of the original small group of disciples that included the apostles, many documents were submitted to him for his evaluation and judgment as to authenticity. Like many older people, he may not have been able to recall what happened "yesterday," yet could have recalled those amazing words and unforgettable events of his youth with great clarity. Let us not forget also that the Holy Spirit was there prompting his memory, as Jesus had promised. Then, having read the others, he would have realized that there were many important statements by Jesus, and events in his life, that the others had not, for whatever reason, included. He would not have been concerned with chronology or with event sequence, but only with providing a record of many important things that had been omitted.

I propose therefore that he was not concerned with setting down an orderly account of the life of Jesus, but only with providing what he observed to be lacking in the accounts already written. Therefore he would not have included what the others had already set forth so satisfactorily, but only what they had not set forth, with a minimum of repetition to provide some degree of correspondence. His great age and long experience with the Lord in the company of the Holy Spirit, together with the fact that he had once died and been resurrected by Jesus, could also explain why the tenor of his writing differs somewhat from the others. He also may have been influenced by decades of combating the numerous heresies that were budding in the late First Century, and if so, would have written his Gospel with a view to combating them. This would also have influenced the quality of the writing. Therefore I see that the delayed writing of the Fourth Gospel, together with the extended experience of the beloved disciple and his own resurrection, explains its distinctive content and quality. In this case, we have the further assurance that the total record is substantially complete; the aged disciple would have been careful to check that everything of importance was at last included.

Much of this is, of course, speculation on my part; yet I believe it is entirely consistent with the scarcity of known facts, and, given the consistency of all four of the canonical gospels, is much more probable than any explanation that seeks to focus on supposed contradictions or alterations of the story of Jesus, or that seek to demonstrate a fictional quality to the writings. Rather, we have on these grounds a firm basis for assurance that the integrity of his words and has been maintained with great accuracy.

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I have mentioned that there were many other records of the words and deeds of Jesus in addition to the four canonical gospels. Having read many of them, I feel that they were justifiably excluded from the canon. This does not mean that there is no benefit to be gained from their study, for there is much in them that parallels or reinforces themes of the canonical gospels. To give some examples, in The Apocryphon of James, we have the following utterance of Jesus, which is perfectly consistent with his teaching of the hatred of life, and gives additional insight:

I say to you, none of those who are afraid of death will be saved. For the Kingdom of God belongs to those who have put themselves to death. (4:15-20)

The Gospel of the Ebionites has Jesus saying:

I have come to do away with sacrifices, and if ye cease not from sacrificing, the wrath of God will not cease from you (Saying 6).

This statement strongly reinforces the conclusions drawn from reading Jesus' statements regarding sacrifices as set forth in the canon. But there are also contradictions between the canonical and the extra canonical gospels, so that we must be careful how we apply them.

(4) The utterances of Jesus in the four canonical gospels do not contain errors of scientific naiveté, as do some of the others. For example, in The Dialogue of the Savior, we read:

He said to them, "He who sustains the earth is he who sustains the heaven. When a word comes forth from the Greatness, it will go to him who sustains the heavens and the earth. For the earth does not move; if it moved, it would fall, but (it does not fall) in order that the first word might not be annulled, namely, he is the one who established the world, and he dwelt in it, and he received incense from it." For everything that does not move I will bring to you, all ye sons of men, for you are from that place (133:1-15).

Whoever first said or wrote this (it certainly wasn't Jesus) had a view of the world in the same genre with that of the lady who held to the ancient belief that the world was supported on the back of a turtle. When challenged by the question, "On what, then, does the turtle rest?" she responded, "Don't mess with me, Buster. Its turtles all the way down!" The utterances of Jesus from the four gospels contain no such foolishness. They are, to the contrary, perfectly consistent with the functioning of the natural world as we are only now, two thousand years later, beginning to comprehend it through the discoveries of the scientists. This is indeed remarkable, and gives us ample grounds for confidence in the four gospels, even by itself. Thus, we have assurance that the words uttered by Jesus and recorded in the canon were uttered by one who was, and is, knowledgeable concerning the operation of the physical universe. Would we not expect the creator to know how it functions?

The churchmen, on the other hand, for hundreds of years, in deafness to the Savior, continued to believe the earth motionless. Witness the accusations made against Galileo, in the Seventeenth Century, who had begun to teach that the earth revolved around the Sun, not vice versa as the churchmen taught. When arrested, charged with heresy and hailed before the authorities, he is said to have recanted (of the doctrine that the earth moves), but nevertheless said to himself, under his breath, "But it does move!" So, when you stop to think about it, you have to marvel that there was a man, two thousand years ago, who gave extensive teachings over a period of years, teachings that were later recorded for us, which nevertheless contain no evidence of ignorance on the part of the speaker concerning the nature of the physical universe, which we are only



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now beginning to fathom.

(5) The message the words convey, in English or any other language, is most peculiar. It is such a message as no perfidious man, nor any sincerely mistaken disciple, could have conceived or transmitted. It violates all that men by nature honor, by calling for a commitment to the hatred of life, and by making our eternal salvation directly dependent on this. The character of the message is such that it would never have been invented by any of us, conditioned as we are by evolutionary forces to put the preservation and protection, yea, the love of life foremost in everything. I have been a student of theology for fifty years. Through all those years of study, through seminary, through church, through the reading of scores of volumes on theology, I cannot recall ever having been exposed through any of it to this idea of Jesus. Indeed, so inundated was I by exposure to works of scholarship that it is a wonder that I was ever able to hear Jesus' simple message. When finally I began to hear him, it was so contrary to what I had been taught that I required many more years of exposure to the pure Word of Jesus before rejoicing in the light. May the Father forgive me for being such a sluggard!

(6) Furthermore, to suppose that such a message as that of Jesus with its consistency and singular nature, as we now have it in the four gospels, could have resulted from centuries of transcription and translation errors is so improbable as to be ridiculous.

(7) Neither is it reasonable to suppose that this message, consistent throughout the gospels, could have been built up progressively by "myth makers" who were motivated to create an image of Jesus and his teachings that was relevant to their particular circumstances, as certain "scholars" are inclined to do. I understand this scholarly approach. I appreciate some of the fruits of it. I can also see that it has arisen through the failure of the scholars to realize the unitary theme of the love of God/hatred of life correlate that joins the gospels in a consistent whole to the person of the historical Jesus. Neither have I found, in their published works, any evidence that they have even attempted such a unification of the gospel messages with the person of Jesus. Since they have not perceived this emphasis in all the gospels, it is not surprising to find them wandering through The Lost Gospel of Q and other contrived documents in an effort to explain the origins of the gospel's presentation of Jesus.

(8) The message is profound -- yes, profoundly simple, clear and consistent. It is not such a message as would result from centuries of adulteration through faulty translation, transmission and myth making. When we look at it, we can know what it says, without a doubt. There is no confused rendering of linguistic error. It presents a simple, consistent, and profound view of life. I have an acquaintance, an author, who objected to my confidence in "the very words of Jesus" based upon his particular experience in this field. He was once president of a corporation that had been sold to French interests. He sent them an acquisition proposal that he had written in English. They then sent the proposal to their "first rate" translation department for translation into French and then decided not to make the acquisition, and so informed him, but he, thinking to make the acquisition himself, sent them a request for the return of his original proposal. They had lost it; but seeking to accommodate him, they sent their French version back to the translation department for translation back into English and provided that. "When I read it," he said, "I didn't have the foggiest idea what the paper said."

This is precisely what we should expect to happen to text that has passed through many sequences of translation and transcription. But with the very words of Jesus this is not the case. There is no fogginess there. No! Rather, every statement is clear, even brutally clear, sharp, concise and consistent. This is powerful testimony to the authenticity of the ideas -- the very ideas, and hence the very words, of Jesus as we have

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received them. This is most assuring of the authenticity of his words. That they have passed through twenty centuries of verbal and written transmission, transcription, and translation, and yet remain clear as a bell is miraculous. Only the Holy Spirit could have accomplished it! It is a miracle! But those of us who truly believe in the bodily resurrection of Jesus should not be surprised; If God could resurrect his body, can he not also resurrect his words? Indeed, his words are his body.

(9) The message accurately prophesies the salient features of the history of Christendom, though written at the beginning of that history. The continuing paucity of genuine faith is accurately reflected in his plaintive question, Yet shall the Son of Man find faith on the earth when he comes? The persecution of the few, and the apostasy of the many, conforms with his prophetic statement, Those who kill you will think they do God service. (John 16:2) The execution of Michael Servetus by John Calvin's Geneva, to which I have referred above, is a sterling example of the latter. Jesus accurately described the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple some forty years beforehand. Of course, I am aware that many have placed the dating of the gospels after the fall of Jerusalem, precisely because they are unwilling to concede that Jesus could have foreseen the event so clearly. If this is true, we are left to conclude that the writers fudged Jesus' prophecies after the fact. Considering all the reasons I have already given for confidence in our record of Jesus' words and ideas, there is no reasonable basis for this conclusion, either. Those writers were such men as were readily laying down their lives for the Gospel. They were committed to the ideas of Jesus, including the hatred of life. It is totally unreasonable of us to suppose that they would have been the least dishonest in recording their recollections of the utterances of the Lord. They were guarding the message with their very lives -- why would they foul it up with lies?

Besides all this we have a certain fact to deal with. When Jesus prophesied the fall of Jerusalem, he was careful to forewarn the disciples to flee beforehand. I believe this was to preserve their testimony to the Word in the world, for Jesus was depending on them, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to sow it around the globe. Here is the utterance.

So, when you see the desolating sacrilege spoken of by the prophet, Daniel, standing in the holy place, let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains; let him who is on the housetop not go down to take what is in his house; and let him who is in the field not turn back to take his mantle. And alas for those who are with child and for those who give suck in those days! Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a sabbath. For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. And if those days had not been shortened, no human being would be saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened (Matthew 24:15-22).

This "desolating sacrilege" is the presence of Gentiles in the Holy of Holies within the temple. It was fulfilled when the Romans destroyed the city and everything in it. This is the same event Jesus also prophesied in Luke:

And when he drew near and saw the city he wept over it, saying, Would that even today you knew the things that make for peace! But now they are hid from your eyes. For the days shall come upon you, when your enemies will cast up a bank about you and surround you and hem you in on every side, and dash you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave on stone upon another in you; because you did not know the time of your visitation. (Luke 19:41-44)

So what actually happened? When the Romans under Titus advanced on the city, the loyal Jews retreated within its walls -- not just because it was a good defensive position,

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but also thinking that God would surely not permit the Romans to enter. So they went into the city, and to their doom. There was one exception: those Jews who were also disciples of Jesus, having heard his Word, fled precisely as he had instructed them. The historical record indicates not only that they fled the Romans, but also that they took up new residence in the city of Pella, in Perea, as I have earlier indicated (Eusebius). Yet the people who fled to Pella were also loyal Jews; they also had early in life been instilled with confidence that Jerusalem would stand forever as the city of the people of God. They had continued to visit the temple and to revere the Holy of Holies. But they fled, and their relatives branded them as traitors. This strange flight can best be understood by accepting that the prophecies of Jesus, including the entire context containing the instruction to flee, was authentic in every detail, and that they were but following the instructions of their Lord.

Therefore I conclude, for these reasons and many others, that the words of Jesus as we have them are substantially accurate and complete. They have not been confused through translation, or transcription, or telling and retelling. Given all the circumstances and facts, this is the only sensible, reasonable, logical conclusion. When we dare to expose ourselves to them, that is, to his very words, the Truth in its immaculate purity stands before us and we cannot reasonably deny it. I have invested several pages on this theme because it is this Holy Word that is the heart of the "ideal fellowship" that I envision and pursue with all my heart. They constitute the living body of Jesus in our midst; they are the power and the glory of the Holy Spirit standing before us, and by our devotion to him we secure the fellowship of the Little Flock. Apart from him, apart from his living Word, there is no Little Flock.

It is not possible to realize the fellowship of the Little Flock while holding to the traditional concepts of the church. There can be no bevy of priests, pastors, shepherds, bishops, overseers, leaders, and teachers. There is only one of all these, and that one is all of them! There can be no unity of the flock, no bonding administrative structures, no chains of command from one human being to another, no infallible "ex cathedra" proclamations to guide and inspire us, but only the precious presence of the Lord through the indwelling Holy Word of the Father, as uttered by Jesus. All of this, absolutely all of it, if it is to be realized in experience, must come from placing him at the absolute center and excluding all else. But when we place his Living Word at the center, when we look only to him for guidance, and when we do it together, there is the fellowship of the Little Flock. What is the option? Look around you. Look out at the vast multiplicity of organizations and personality cults that go by the name of church and you see it, loud and clear.