



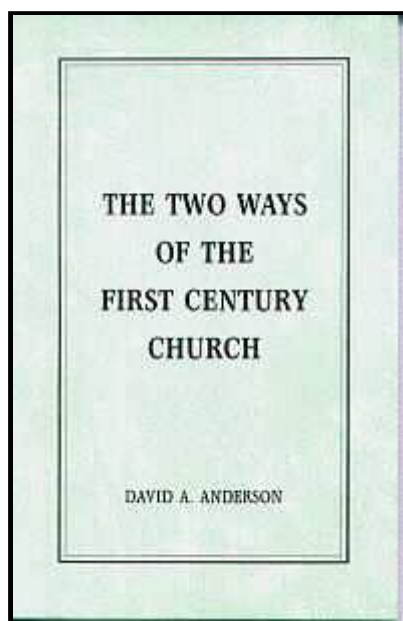
[Return to the Home Page](#)

Center for the Advancement of First Century Christianity

THE TWO WAYS OF THE FIRST CENTURY CHURCH

by: DAVID A. ANDERSON

**A study in the book of Acts of the conflict between law and grace-
as seen in the conflict between James, the Lord's brother, and Paul, the apostle
and as seen in the church today**



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To the memory of Verda Barga, as wonderful a Christian example as God ever put on this earth. Her untimely departure from this world was a shock and a loss to many. But, the impact of her kindness and helpfulness lives on.

[Table of contents](#)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- [Introduction](#)
- [Chapter 1 Grace And "The Other Gospel"](#)
- [Chapter 2 The Start Of It All](#)
- [Chapter 3 Growth Unprecedented](#)
- [Chapter 4 Trouble Within The Jerusalem Church](#)
- [Chapter 5 Enter Paul And The Gentiles](#)
- [Chapter 6 Enter, James The Brother Of Jesus](#)
- [Chapter 7 Deliverance To The Nations](#)
- [Chapter 8 Showdown In JerusalemI"](#)
- [Chapter 9 Law Gives Way To Grace"](#)
- [Chapter 10 Paul Returns To Jerusalem"](#)
- [Chapter 11 The Final Outcome](#)
- [Chapter 12 And The Church Goes On](#)
- [Appendix](#)

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I would not want to offend any of them by presuming to rank their helpfulness. The most casual comment given to me by any one of them may well prove as important as the hours of labor spent to bring the book to completion. I rest in the knowledge that Jesus Christ is the head of the church, called His body, and directs its functioning.

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over the past four years, the books she furnished and the hospitality that she and her husband, Gene, so graciously furnished for the month it took us to go over the second draft were a blessing I will always cherish.

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To Jesus Christ I acknowledge supremacy- even over any conflict that this book may cause. I am only a member in the body of Christ, He is the Head. I am thrilled that He loves me!

INTRODUCTION

I

The purpose of this book is to show a different picture of the book of Acts than is commonly perceived. This picture did not arise out of a desire to write a book. It arose out of many high expectations and then hurtful disappointments while pursuing Christian causes. If it succeeds in capturing your attention, it will be due to the thrill of God's Word rather than to any exceptional literary skills on my part.

I have no "air tight" answer to the critic who may ask, "who does he think he is to presume to write on such a topic?" other than the worldly weak answer that I am a child of God. The only other answer that I could give is that the subject needs to be addressed, and it does not appear that anyone has adequately addressed it for the best part of two thousand years. Conflict is not the easiest subject to graciously address without diminishing its seriousness.

II

The kernel of truth that developed into this book was not discovered by an academic searching for new or novel ground in which to dig. It arose out of a practical search to discover, from within the word of God, how to solve disputes within the Christian community. Like many others, conflict among Christians has been all too common in my life. I was prepared for conflict with the "ungodly". Conflict within the "church" was another matter entirely. At times I was surprised. At times I was overwhelmed. But conflict seems to be among the standard fare of Christians. Fortunately, joy, love, peace, miracles and blessings go along with conflict and serve to moderate its bitterness.

The Apostle Paul advises Timothy to "endure hardness as a good soldier" (II Tim. 2:3). This hardness certainly includes evil, trouble, conflict. Conflict is unpleasant to consider. Nevertheless, I think you will agree that understanding and resolving conflict in the church is very needful. A "good soldier" needs to learn all he can about the conflict in which he engages, if he is to effectively "endure hardness".

I have tried to be fair and reasonable in presenting the evidence for conflict within the church of the first century. But, you may find that this book is not an easy book to read because of where the evidence leads. Ten years ago I began to suspect that James, the brother of Jesus, was in conflict with the apostle Paul. At times I asked myself, "Who cares? What difference does it make?" I struggled with the answers to these questions until it dawned on me that the very liberty of the Christian was at stake. I concluded that there could be no more critical an

issue for the Christian today than understanding the threat, ever present, to our liberty in Christ Jesus. That threat comes both from the direction of law and the direction of license. This book deals primarily with the threat to grace from the direction of law. A study of the similar threat from the direction of license would be more focused on Paul's epistles to the Corinthian church and is outside the scope of this work.

I used to think that the threat to the Christian's liberty was primarily from those outside the church. I now think it comes primarily from within the church. My personal experiences in going through life lead me to this conclusion and this investigation into the first century church points in that direction as well. The threat, the conflict, that this book deals with is over the issue of law versus grace within the church.

Solving my conflicts with others in the "church" by relegating all my opponents to the category of "ungodly" would not have been honest or fair. And, at times when I tried to do so, the solution did not satisfy. Christians want to love one another, all evidence to the contrary notwithstanding. It is the preeminent characteristic of the gift that God gave in making us "Christian". And yet, conflict remains. To me, it is the ultimate practical problem of Christianity. I fully believe that conflict within the Christian church shows the urgent need for each Christian to more fully understand the Word of God. Some have held the opposite position over the centuries and felt that the study of God's Word should be done only by "authorities". Such a position has not done service to the church of grace. Only the truth sets men and women free. The more truth the individual learns, the more freedom he possesses. Ignorance of the truth keeps us in bondage.

III

I do not believe that conflict in the church will be solved through philosophy, through psychology, or through any worldly wisdom. It certainly will not be solved by the "unbeliever". His interest is in a different direction than Christianity. Most importantly, conflict within the church will not be solved by ignoring it or yielding to "strong arm" tactics of "authorities" in the church simply to avoid it. Jesus Christ must be at the center of the solution. Not even James, Jesus half-brother, will do. Jesus Christ only is our Lord.

Acts is clearly a focal point of Christianity and Jesus Christ is the focal point of Acts. The perception we have of the church in Acts becomes our model for how we should behave today. If we misunderstand Acts, our understanding of how to live today suffers. Also, Acts is fundamental to our understanding of Paul's epistles in that it shows the setting in which Paul wrote. Misunderstanding Acts causes us to misunderstand Paul.

My involvement with Acts began when I remembered the conflict in the early church at Antioch (Acts 15:1). Some came down from Jerusalem and told the believers in Antioch that they could not be saved unless they were circumcised. I thought, "certainly there cannot be a bigger conflict in the church today than this conflict in Acts 15:1." The "believers" from Jerusalem were telling the "believers" in Antioch that some of them were not saved at all because they were not circumcised.

I concluded that if I could find in Acts how the problem in Antioch was solved, I would have a key to solving conflict in the church today. In studying the record of the Council in Jerusalem (Acts 15), the surface solution, compromise, did not satisfy at all. It seemed to only gloss over the problem and in fact presented a greater problem. Namely, how did James get to the position of being the head of the Jerusalem church, 15 years after the start of the church age, so that he prevailed in the Council with his 'sentence'?" I had always thought of Peter when I thought of Jerusalem. Seeing James, the brother of Jesus, as being superior to Peter in the Council, presented a major problem.

For the past ten years I have been trying to answer the question, "How did James become the

leader of the Jerusalem Church?" and its implications. This book is the result. My intention is not only to report what I have found but also to solicit help in pursuing the subject further in the hope that conflicts in the church today will yield to the discoveries forthcoming from that pursuit.

IV

My desire is to promote God's wisdom, the Word of God, rather than man's wisdom. Many books could be recommended for further study, many wonderful books. But, it seems that as many pertinent books are lost or hidden as are found and so I feel safe only in recognizing and recommending God's Word for future study. In other words, I feel much more comfortable assuming the role of a journalist who is not compelled to reveal his sources than I do assuming the role of a scholar who tries his best to examine and report all the sources he can possibly find. The scholar will know how to proceed further academically. The layman will hopefully appreciate the lack of footnotes and references outside the Bible.

There are striking contrasts in Acts which are not commonly perceived as contrasts at all. If we do not expect to see contrasts, we sometimes do not see them at all when we study the Bible. On the other hand, when we discover one surprising contrast, we begin to look for others to confirm our first observation.

Since first suspecting that James was presented in Acts as a contrast to Paul rather than a compliment, much data has been uncovered to confirm my suspicions. If you feel that I have overstated my case at certain points, please bear with me. The subject is far to critical to be dismissed because of any inadequacy on my part in addressing it or my imperfect knowledge about it. By the time you finish reading this book I think you will agree that the evidence presented shows that there were "two ways" within "the way" of the first century church, Paul's way and James' way.

In searching the literature to see if others had written on the subject of conflict in Acts, I was disappointed. The closest I could come to finding any one that pursued the idea of conflict within Acts was the "Tubingen school" in Germany in the nineteenth century. But, they saw the conflict existing between Peter and Paul, a conflict that I do not see at all in Acts. Peter did great things as did Paul. They were clearly on the same side, although Peter was caught in the middle, at times, in the conflict between Paul and James.

The "Tubingen school" held that "the impossibility of the miraculous is an axiom of historical criticism." In other words, the impact of the many miracles, signs and wonders, recorded in Acts, were not considered. Obviously, if the miraculous is disallowed, the whole book of Acts is discredited. Therefore, the conflict they endeavored to develop could not address the conflict between James and Paul. The power of God, inherent in the resurrection of Jesus Christ is central to that conflict. The conflict they endeavored to develop dismissed the most vital element of Acts.

One well known scholar stated, "All the mistakes which have been made by New Testament Criticism have converged in Acts as in a focal point." I came to Acts to solve a practical problem and found Acts to be a focal point of the Christian church. Scholars have evidently known it was a focal point all along. They have either defended Acts or attacked it, depending on their motive. I am hopeful that the defenders will see the conflict between James and Paul and will make their defense of God's Word stronger as a result. As for the attackers of God's Word, hopefully they will change their mind after reading this book and conclude that the Bible is God's Word after all. They simply must not know Jesus Christ well enough yet or they would love Him.

V

It seems to me that there are two basic branches of Christianity today. Both branches teach salvation and profess to believe the Bible and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. But, how they perceive Christianity tends in opposite directions. There are two ways for the Christian to go after salvation, toward Jesus Christ and away from Him. I call these branches "Paul's Church" and "James' Church" because the contrasts between them are much the same as similar contrasts seen in Acts and Paul's epistles.

I have no doubt that many are "saved" in both branches of Christianity today. I also have no doubt that there are impostors in both branches. But, separating one branch from the other today is far more difficult than in the first century because two thousand years have gone by and doctrinal elements of both branches seem to exist in every Christian organization and denomination today. I hope to present the sides of the conflict in the first century church without claiming that any one organization or denomination in the church today is superior to any other. Hopefully, this reinvestigation of Acts will help them all. My interest is to promote the church of Jesus Christ rather than a subgroup of that church.

The postulate of this book is that there were two churches within the Christian church of the first century. And, they went in two different directions. These are "The Two Ways of the First Century Church". One is the Church of Bondage, the other the Church of Liberty. The former is the church of the bondwoman, the church of the law of sin and death, the church of the world, the church of the old nature, the church of the self-righteous, the church of the walk by the flesh. The other is the church of the freewoman, the church of grace, the church of the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus, the church of the body of Christ, the church seated in the heavenlies, the church of the new nature, the church of Christ-righteousness, and the church of the walk by the spirit. The one heads up in James, the other in Paul. The Bondage Church emphasizes the power of the group, the Liberty Church the power of the individual as directed by the spirit of God.

VI

Although the King James Version is the main version used throughout this work, there are two translations of the bible that I refer to in the text that may be unfamiliar to the reader. I call them to your attention, not because I believe them to be superior to other translations of the bible, but because they have come to be my first recourse when confronting a difficult verse in the King James.

The first is "Concordant Literal New Testament", compiled by A. E. Knoch and published first in 1926 by Concordant Publishing Concern, 15570 West Knochaven Road, Canyon Country, CA 91351. It differs from other translations in that the compiler set as his rule to use only one English word for a Greek word, rather than allowing more than one, so that the English reader would know by differing English words that different Greek words were being translated. I have found Knoch's translations very helpful in correcting misconceptions in my understanding of many verses in the King James Version.

The second is "A New Translation of The Bible Containing the Old and New Testaments" translated by James Moffatt and published first in 1922 by Harper and Row, Publishers, Inc., 10 East 53rd Street, New York, N.Y. 10022. It differs from the King James in that Moffatt used other greek sources beyond the Stephens text from which the King James came. In his introduction he points out that the Stephen's text was based on only about one percent of the Greek evidence available by Moffatt's time.

In using Moffatt's translation to discuss scriptures with others who use the N.I.V., I have not yet been convinced to set aside Moffatt in favor of the newer translation. The two seem very similar to me in their advantage to the student who uses the King James Version as his first source. I am not a Greek or Hebrew scholar and therefore do not have access to ancient manuscripts except through English translations and concordances. Many translations have

proved a benefit to me over the years, as have Greek interlinears and English concordances.

However, Jesus' words, "But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established," (Matt. 18:16) seem to apply to my difficulty in studying God's Word. If the King James Version is hard for me to hear, I resort to Moffatt and Knoch. If one or both render the verse differently than the King James Version, one of the renderings usually helps my hearing. I consider all three translations to be dear friends and although friends sometimes differ, the differences always lead to growth.

Since I do not pretend to have thoroughly mastered the subject matter of conflict in Acts, I feel quite free to cite evidence on the subject, however incomplete, and can not hope to present conclusive proof on each and every point and every scripture. To do so is quite beyond me. I would get lost in analysis and never get to synthesis. In my view, synthesis is the objective of analysis. I leave it to others in the body of Christ to dig further and deeper where I have only scratched the surface. By so doing, they can help correct, and expand the picture, admittedly imperfect, that I have painted.

My method (due probably to my training in engineering as opposed to the pure sciences) aims at substance, sometimes at the expense of form. Having identified the problem (the conflict between law and grace), I have tried to clarify and define it as best I can. Speculation over possible solutions is a necessary next step (science uses the word "postulate" rather than "speculate" but I find little difference). I have then tried to focus on the main elements of the solution and proceed in developing them. Hopefully, the outcome will be functional, even if not elegant. My goal is practical rather than academic. If this work lacks the elegance that some might desire, it is because I feel a personal urgency to address the issue that precludes any delay. In the contest between brevity and completeness I claim both as my friends and am not ashamed to be eclectic in my presentation. I am after opening a new debate rather than concluding an old one.

I recognize my shortcomings and the reality of life that we only know and see in part until "that which is perfect is come" (I Cor. 13:12). I bow to God's Truth and hope that all who read what follows will heed the statement, "criticism in what we say, think, and feel, should be the balance of what we bow to versus what we feel doubtful of." Debate is wonderful when the love of God prevails in it. As Paul says in I Timothy 3:16, "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness!" When debate degenerates into controversy, the joy of discovery turns to anger. If we are to learn more of God's Word, debate must be encouraged and anger turned to diligent study. Debate seems, among many people, to be a long lost art. Christians cannot afford to let God's Truth remain undiscovered for fear of controversy. We must rediscover the fine art of debate so that we can prove "what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Rom. 12:2). Science has little problem with "Prove it!" Theology sometimes does.

VI

One of the chronic problems, to me at least, in reading most non-fiction books is that little, if anything is included about the author. Stories of fiction can be enjoyed without reference to the author. However, since the content of a non-fiction book can only be fully appreciated and carried further in the light of the author's motives, his background and his experiences, most non-fiction books would do well, I believe, to include more about the author. Even the publishers of the King James Version usually fail to include the preface of "the translators to the reader". Such an omission seems a disservice to the reader. Certainly the words selected by the translators of the King James Version to include in their preface are worthy to include along with the work they wrought. The reader can then choose whether or not to read them. To remedy the problem of "the invisible author" I have included some information about myself as an appendix.

VII

This is a book about compromise. Not the sort of compromise wherein both sides of a dispute agree to the decision of an arbitrator, nor the kind of compromise that involves an insignificant issue- for example, one wants red paint for the building, the other wants blue, so they compromise and paint the building purple. The compromise with which this book deals is a compromise of integrity, a compromise of truth, a compromise between the forces of good and the forces of evil.

In the course of working with a Christian organization twenty years ago, the logical position was advanced that we should "yield on insignificant issues". Of course most would agree that one should not waste his time defending a position that has no significance in the first place. The statement was readily accepted. However, over time, I began to notice that the intent behind promoting such a statement was to eliminate disagreement within the group on any issue- significant or insignificant. With the passing of time, I began to feel increasing pressure placed on the individual to relinquish his own judgement as to what was significant in favor of the official position of the organization.

As this pressure was accelerated, I noticed also that the issues on which the individual was to yield became increasingly significant. "Follow the leader, right or wrong", was one of those issues presented. Such a position may have a place in a military organization, but certainly not in the church! Our leader is Jesus Christ and His instruction is very clear. We are to follow Him, and He is never wrong, even if we are. Yielding to any other "authority" on matters of truth and conviction can only lead to disaster. And, the major conflicts in the church seem always to center around which man or group of men should be followed. Our faith should not stand in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. The power of God that is manifested about us should be the standard by which we measure "how we are doing", not the size or "authorities" of the group or groups to which we belong. When we finally realize that Jesus Christ is the only "authority" in the world today, our response to council, advice, instruction and "orders" will be to evaluate if the person giving them is doing so as an "agent" of Jesus Christ or as one who presumes to replace Him.

The methods of our adversary, the devil, are subtle. One method is to move the discussion from the truth to a half truth, promote the half truth by group pressure, and establish it within the group by driving out the dissenting voices. The same method is seen in the book of Acts. And, since it is a method of the world, it is not surprising that it has been used over and over ever since the book of Acts was written. It seems that whenever a group is formed, correction from within becomes increasingly difficult as the group ages and grows in size. As one pastor said to me, "the seeds of death are in the start of every organization." In order to promote itself, the group searches out and promotes concepts that make it exclusive and that exclusivity defines membership. The image of the group takes on an aura of holiness that individuals would never take on themselves apart from the organization. The group appears to be more vital than the individual members and the members are deceived. God's church seems to become more divided as new sects, denominations, cults, or whatever the new groups may be called, are formed. "Endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph.4:3) is made more difficult by over zealous defenders and attackers of such groups.

Since the group as a whole is much more visible than a single dissenting voice, it is not surprising that the groups' collective position has been advanced down through history. Many, if not most, of the dissenting voices within Christianity are not found in history books or historical records. But, God knows who they are and as the Amplified Bible says in Psalm 92:12, "The uncompromisingly righteous shall flourish like the palm tree- be long-lived, stately, upright and fruitful; he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon- majestic, stable, durable and incorruptible."

The dissenting voices may not always be merely "trouble makers". Many times their dissent

arises from error within the group meeting resistance from the truth of God's Word. When such conflict is resolved by driving out the dissenting voices, the group may well continue, but the Bible is no longer at the center of the group. It is moved to the side because of the group's perception that it causes conflict. Christianity suffers as a result.

VIII

As a follower of Jesus Christ, the apostle Paul is an excellent example of the uncompromisingly righteous. Moffatt's translation of I Corinthians 15:8 says that he was "an abortion of an apostle". And so he was. He was "born out of due season." Such a description of himself reveals much about Paul's focus. He tells us he had no right to be an apostle. In fact, he tells us that he killed Christians before he met up with Jesus Christ. Whatever love of God he possessed, before his conversion, was certainly misdirected.

But, after that meeting, he never recognized any man as his superior, or his subordinate. He did try to accommodate the position of the Jerusalem church for a time, but ultimately found that he could not do so without compromising his defense of grace at the same time. Paul was the servant of Jesus Christ and was faithful to that service. He was not perfect. But, he was faithful.

Because the book of Acts has survived as well as Paul's epistles, we know much about him that we do not know about the other apostles. He is an excellent example of the uncompromisingly righteous. If we examine all there is to know about Paul in Acts and all he wrote in his epistles, we will have a detailed picture on how to serve the Lord Jesus Christ.

James, the brother of Jesus, is the antithesis of Paul. By the middle of the book of Acts, he is clearly the head of the Jerusalem church. Many say that he was an apostle- and yet we will see that he was not. Many think he must be a fine example to follow because a book of the bible was written by him. That the book of James was written by James, the brother of Jesus, I have no doubt. I have serious reservations as to whether God told James what to write. I think the words of James are his alone and not God's. If the book of James is viewed as a compliment to Paul's epistles when it is studied, much squeezing is required and some statements won't squeeze at all. If it is viewed as a contrast to Paul's epistles, then much is revealed.

How the book of James became part of the New Testament has a surprising answer. We know from the Word of God that "Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (II Pet. 1:21). But, who decided which books would be part of the New Testament and when? That is a question that can only be answered by the historical data available to us and great caution must be used in searching it out since the very groups that throughout the centuries have driven out the dissenting voices have been the custodians of the data.

To find out who decided to include the book of James in the New Testament and when it was included, I read a number of books on the canon, or "official list", of Scripture. All of them talked about "the early Fathers" as being the oldest authorities- even though they spanned a period from 200 A.D. to 400 A.D.. Their comments are hardly "early" since they were hundreds of years after the fact.

Then there was finally a man in the second century. But, the authors I read all called him "the Heretic Marcion" as though heretic was his first name. My encyclopedia had quite a bit to say about Marcion, but the words that jumped out from all the rest were, "It may be said that in the second century only one Christian, Marcion, took the trouble to understand Paul; but it must be added that he misunderstood him." I was transfixed. The author was saying that during the second century, only Marcion endeavored to search out Paul's epistles. And yet, the third and fourth century "early church fathers" all said Marcion was a heretic. I had to find out more about this "heretic".

I found that Marcion was the first to fix a New Testament canon- which he did in about 140

A.D. (the Marcionite church rivaled the Roman Catholic church until about the sixth century A.D.). His canon included only Paul's writings and Luke's writings because Luke traveled with Paul. The Gospel of Luke, the book of Acts, and Paul's epistles are therefore the oldest collection of books to be considered "New Testament"- and that not until seventy or more years after those books were written.

The study of Marcion is interesting because invariably the authors take sides when writing about him. Some show their disdain by saying that Paul would never have such a dominating position in the New Testament if it had not been for Marcion. Others say he was a heretic in the same sense as Luther- because Luther expunged from the Bible the apocryphal books. It should be noted also, that Luther did not accept the book of James to the same degree as he accepted Paul's writings. He called James' epistle "the epistle of straw" and forbade its use in the University of Wittenberg toward the end of his life. Undoubtedly this was because James said that faith without works is dead, whereas Paul said faith without works is alive- "The just shall live by faith".

All that is known about Marcion comes from his enemies. The earliest, and most extensive, is Tertullian-and he didn't write until about 200 A.D.! In his work, he calls Paul "Marcion's apostle" and "the heretic's apostle". So much for Tertullian.

IX

One fundamental question to keep in mind when reading the early church fathers or others regarding the history of Christianity is, "Was christianity, or was it not, a reformed Judaism?" The answer to this question will determine where the author is headed with his work.

Many will say that Christianity was a reformed Judaism and that it started in Jerusalem and spread out from there as waves move across the sea. The picture that these people will develop is one of deliverance of the Gentiles by Jesus Christ and then the addition to them of almost all the baggage of Judaism. To those who answer yes to the question, "Was Christianity a reformed Judaism?", Paul's epistles are incomprehensible. Trying to harmonize contrasts while thinking they are not contrasts is wearisome and unprofitable work.

When Jesus Christ said that he came that we might have life and that we might have it more abundantly (Jn. 10:10), He was not saying that He came that we could have more money, as some preach. Luke 12:15 makes that very clear. Jesus Christ says in that verse, "a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." It is clear that in John 10:10 Jesus is not saying that He came merely to allow man to have more of the same that he had before. He is talking about a new relationship with God. A new life. A life that transcends mere abundance. He brought in a new covenant based on a better promise. This covenant was a walk with Christ, not a walk with Israel- in any of it's forms or traditions. To the Christian, "old things are passed away, behold all things are become new" (II Cor. 5:17). The new covenant resulted in a New Testament and the Old Testament became a contrast to it- a "shadow of things to come" (Col. 2:17).

The book of Acts clearly shows that Christianity was not a reformed Judaism. It shows that the spreading of the gospel happened in spite of the bondage exercised by the Jerusalem church. In one way or another, that bondage church has come down to this day. It is the church of the visible, the church of the tangible, the money church. It is the church of rules and regulations, the church of pecking order, of boards of elders and boards of deacons. The church of thousand member congregations and million dollar mortgages. It is the church that has a form of godliness but denies the power thereof.

In contrast, the church of the body of Christ is the secret church. It is not composed of buildings and organizations and man made devices to control peoples lives. Paul writes toward

the end of his ministry that all Asia had forsaken him. But, God did not forsake him and the glorious gospel of grace has prevailed ever since Paul made it known. But, it prevails in the hearts and lives of those who are spiritually minded. For, the carnal mind cannot see or comprehend that prevailing church. To the world, it is a secret church. God grant that the secret church be filled to overflowing as new members find it not a secret anymore! I eagerly await your response to "The Two Ways Of The First Century Church".



Chapter 1 Grace And "The Other Gospel"



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