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THE TWO WAYS OF THE FIRST CENTURY CHURCH

CHAPTER 9

LAW GIVES WAY TO GRACE

"Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace. For we through the spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love."

Galatians 5:4-6

Deliverance presumes something to be delivered from. Paul asks the believers in Rome to pray with him, "that I may be delivered from them that do not believe in Judea; and that my service which I have for Jerusalem may be accepted of the saints." (Rom.15:31). He asks for the prayers of the believers in Thessalonica "that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men." (II Thess.3:2). Paul tells Timothy, "I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion." (II Tim.4:17).

In II Corinthians 11:23-28 Paul says, in contrasting himself to others in Corinth who called themselves ministers of Christ, "I am more, in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep, In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Besides those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches."

Paul continues in II Cor. 12 to contrast his "thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me", (namely all the "messengers" that afflicted him above with beatings, robbery, stoning, etc.) with the glory that was his as well. He implies (verse 9) that if suffering must be endured in order manifest the power of Christ, then he would even glory in his infirmities, reproaches, necessities, persecutions and distresses (verse 10).

Certainly Paul paid a price far dearer than most for the privilege of ministering God's Word. He was delivered from all of his afflictions, but law did not easily give way to grace. Many books have been written about Paul, many wonderful books. They tell of his travel, of his work, of the persecution against him and are wonderful in their insight of a man, who, as the servant of Jesus Christ, was without peer in the first century, and probably without peer in any century since then.

However, in these books there are few hints of Paul's persecution coming, in no small part, from within the church. James, the brother of Jesus, does not appear to be suspected of being a culprit, even though he held the chief position in the church in Jerusalem for most, if not all, of the time that Paul was being persecuted. Certainly the backdrop of James living in Jerusalem since the start of the church age and as the head of the Jerusalem church for perhaps twenty years or more, without any evidence given by Luke of being persecuted, is central to the picture of Paul's ministry among the Gentiles and the persecution he

suffered.

In II Cor. 11, before the section quoted above, Paul clearly identifies his antagonists in Corinth as "false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ." (verse 13). He further identifies them as Hebrews (verse 22) and, facetiously, as "ministers of Christ" (verse 23). From what we have seen regarding James, a man of whom Jesus Christ said, "the world cannot hate you", we cannot help but think that the men hindering the work of Paul in Corinth were representatives of James.

Although the whole subject of who persecuted Paul pleads for further study, it is safe to say that law did not readily give way to grace, either from within the Jerusalem church or from the rest of Judaism. It is true that Paul also faced persecution from the Gentile world. But that threat does not seem to be nearly as wide spread as from the Jews. As with the Jews, the threat from the Gentiles seems to be more from within the church than without. Pulling the Gentile Christians back from license to grace had to be every bit as much of a challenge as pulling Jewish and Gentile Christians back from law to grace. But, the glory of life in the grace of God was well worth the effort to ward off the enemy from both directions. Satan was not without "messengers" in both the camp of law and the camp of license.

The Choice of the Christian

The Jerusalem Council took place about nineteen years after the events recorded in Acts one and two. The works of Jesus Christ were amply demonstrated by that time and many eye witnesses to His works and words remained alive. Jesus' declaration in Matthew 28:18, after He was raised from the dead, that "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" had been thoroughly demonstrated to the world by the signs, miracles, and wonders performed during those twenty years and by an ever increasing number of Christians in the world.

We have seen from Acts 15:1 that men came down to Antioch from Judea, about this time, and taught, "Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved." The results of that teaching were cataclysmic. The teaching was a frontal assault on grace and caused all out war. Paul and Barnabas met the attack boldly and without hesitation and the result was "no small dissension and disputation." (Acts 15:2). Jesus Christ had clearly "poured out" the new birth, the power from on high, the holy spirit, to the Gentiles, and the war was engaged to determine whether the Gentiles would be able to continue in the grace of God or be brought under the bondage of law.

The people had to decide whether they would serve Jesus Christ as Lord directly or whether they would agree to serve him only through an intermediary- James, the brother of Jesus. Peter, Paul, Barnabas, and others take the former position. James, the men who came down to Antioch, those who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees which believed (Acts 15:5), and others, took the latter position.

Of them all, only Paul saw with clarity the absolute impossibility of a compromise. He says after the Council in Jerusalem, "we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue in you." (Gal. 2:5). He declares, "they who seemed to be somewhat in conference added nothing to me." (Gal. 2:6). He even took with him Titus, as a test case, and Paul's victory was demonstrated by Titus returning to Antioch uncircumcised. (Gal. 2:3) Paul's work and his writings in the following twenty years would show his stand for grace. There could be no compromise.

The choice was clear. Continue in the grace of God (Acts 13:43) or fall from grace (Gal. 5:4). The issue was clear, the choice was clear, the cast of characters was clear. And, overruling in the conflict was the One to whom was given "All authority in heaven and in earth", Jesus Christ. He had already given His verdict. "No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon." (Luke 16:13).

This was no mere contest. It was not a game being played with rules and referees and spectators enjoying an afternoon's entertainment. It was war! And, in war there is only one rule, survival. Had Jesus Christ not overruled and enforced His rulings throughout the years since the church began, there would be no survivors in the church. But, He did overrule as we shall see in the second half of Acts and His

"overruling" is as glorious as His "outpouring". It should be pointed out, before proceeding, that the word "mammon" in Luke 16:13 means money, or wealth. Jesus Christ said, "you cannot serve God and money!" Further, "mammon" means all that money or wealth stands for: prestige, earthly power, recognition, man's favor, man's control over other men, man's pride. In short, every arrogant misuse of money is implied in the word "mammon". We love God or we love money. The love of money is the root of all evil (I Tim. 6:10). The love of God is the root of all good (Acts 17:28). If we love God it is only because we come to realize that He first loved us (Rom. 5:5-8, I John 4:19). We either love God and live in, and by, all that is implied in God's love, or we love money and live in, and by, all that is implied by money's love. We are servants of whom we obey (Rom. 6:16).

The war that we see so clearly engaged in Acts 15:1,2 had been going on for some time. If we look back over the ground we have already covered, we see evidence of this war as early as Acts 5:1, with the attempted money deception of Ananias and Sapphira. This was not a war between the unbeliever and the believer. It was not the war referred to by Peter in Acts 4:25-27 where he points out that the kings of the earth stood up and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against His Christ. Those people could do nothing, as we have seen. The apostles were more popular than the rulers at that time.

The war we are attempting to show was in the church. It was a war of subversion, a war of intrigue, a war of subtlety. It was a war going on between factions inside the church. It may have been fueled and funded by the enemies of Christ from without, but the principals in the conflict were all inside the church. Divide and conquer was the strategy and grace versus law was the issue.

The Word Circumcision in Acts

After Ananias and Sapphira, we see "murmurings" over money in Acts 6:1. We then see a member of the church, Stephen, assassinated in Acts 7. The account of Stephen's speech introduces the word "circumcision" (Acts 7:8) to the narrative of Acts. It is a very revealing word. A study of who used this word and who did not use it is instructive, as is the sequence of its uses in Acts.

In the Old Testament the word circumcision, and its derivatives, is used thirty times. About half of those uses are in Genesis and describe the instruction given to Abraham. Outside of Genesis, it is used only sixteen times throughout the entire Old Testament.

In the Gospels, the word circumcision is used only by Luke and John, twice in Luke and twice in John. In Luke they refer to Jesus and John the Baptist being circumcised. In John, Jesus contrasts circumcision on the sabbath with His healing on the sabbath.

Paul uses the word "circumcision" forty times in His epistles. That is more times than the word is used in the entire Old Testament. The word "circumcision" is missing from Hebrews, as well as the rest of the New Testament except for Acts. It occurs nine times in Acts, with the first occurrence being in Stephen's speech. In that occurrence, it is used as a literal fact. God gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision.

The second occurrence is in Acts 10:45 at the event of Cornelius and his family speaking in tongues. It clearly refers to the six men that came with Peter and they were undoubtedly tied to the Jerusalem church. They were "of the circumcision" (Acts 10:45). This usage is not referring to the literal act but to a group or party within the Christian church. And, the context makes it clear that Luke is not using it as synonymous with "Jew". He uses the word to define six men who were undoubtedly well known and respected within the Jerusalem church.

The third occurrence is in Acts 11:2 and again clearly refers to those in the Jerusalem church that contended with Peter for having gone into the house of a Gentile. "They that were of the circumcision contended with him, saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them." (Acts 11:2,3). The fact that Peter "rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them" (verse 4) makes it clear that Peter is not talking to Jews in general but to Christian Jews in the church in Jerusalem. Since all the believers in the Jerusalem church were Jews, the phrase "they that were of the circumcision" must be intended by Luke to mean either everyone in the Jerusalem church or a

group within the church that was called "the circumcision party", the same group that Peter's "six witnesses" belonged to. In any event, the phrase does not refer to "unsaved" Jews.

Acts 15:1 is its forth usage and we see it is a command given by those who came from the Jerusalem church. They state not only the necessity of the act of circumcision but include the keeping of the whole law of Moses as well. The men that taught this doctrine came from James and were undoubtedly members of the Jerusalem church.

In Acts 15:5, the word "circumcision" is used by "certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed" and is linked by them to the keeping of the law of Moses. In Acts 15:24 it is used in the letter sent from the Jerusalem church and is again linked with the keeping of the law of Moses. In Acts 16:3, Paul has Timothy circumcised "because of the Jews which were in those quarters" (and presumably only because of them).

The final usage of "circumcision" in the book of Acts is in Acts 21:21. In this usage, James is stating his concern about Paul's reputation in Jerusalem and again the word circumcise is linked to keeping the law. James points out how many Jews there are in Jerusalem which believe and that these believers are all zealous for the law and are informed that Paul was teaching the Jews of the dispersion to forsake Moses by saying, "they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs." It is evident that these believers are among those in Jerusalem that try to kill Paul.

From the usages of "circumcision" in Acts, we can conclude that, except for references to the physical act, the word is used to refer to people in the Jerusalem church and not to Jews in general. When it is used in Acts to describe the physical act, it is used by members of the Jerusalem church, not by those outside the church. James, the brother of Jesus, was the leader of this "circumcision party". (Gal. 2:12). It seems clear that this church felt superior to the Gentile Christians and insisted that the Gentiles be brought into the church not on an equal footing but rather as inferiors who acknowledged their inferiority to the Jews by circumcision and the keeping of the laws of Moses. If the Gentiles did so, they would be accountable not only to the Jerusalem church but to the Temple authority as well. Such a condition was clearly unacceptable to Paul (and I think unacceptable to Jesus Christ).

If the fact that James gives his sentence at the Council in Jerusalem is not sufficient to some to prove that James is the head of the circumcision party which controlled the Jerusalem church, Galatians 2:12 should be. In that verse, we see that Peter removed himself from the Gentiles when representatives from James came to Antioch and the reason is given clearly, "fearing them which were of the circumcision."

In Acts 15:5 we see that certain of the Pharisees which believed asserted that it was needful to circumcise the Gentiles and command them to keep the law of Moses. It is perfectly clear that James was the head of the Jerusalem church and that by the time of the Council this church insisted that the Gentiles must be circumcised and be brought under the law of Moses. It is the Bondage Church and James, the brother of Jesus, is in control of that church. In nineteen years, James had somehow usurped the authority of the twelve apostles and Peter was afraid of him. We see in Galatians 2:13, that even Barnabas removed himself from the Gentiles when the representatives from James came to Antioch.

The Choice Between Law and Grace

At the end of Acts 15, we see that Barnabas and Paul severed their longstanding relationship over the issue of John Mark's behavior. The split was unquestionably serious and resulted from differences that at least Paul thought were important. The war within the church raged on as the James' faction contended with Paul and evidently, even Barnabas and Peter thought that Paul had gone too far in his uncompromising stand for grace. It seems clear that John Mark had to be perceived by Paul as a threat to grace and Paul stood his ground in spite of losing his good friend Barnabas. Barnabas and John Mark went back to Cyprus. Paul took Silas and went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches.

The question that Israel faced was how to be proper servants of an unseen master. They had to reconcile the fulfillment, in Jesus Christ, of the promise made to Abraham with more than a thousand years of

tradition built up between the promise and its fulfillment. Tradition runs deep and is not easily overthrown by new revelation. The "new clothes" of Christianity were uncomfortable to wear. The new "weapons of our warfare" were awesome to use, and the friction between that which was comfortable and that which was effective was bound to generate heat.

As with today, the people in the first twenty years of the church age had to first realize that in Christ we are a new creation. The immediate result was thrill, wonder, awe, expectation. But, as with a new born baby, the wonder and inquisitiveness generated by a whole new world, gave way to "the terrible two's". They in turn gave way to adolescence and finally adulthood.

Those children of Israel who accepted the reproof and instruction of their Father grew into fine men of God. But, those who did not obey and learn, but rather thought they knew more, held on to and developed the traditions of the past. Their behavior was designed to frustrate the grace of their Father- not honor Him. They wanted people to follow and be obedient to them, not to Jesus Christ.

The Council of Jerusalem brought both groups of children together and Paul readily saw the difference. Within a few years of the Council, Paul wrote the book of Galatians and contrasted these two groups. He calls them the children of the bondwoman and the children of the freewoman. His exhortation to the believer is: "Stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made you free, and be not entangled with the yoke of bondage." (Gal. 5:1).

Shortly after writing Galatians, Paul wrote the two books of Thessalonians and the book of Hebrews. All four of these epistles point to the preeminence of Jesus Christ and to the fact that all power (the word power in Matthew 28:18 is the greek word *exousia*, meaning privilege or authority) was indeed given unto Him, both in heaven and in earth. What the law could not do, Jesus Christ did. By His authority man could be transformed, something that the law could never do.

Paul's interest was in bringing Jew and Gentile alike under the authority of Jesus Christ- and in so doing, transforming them so they could walk in newness of life. The children of the bondwoman were interested in bringing Jew and Gentile alike under their own authority. The first nineteen years of the church age was a time of great deliverance and joy in Israel, as well as among the dispersion, mixed with a challenge to the authority of Jesus Christ. The second twenty years starts with that challenge and ends with the challenger, Israel, being destroyed as a nation.

At the end of Israel's forty years of probation, for two years and seven months, the Roman legions, under Vespasian and his son Titus, dominated and decimated Israel. During that time, Josephus tells us that Israel killed more of it's own while the Roman army watched, than did the Roman army itself. Civil war was rampant as well as war with Rome.

The Roman Empire, and it's authority, fared little better than Israel during the decade of the 60's, especially after 62 A.D. when Acts ends with Paul awaiting his hearing before Nero. Rome burned. Ten of Rome's fourteen districts were either totally destroyed or severely damaged. Civil war and revolt threatened throughout the empire. But, Paul's epistles were finished at that time also, and they brilliantly explain and establish the unchallengable authority of Jesus Christ. The grace of God was fully proclaimed and law had given way to grace. The world would continue to see the church of law, but the Christian would be continually pulled toward the church of Grace. In many respects, the church of Grace has been the "Hidden Church" ever since that time. But, the power in that "Hidden Church" has been fully exercised and evident to all who will look for it.

Paul's Ministry Answers to Peter's

The account of Paul's ministry after the Jerusalem Council begins at the end of Acts 15. The first fifteen chapters of Acts show the rise of Christianity throughout the Jewish nation, beginning in Jerusalem, and it's spread among them throughout the nations of the world. The first half of Acts also shows us that eager acceptance of God's Word is turned to a reluctant sharing of the "good news" with the Gentiles of the world. In fifteen years time, the status of Peter changes from being overwhelmingly popular in Israel to

being thrown in jail because Herod sees that such an act would be pleasing to the Jews. It should be noted that Herod Agrippa I (the Herod who had Peter imprisoned and the apostle James killed in Acts 12) was brought up with and was good friends with the Emperor Claudius. One wonders whether the killing of James the apostle and the imprisonment of Peter was pleasing to Claudius as well as to Agrippa I and the Jews in Jerusalem.

There is evidence to show that Claudius did have a concern over the effect of Christianity on the Roman Empire, particularly the "trouble" between the law and grace factions within the Jewish communities of the empire. Claudius' edict expelling all Jews from Rome in 49 A.D. caused Aquilla and Pricilla to move from Rome to Corinth (Acts 18:2). Early historians attribute the problem among the Jews in Rome (Christians and Jews were not seen as separate entities at the time), that caused their expulsion, to someone named "Chrestus". The word most probably referred to Jesus Christ.

It seems more than coincidental that the edict was issued the same year as the problem revealed in Acts 15 that occurred in Syrian Antioch (the third largest city in the Roman Empire behind Rome and Alexandria). Perhaps the representatives from James went to Rome as well as to Antioch (and elsewhere) and said that salvation was impossible without first being circumcised. Examination of events in Alexandria for the year 49 A.D. may also shed light on the extensiveness of the conflict between Paul and James. It should be a fruitful area for further study. Also, an inscription has been found in Nazareth from Claudius, warning of exceptionally severe penalties for grave robbing. This inscription seems to date from the same period as the expulsion edict and some historians imply that Claudius was trying to put down rumors of the resurrection of Jesus Christ by his order. If so, Christianity had come to the attention of the Roman Emperor by at least 49 A.D..

In any event, what starts as a hint of trouble in the first years of the church in Jerusalem, arrives full blown, at least in Antioch, about nineteen years later. By that time, James, the brother of Jesus, had succeeded in usurping the authority and popularity of Peter. But, the first nineteen years of the church age also includes Jesus Christ meeting up with Paul on the road to Damascus and Paul proceeds to spread the gospel of grace to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews of the dispersion. By the time of the Jerusalem Council, recorded in Acts 15, Paul had been ministering for about fourteen years.

If possible, the feats done at the hand of Paul among the Gentiles are even greater than the feats done among the children of Israel at the hand of Peter. (There is no evidence of any feats done by James, the brother of Jesus.) For example, Peter's imprisonment in Jerusalem (Acts 12) results in the death of the guards. Paul's imprisonment (Acts 16) results in the keeper of the prison being saved, as well as his entire house. Peter had to leave town in the middle of the night. Paul received an apology from the magistrates.

Peter's raising Tabitha from the dead (Acts 9) is followed by Paul's raising Eutychus from the dead (Acts 20) and perhaps the believers in Lystra raising Paul from the dead (Acts 14:19-20). In the second event, Paul had been teaching all evening and about midnight, Eutychus fell asleep and fell out of the third floor window. The event did not result in Eutychus being condemned because he had fallen asleep, but resulted in Paul's continuing to teach until the break of day. The summary (Acts 20:12) is a refreshing understatement. "They brought the young man alive, and were not a little comforted."

The Missionary Journey of Paul and Silas

The demonstration of the authority of Jesus Christ by Peter is continued by Paul. After the Jerusalem council and Paul's return to Antioch, he chose Silas to go with him (after his altercation with Barnabas) and they are recommended by the brethren in Antioch to the grace of God. The statement, "being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God" (Acts 15:40) seems to imply that Barnabas and Mark were not given the same cordial send-off. Acts 16 through 20 tell of the spreading of God's Word throughout the nations in the following seven years. Jesus Christ continued to "pour out" holy spirit, and that "pouring out" was glorious indeed.

In Acts 16:5, we see that churches in Derbe, Lystra, Iconium and the cities in that area were "established in the faith, and increased in number daily." In Acts 17:4, we see that a "great multitude" of devout

Greeks in Thessalonica believed and many of the "chief women" as well.

Just how extensively and effectively the spreading of the gospel of grace was carried out is shown by the statement of the Jews that resisted Paul. They said to the rulers of the city of Thessalonica, "These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also." (Acts 17:6). We are prone, in today's "modern age", to think of people that lived two thousand years ago as approaching the level of Darwin's "half-hairy ape", perhaps walking, but surely stupid and uninformed and incapable of today's "brilliance". Our conditioning in such an atmosphere of man's arrogance causes us to think that the accusation in Thessalonica was exaggerated and spoken by illiterate men to equally illiterate rulers. Nothing could be further from the truth. Paul was a "known man" even before his conversion and Acts clearly shows the extensiveness of his work in spreading Christianity throughout the world.

When the unbelieving Jews said, "these that have turned the world upside down are come hither also", there is every reason to expect that they knew what they were talking about. The Roman Empire was not a collection of isolated, insignificant cities that had no communication with each other. The opposite was the case, and there is every reason to expect that Paul's accusers knew exactly what they were saying. No clearer description of the immensity of the work wrought by Jesus Christ could be given than to say that the world was being turned upside down (or more properly, right side up). The "pouring out" of holy spirit was changing the face of the world.

In Berea, many people believed (Acts 17:12). In Athens "certain men" believed (Acts 17:34). In Corinth, Paul spent over a year and a half teaching the gospel and the Lord said to Paul, "Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city." (Acts 18:9,10). Paul was informed that the Lord had many people in the city of Corinth before he had reason to know it by experience. Jesus Christ was indeed Paul's Lord and kept him informed and encouraged in spite of the visible evidence that would tend toward discouragement.

In Ephesus, Caesarea, Antioch, Galatia and Phrygia, Paul taught and strengthened all the disciples (Acts 18:19-23). After he returned to Ephesus and spent two years and three months there, we are told, "all they that dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks." (Acts 19:10). Again we see a huge picture of the impact of Christianity on the world. As one Roman historian commented, despite the attacks on Christianity, it was finally the city of Rome and the Roman Empire that capitulated to the church rather than the other way around. That capitulation did not happen over night, but it did happen. Despite what one may think about the theology of the various churches of the second and third centuries, none of them denied the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. And, nations also accepted the resurrection of Jesus Christ as fact.

We are also told that God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul so that when "from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, the diseases departed from them and the evil spirits went out of them" (Acts 19:12). It was a glorious time of deliverance in Ephesus, reminiscent of the similar scene in Jerusalem perhaps twenty five years prior where "they were healed every one (Acts 5:16). In the former event, the people in Jerusalem sought out Peter's shadow. In the latter event, clothing from Paul was delivered to the people in Ephesus. The result was the same, they were healed!

As the outpouring of holy spirit in Jerusalem can not be exaggerated, so also the outpouring of holy spirit in Ephesus can not be exaggerated. We are told that "many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. So mightily grew the word of God and PREVAILED!" (Acts 19:19-20). To think of the Word of God prevailing in Ephesus is awesome to consider. The implications of such a statement could fill a book all by themselves.

In Acts 19:21 we are told that Paul determined to go to Jerusalem and determined also that he would go to Rome after Jerusalem. In Acts 20, we see Paul go to Macedonia, Philippi, Troas (where Eutychus was raised from the dead), Assos, Mitylene, Chios, Samos, Trogylium and Miletus. In Miletus, Paul sent for the elders of the church in Ephesus and the instructions he gave them reveal his love and his concern for

their welfare. He warns them to be on guard for those who were bound to arise and speak perverse things in order to draw away disciples to themselves. He commends them to God and to the word of His grace (Acts 20:32) and tells them he will not be seen of them again (Acts 20:25) and departs with an emotional and heartfelt farewell (Acts 20:36-38).

Notes on Paul's Ministry

In all, Paul's ministry covers a period of thirty or more years. Except for about the first five years of the church age, when he was persecuting Christians, his ministry coincides with Israel's 40 year probationary period. We can well imagine the hopes he had for Israel as a nation as he began searching the scriptures in the light of the walk by the spirit.

We can also appreciate how he would have kept separating the chaff from the wheat in his mind as he grew and saw the increasingly worldly church grow in Jerusalem. The tone of his first writing, Galatians, written around 52 A.D., shows a clear disappointment in the Jerusalem church.

When he writes, "Oh foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, that you should not obey the truth?" He was not referring to ignorant and unlearned people bewitching them. Such people may hate but they do not "bewitch". It is more probable that he was referring to members of the Jerusalem church. Galatians 3:2-3 makes that clear. The Galatians had received the spirit from the message of Paul, not the message of James and the Jerusalem church. The spirit was not received by the message "you must be circumcised according to the law of Moses in order to be saved." Galatians stands out much more clearly when it is understood that Paul wrote it shortly after the Jerusalem council.

It should be noted that the book of Hebrews was written at about the same time as Galatians, as were the two epistles to the Thessalonians. Some say that Hebrews was not written by Paul, some say that it was. The early evidence indicates that in the second century, the church in the west said Paul didn't write Hebrews and the church in the east said he did. When we consider the fact that, for the first fourteen or more years of his ministry, Paul ministered in the "east" (Syria and Cilicia, Gal. 1:21) while the Jerusalem church was more likely to extend its influence and political authority to the political capital of the world, Rome, the evidence swings in favor of Paul being the writer of Hebrews- not to mention the content of Hebrews. In it, Jesus Christ is presented as the rightful High Priest in the Temple in Jerusalem!

Those who say Paul did not write Hebrews, use as one argument the fact that his name is not mentioned in Hebrews. The argument has no weight. For, Paul was no popular person among many in Israel (remember that he went to those in authority in private in Galatians 2:2) and prudence would dictate that he leave his name off the work and let the work stand by itself among the Hebrews.

In any event, the seven years following the Jerusalem council is summed up by Acts 19:10,20, "All they that dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks" and "So mightily grew the Word of God and prevailed." Just as the message of Jesus Christ being "the authority" had permeated Jerusalem and Israel, so also it now had permeated the rest of the world. No one could say that they had not had the opportunity to hear the gospel. The "out pouring" was wide spread, it was thorough, and it was effective.

Paul did not accept the suggestion of the Jerusalem church that he go to the Gentiles and they go to the Jews.(Gal.2:9) His habit was to go to the synagogue and teach whenever he came into a new town. And, many Jews believed. Paul's ministry was to Jews, Gentiles and Kings (Acts9;15), and he fully exercised that ministry.

The Persecutors of Paul

In the seven years following the Jerusalem Council, many Jews as well as Gentiles believed. Many Jews also persecuted Paul. They weren't alone, the Gentiles persecuted him also. But, in Thessalonica it was the "Jews which believed not" (Acts 17:5) which persecuted him. In verse thirteen these same Jews came from Thessalonica to Berea. Notice that Paul, "as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath

days reasoned with them out of the scriptures." (Acts 17:2). The fact that "some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few" (Acts 17:4), implies that Paul and Silas spent three full weeks teaching the Word of God rather than limiting their teaching to an hour or so a week in the synagogue on the sabbath.

Some would have us believe that Paul "worked a full time job" during the week and ministered the gospel "part time" throughout his ministry. This is hard to conceive in a man who was arrested in his "full time" persecution of the church by Jesus Christ Himself. It is true that he tells the elders from Ephesus (Acts 20:33-35), "I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, It is more blessed to give than to receive."

But, he also said to the Corinthian church, "I have robbed other churches, taking wages of them, to do you service. And when I was present with you, and wanted, I was chargeable to no man: for that which was lacking to me the brethren which came from Macedonia supplied: and in all things I have kept myself from being burdensome unto you, and so will I keep myself." (II Cor. 11:8,9). Paul also says he had been "through hunger and thirst, starving many a time" (II Cor. 11:27, Moffatt). From all the evidence in Paul's epistles and the book of Acts, it is just not reasonable to assume that Paul spent anywhere near a majority of his time working with his hands to support himself.

From all the evidence, we must conclude that Paul's calling as an Apostle came first, and last, and inbetween. Of all people, Paul would have "obeyed the voice at eve, obeyed at prime". The times that he worked with his hands must have been to set an example rather than out of necessity to provide an income. It is more probable that he preferred starving to working with his hands if there were people to teach and the opportunity to teach them. Perhaps this is his reference to "starving many a time."

The point about how Paul normally lived is not unimportant to the picture developed from a study of Acts and Paul's epistles. If Paul only preached on the Sabbath in Thessalonica then the Jews that believed, the chief women, and "a great multitude" of devout Greeks only had the opportunity to hear what he had to say for a few hours while the majority of his time was spent working with his hands to provide for his needs and those of the people traveling with him. However, if he taught night and day (as he did in Acts 20:7-11 when Eutychus fell out of the window) for three weeks, then the "uproar" caused by the Jews that believed not is much more understandable.

The fact that they enlisted "certain lewd fellows of the baser sort" or "some wicked men of the loafers" (Knoch) or "some idle rascals" (Moffatt), implies that they could not solicit legitimate help from the synagogue. It also implies that they could not "withstand the wisdom with which he spoke", just as the people in Acts 6 could not withstand the wisdom by which Stephen spoke. It is hard to believe that Paul could have made such an impact with three "sermons" given on the three sabbath days recorded. It seems much more probable that the unbelieving Jews tried to refute Paul's teaching throughout the three week period and when they could not, they resorted to less honorable tactics.

The fact that Paul was able to spend three weeks in the synagogue of the Jews also implies that the fight against him was not over salvation in Jesus Christ but rather was over issues of law and how to live in that salvation. Certainly it does not take much time to proclaim that Jesus Christ rose from the dead and it would have been among the first declarations that Paul made. From what we have endeavored to show of the extensiveness of Christianity in the first twenty or so years of the church age, it is improbable that the Jews in Thessalonica were ignorant of the salvation message. If they were, and the majority of the people in the synagogue refused to believe that message, Paul would not have had a second chance the following day, let alone the following week or for three weeks following.

Also, if the people in the synagogue had heard the "salvation" message before and refused it, the case is even stronger against their allowing Paul to continue even one week. Much more likely than either of these two possibilities is the conclusion that many of the people in the synagogue, Jew and devout Greek

alike, had heard and at least not been hostile to the "salvation" message before Paul came, even if they had not wholeheartedly believed in Jesus Christ. If such was the case, then Paul could well have spent three full weeks showing the people not only that the Old Testament prophesies were fulfilled in Jesus Christ but also that holy spirit was available as a free gift to all, Jew and Gentile alike, so that the faith of all men could stand in the power of God rather than the wisdom of men. Such a message would be a threat to "the Jews which believed not" while it would be gladly accepted by many Jews and Gentiles alike.

Perhaps a personal example would be in order. I was brought up in a "main line" Christian Denomination and went to their schools for the first twelve years of my education. I fully believed that the bible was the Word of God and had no question about Jesus Christ being raised from the dead. However, as a young adult I was shown, for the first time, the scriptures regarding the "mystery", the hidden wisdom kept in God until it was revealed to the Apostle Paul (Col. 1:26,27; 2:2; 4:3; Eph. 1:9; 3:3,4,9; 5:32; 6:19). This mystery, that the Gentiles should be joint heirs with the Jews, of the same body, and that they would all have "Christ in you, the hope of glory" was thrilling beyond anything I had ever learned. But, to have pointed out to me from I Cor. 2:7 and following that none of the princes of this world knew this mystery, for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory, was breathtaking. It was electrifying, astounding, filled with implications that I had never considered.

I truly thought that everyone I knew would be as thrilled as I was to hear this information. I was wrong. Many Christians that I knew didn't want to hear the information at all. Their responses varied from "who does he think he is to tell us anything" to "this is of the devil". Many, of course, did love to hear the information. But to some, the implications of such a teaching were just to personally threatening to accept. Their status in their church was threatened by accepting any significant truth from someone not officially sanctioned by their church.

The implications of what I had learned were enormous. If every Christian has received "the full measure of faith", then there is not one Christian who is superior to another. The "pneumatikos" of I Cor.12:1, translated in King James as "spiritual gifts", were found to be more properly understood as "spiritual matters" and the so called "gifts" of the spirit, commonly perceived as being sparingly doled out by God, were found to be "manifestations" of the spirit, available, all the time, to every Christian for the benefit of the "body of Christ". In short, the logical conclusion is that if we can receive anything from God, we can receive everything from God. If "the measure of faith" was given to all in the gift of holy spirit, then our opportunity is to fully exercise what we have already been given rather than to seek more "gifts" from God. The scripture that controls these thoughts is Eph. 3:20, which says that God is more willing to give than we are to think or to ask. (see also Eph. 1:19, 2:7).

Therein is the problem. Some Christians find such a possibility unthinkable. And, they are likely to feel animosity, if not hatred, toward those who do believe that God has given us more than we can possibly comprehend. My experience over the past twenty five years has been that much more hate comes my way from Christians than from non-Christians. Obviously, much more love comes my way from Christians as well. But, the practical conflicts in life seem to come much more from within the church than to originate from without. Non- Christians, for the most part, simply walk away from any discussion about Jesus Christ because they consider it foolishness. They seldom feel threatened and are many times more gracious than the Christians.

It is not my intention to evaluate who is a Christian and who is not. I generally assume that those who say they are Christian are telling the truth. My point in giving the above personal example is only to give reason why I feel it more likely that the conflict in Thessalonica, as well as much of the rest of Paul's conflict was not over salvation but over the teaching of grace as opposed to law. The conflict I experienced because I was shown some of Paul's "teaching" causes me to think that the same teaching, by Paul directly, resulted in the same conflict.

The effectiveness of Paul's work in Thessalonica and it's consequent problems are not unique. In Acts 18:12, "The Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul" in Athens. In Ephesus (Acts 19:9), we see that in the synagogue many were hardened and spoke evil of that way. In Greece, (Acts 20:3) the

Jews laid wait for him. And in Ephesus just prior to his going to Jerusalem, Paul says to the elders of the church there (Acts 20:19) that he was "serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews".

So, we see a picture of many Jews among the nations believing and many not believing but rather hating Paul. It should be pointed out that these were not isolated Jews who had no contact with Jerusalem because the law was that every able male over 13 years of age was required to go to Jerusalem three times a year for the feasts of Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles. Certainly they did not all obey the law. But, many did. And during those feasts, the city was full to overflowing- the same as recorded in Acts 2.

And, Israel was not a picture of good guys stand to the left and bad guys stand to the right. If it had been, there would have been civil war in Israel- perhaps that was what Peter was afraid of when he removed himself from the Gentiles upon the arrival of the representatives from James in Antioch. In any event, the grace of God had been compromised within the Jewish nation and that compromising church had influence throughout the Jewish people among the nations. James statement in the Jerusalem Council makes that clear, "for Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day." (Acts 15:21).

It is also interesting to note that the epistle of James is written to "the twelve tribes" rather than to Christians among the twelve tribes. Hebrews, I and II Peter, I, II and III John, as well as Paul's epistles, all identify "to whom it is written" with followers of Jesus Christ. Only James addresses his epistle to "the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad." Also, James does not mention the resurrection in his epistle as do the other epistles.

Acts 19:20 tells us that the Word of God grew mightily and prevailed by the end of the seven year period following the Jerusalem council. But, in Acts 19:23, we are told, "and the same time there arose no small stir about that way".

Whose way? What way? It is obvious from the whole context that those who believed Paul's gospel are being referred to. Paul spells out two gospels in Galatians 1, his gospel and the gospel presented by the Jerusalem church. Their gospel commingled law and grace. Paul's gospel was received by revelation from Jesus Christ and was the glorious gospel of grace alone, without the deeds of the law. During this time (c. 55 A.D.), Paul wrote the epistle of Romans to amplify the subject.

And so we see that by about 56 A.D., the Word of God was growing mightily and prevailing while at the same time there was no small stir about it. Paul determines to go to Jerusalem and we will see just how hardened the people in Jerusalem had become in the seven or eight years following the Jerusalem Council.



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