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THE TWO WAYS OF THE FIRST CENTURY CHURCH

CHAPTER 12

AND THE CHURCH GOES ON

"Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.

Ephesians 3:20,21

Almost two thousand years have passed since the New Age began. Trying to look back over such a span of time with the hope of seeing a clear and accurate picture of the first century church would be a hopeless task without the book of Acts as our controlling guide. Historians need only point to how little is accurately known of the thirty years following Acts to show us how critical a record it is.

While some theologians argue over the impossibility of Luke writing Acts before the destruction of the Temple (because, they say, he could not have known of it in advance, and thereby deny that Jesus Christ prophesied that it would occur, forty years before the fact), it seems clear from the ending of Acts that Luke completed it while Paul was still in prison after two years in Rome.

Since Acts ties in so readily with other historical records of the era, we know that Felix was governor (procurator) of Judea from 52 A.D. to 59 A.D. and that Paul was imprisoned in Caesarea for the final two years of that time. We know from Acts 27:12 that by the winter of 59 A.D. Paul had not yet arrived in Rome. Therefore, the two years he spent imprisoned "in his own hired house" in Rome were the years 60 A.D. and 61 A.D.. Presumably, Paul was released in 62 A.D. (we cannot imagine the angel of God giving Paul encouragement at sea by saying "Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar" (Acts 27:24), only to have Paul convicted when he came before Caesar), about the time that James was assassinated in Jerusalem. (Festus died in office in 62 A.D. and James was assassinated before Albinus arrived to replace him).

We are not left without witness of events after 62 A.D. because Paul wrote I and II Timothy after that time as well as Titus. One commentator wrote, "That the names, places, and incidents alluded to in the Pastorals cannot be fitted into the outline of Acts, is a very good reason for extending the life of Paul beyond the narration of Acts." Some say that Paul went before Nero again in 68 A.D. and was executed. Others tell us, "That Peter as well as Paul was put to death at Rome under Nero is the unanimous testimony of Christian tradition." But, this testimony of tradition comes long after the time that the events were supposed to happen, and in the light of many other "traditions" that have been shown to be false, this tradition also must be considered to be suspect.

Paul's own words, "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand" (II Tim. 4:6), do not necessarily lead to the conclusion that he was martyred. Knoch's translation says, "For I am already a libation, and the period of my dissolution is imminent. I have contended the ideal contest. I have finished my career. I have kept the faith." (II Tim. 4:6-7). Paul knew that his work was finished and that he would soon die. But the fact that he states that he finished his career leads us to believe that his

career was not terminated by his enemies. However much the traditional church values martyrs, the evidence in Acts shows clearly how often and in how many different ways Paul was delivered from death by the miraculous power of God. To think that Jesus Christ would finally let Paul be martyred after Paul had not spared himself for perhaps 35 or 40 years, is hard to believe.

It seems more likely that he died in his sleep one night being contented that he had fully exercised his ministry and had seen the power of Jesus Christ manifested in a way that few, if any, have seen since Paul. After all, he would have been at least in his 60's, not a young age for a man that had gone through as much as Paul had gone through. The trials, shipwrecks, beatings, stonings, perils, starvations, and imprisonments would surely have taken a toll on Paul's "earthen vessel". Paul was delivered from them all. And, he says at the end of II Timothy, "The Lord shall deliver me from every evil work and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen." (II Tim. 4:18). Surely, it was not an "evil work" that overcame Paul at the end of his life. We would rather believe that he was translated, like Enoch, than to believe that he was overcome with evil. We simply need not believe such a thing from the evidence of scripture.

During Paul's imprisonment in Rome in 60-61 A.D., he wrote the epistles of Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians (as well as the letter to Philemon). Studying them in the light of all that Paul had gone through in the book of Acts provides a backdrop that allows them to stand out with a brilliance impossible to see otherwise. To understand the extremes to which Paul went to achieve reconciliation with the Jerusalem church, culminating in Paul's final trip to Jerusalem, allows an understanding of these three epistles, impossible to gain otherwise. Understanding that Galatians was written shortly after the Jerusalem council of 49 A.D. also amplifies the glorious truth of Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians. And, realizing that Romans was written about three years before Paul's final trip to Jerusalem causes Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians to show a brilliance, dazzling in glory. They are preeminently the "rule of faith and practice" of the church age.

If Christians today read, studied, and understood these three epistles and applied them day by day (and they are not that long, Ephesians is about 6 pages, Philippians and Colossians less than 5 pages), it is impossible to imagine the changes that would take place and the power of God that would be manifested in the world. These epistles have been hidden for so long, from so many, simply because they are too glorious to believe. And, "the James faction" has a vested interest in keeping them hid. But, Jesus Christ is the head of the church, not members of "the James faction", and, as a shepherd has the job of finding the lost sheep, not the sheep the shepherd, so also Jesus Christ keeps looking for us when we wander, and calls us back to Him.

To realize that the many tens of thousands of Christians in Jerusalem had access to the Epistles of Galatians, I and II Thessalonians, I and II Corinthians, Romans, and probably Hebrews, before Paul's last trip to Jerusalem, puts their hardness of heart in a perspective that shows just how far apart they were from Paul. And, it shows just how hard they tried to keep the Christians from among the Gentiles under their authority. It is evident that they could not refute the documents and so they tried to kill their writer. But, Jesus Christ delivered Paul from their hands and Luke spent the final third of Acts reporting that deliverance and reporting Paul's final conclusion that there could be no reconciliation between the children of the bondwoman and the children of liberty. Surely, this fact alone shows Luke's purpose to be much more than merely providing an orderly account of the rise of Christianity in the first thirty years of the church age. Clearly, his purpose goes far beyond the vague purpose of showing "growth" and "outreach". Conflict within the church over law and grace are evident throughout and Acts ends with the priceless demonstration that "my grace is sufficient for thee" (II Cor. 12:9).

Acts and Paul's Appeal Before Nero

Late in the development of this book, the suggestion was brought to my attention that Luke's immediate purpose in writing Acts may well have been to provide a document for Paul's appeal before Nero. The suggestion seems to fit so exactly with the thesis of this work, namely, that there was conflict in the early church and that conflict is a major theme in Acts, that a short examination of the suggestion may well

provide fuel for additional study as well as provide a summary for this work.

Many times throughout scripture, as well as in life today, those who endeavor to do God's will have little idea of the overall impact that their work will have. Martin Luther, for example, could not have known, at the time he posted his ninety five thesis for public examination and comment by other professors and students, that the impact of that work would be so revolutionary and begin the reformation that changed the world within fifty years of Columbus discovering America.

So also, Simeon (Luke 2:25), could not have known when the holy spirit came upon him and revealed to him that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ, just how dramatically the world would change as a result of Christ's coming. When Simeon took the baby Jesus in his arms and prophesied, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to they word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel", he could not have known that his words would be preserved two thousand years later and that Christians the world over would read them with tears of joy in their eyes. So great was the salvation of Jesus Christ, so brilliant was the light that lightened the Gentiles, so glorious was His glory to His people Israel, that Simeon could not possibly have comprehended the magnitude of what he was saying. Surely, he was blessed beyond measure by what he did comprehend. But still, his comprehension encompassed only a small part of what would unfold as time went by.

Many other examples could be given of a man's immediate purpose being far less, at its highest and most pure, than God's overall purpose. So also, Luke could well have had an immediate purpose in mind when he wrote Acts that did not anticipate the impact that Acts still has, two thousand years after it was written. Luke could well have written Acts to present in Paul's defense before Nero. In fact, such a purpose would fully explain why Acts seems to end so abruptly with Paul in his own "hired house" in Rome, awaiting his appearance before Nero.

Many have wondered why Luke did not continue his "history" and tell us how Paul's life ended or when it ended. These questions are answered if Luke's immediate purpose was to present evidence in support of Paul at his trial before the Roman Emperor, Nero. And, if Nero read and studied Acts before hearing Paul's case, and had all the information documented and investigated by his agents, and summoned eyewitnesses to confirm the many events that Luke covers in Acts, we can well imagine that the trial was not a casual affair that was lightly considered by Nero.

Nero's attention could well have been focused on the matter from the time that Paul arrived in Rome, (or perhaps even before that time when Felix was dismissed and Festus installed as governor) and for the two years following as evidence was submitted and confirmed. From what we have shown, surely Christianity was widespread throughout the Roman Empire and it could well be that the issue before Nero was not merely Paul versus the High Priest, but rather Christianity versus Judiasm. This may sound far- fetched, but consider the evidence.

In 49 A.D., the year of the Jerusalem Council, the Roman Emperor, Claudius, had the Jews (including Aquila and Priscilla) expelled from Rome because of riots caused by one "Chrestus". If this reference to "Chrestus" was in fact to Christ rather than some unknown slave, then we see that Christianity was a part of Judiasm in Rome at that time and the "infighting" among approximately 60,000 Jews in Rome became intolerable to Claudius. On the other hand, the claims that Nero blamed the fire in Rome on the Christians point to the fact that Christianity was separate from Judiasm by 64 A.D. when much of Rome was burned to the ground. In the fifteen years between these two events, the record of the second half of Acts takes place and Paul appeared before Nero. In this light, it seems quite possible that Nero ruled in favor of Paul and also ruled that Christianity was distinct from Judiasm, based on the evidence in Acts.

If Paul was released in 62 A.D., it seems more than coincidental that James was killed that same year, that concurrently the High Priest was removed from office by Agrippa II, and that Festus died in office (of unknown causes) the same year. We have seen from the evidence in Acts that the issues represented by Paul were most likely the cause of Felix being removed from office in 59 A.D.. And, the massive fire in

Rome in 64 A.D., together with the ceasing of the sacrifice for Caesar in 66 A.D. (and the war which followed), all fit together if in fact Nero ruled that Christianity was a recognized religion in the Roman Empire, distinct from Judaism. Such a ruling would appear to go a long way in explaining the above facts and in clarifying the origin of the Roman Catholic Church as being distinct from the Jerusalem church.

There is no evidence that the edict of the Jerusalem Council in 49 A.D. was enforced after Jerusalem was destroyed although there is evidence of a Jewish Christian church headed by relations of Jesus Christ. Hegesippus, an early Christian writer who was of Palestinian origin (c. 150 A.D.), says that those who were related to the Lord in the flesh met after the death of James to elect his successor since the greater number of them were still alive. If this be true, the case for nepotism in the Jerusalem church is clearly seen. Also, Harnack states that "the Jews were probably the instigators of the Neronian outburst against the Christians." If this is so, then clearly the Jews were divorced from the Christians soon after Paul's appeal before Nero.

If we add to this evidence the fact that Nero was Emperor for 14 years, (from 55 A.D. until his death in 68 A.D.), and that during the first seven years of his reign the empire was apparently administered well while the second seven years were not, we see that 62 A.D. was a year in which not only was Paul heard by Nero, but Nero's administration dramatically changed as well. In that year, Burrus, Nero's honest and able head of the Praetorian Guard, died, and Seneca, Nero's advisor, was forced to retire and soon afterward was forced to commit suicide. Seneca's forced retirement appears especially significant when the fact is considered that Gallio, the proconsul of Achaia (who would not hear charges against Paul in Corinth in Acts 18) was Seneca's brother. Also, Seneca's own words, "Meantime the customs of this most accursed race (the Jews) have prevailed to such an extent that they are everywhere received. The conquered have imposed their laws on the conquerors" suggest that in a confrontation between the Jews and Christianity, he would have taken the side of Christianity.

It is hard to accept that such dramatic changes as occurred in the Roman Empire in 62 A.D. were merely coincidental with Paul's appeal before Nero. Historians tell us that, after the death of Burrus and Seneca, selfish, calculating persons gained control of Nero and the empire was worse off for the change. From what we have seen of the size of the Jerusalem church as well as the dramatic spreading of Christianity throughout the Roman Empire, it is not difficult to believe that Paul's appeal before Nero was central to the intrigue and the changes that occurred in Rome in 62 A.D..

Paul's own testimony leads to the same conclusion. Namely, that his imprisonment in Rome had a very major impact in that city. In Phil. 1:13 he says, "My bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace and in all other places." If we consider that no charge was found against Paul nor forwarded with him to Rome by Festus (see Acts 25:25-27) and that Paul's work continued unabated for two years during his imprisonment in Caesarea and an additional two years in Rome, we can well imagine the stir caused throughout the whole Roman empire at such injustice.

Paul was imprisoned solely for preaching the gospel and not on account of any crime (see also Col. 4:3). Well can we imagine the kinds of doors that opened to Paul during his imprisonment in Rome just as they had opened in Caesarea when King Agrippa II was persuaded to be a Christian (as well as perhaps many of the "chief captains and principal men of the city"-Acts 26).

Paul specifically states in Philippians 4:22, "All the saints salute you, chiefly they that are of Caesar's household." Since Philippians was written during Paul's imprisonment in Rome, we must either say he was exaggerating (a position against all the evidence) or acknowledge that the gospel of Christ was accepted within Caesar's own household. Paul was clearly optimistic about his release (see Phil. 1:24-26 and Phil. 2:23-24) and we must assume he had reason to be optimistic based on his experiences in Rome. Certainly, if enthusiastic Christians were in Caesar's own household, he would have cause for optimism.

How Nero Might Have Examined Acts

If we try to picture ourselves as Nero, sitting at a table and reading Luke's submittal, perhaps we can gain some insight as to whether or not it is probable that Luke wrote Acts for use at Paul's trial in Rome.

To begin with, we would read, "The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus" and we would ask an attendant, "what is the former treatise?". After being briefed on the content of the gospel of Luke we would then ask, "Who is Theophilus" or else we would understand that Luke was addressing us (the Emperor, Nero) as "Beloved of God". We might smile and think, "flattery will get you nowhere!" but we would be pleased nevertheless at the admission that God loves the Emperor.

It should be noted that Luke's use of Theophilus in Luke 1:3 is preceded by the words "most excellent" which in the greek is the word "kratistos". Kratistos means a host, strongest, most powerful, noble. It is only used four times in scripture, all of them by Luke: "Kratistos" Theophilus (Luke 1:3), "Kratistos" Felix (in the letter from Claudius Lysias in Acts 23:26), "Kratistos" Felix (translated "most noble" in Paul's address to Felix in Acts 24:3), and "Kratistos" Festus (also translated "most noble" in Paul's response to Festus in Acts 26:25).

Since Theophilus is a combination of two greek words, theo= God and phileo= love, its literal meaning is "God Loved" or "Beloved of God". Therefore, instead of Luke writing the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts to some person "about whom nothing is known", as some commentaries say, it is more reasonable to conclude that he is either writing them to Caesar or else that he has coined a word (as in the case of hellenistes) to signify that he is addressing "the beloved of God" as a "most noble" or "most excellent" group of people. Although the second alternative is certainly acceptable, the first alternative, addressing Caesar himself, is certainly not unreasonable from the other usages of kratistos. After all, Caesar worship was insisted upon in the Roman Empire and "kratistos Nero" would not have the impact of "kratistos Theophilus" if Luke did indeed address his Gospel and Acts to Nero.

As we (Nero) continued to read Acts, we might consider the first chapter to be myth and, if so, not jot down a note to have any of the apostles called to verify that Jesus Christ talked with them after the resurrection. But, we would conclude that the chapter was certainly in line with what Paul believed and Festus found ridiculous. We would also appreciate from verse 6 and the fact that over 30 years had gone by since that time, that Jesus Christ was not a threat to the Roman Empire but only a threat to a troublesome Israel. From verse 8 we would understand that this Jesus Christ wanted the twelve apostles to be witnesses rather than rulers. Realizing that the apostles were not major political powers in Jerusalem would confirm our conclusion that Jesus Christ was not a threat to the Roman Empire.

We would probably also ask an attendant to gather all the information available about the death of Jesus Christ and we would note with interest that darkness prevailed over the Roman empire on the day of Jesus death from noon until three o'clock in the afternoon. We would be reminded of this fact when we read in Acts 2:20, "the sun shall be darkened". We might even have information in front of us regarding the veil of the Temple being "rent in the midst" (Luke 23:45) and if so, we would surely comment to the attendant that the High Priest must have had fits upon hearing that the empty Holy of Holies was exposed to public view. We might also comment that the preparation for the Passover must have been in disarray with darkness for three hours in the middle of the day, making it very difficult to slaughter the many thousands of lambs and sheep that needed to be processed.

When we read that Matthias was picked to replace Judas we would undoubtedly jot down a note to investigate further why James, the brother of Jesus, was by-passed at this time. In chapter two, we would notice that three thousand believed and we would jot down another note to get a report on how Jerusalem "behaved" in the years after 30 A.D.. We might even summon Peter to confirm that he was in the Temple and did say the things recorded in Acts 2. As we read on, we would see that Peter was certainly a key figure and would undoubtedly summon him (if he was not in Babylon and beyond our reach).

From Acts 3 through 7 we would see that the High Priest and the Sanhedrin had no end of problems with Christianity and would probably smile and understand that the conflict between Paul and the Sanhedrin had its roots over thirty years earlier. And, we would know from the killing of Stephen and the record of Acts 8 that Paul was a "turncoat" in the eyes of the High Priestly families and perhaps our appreciation of the record before us would go up a notch as we learned that Paul was no "dummy" and that even he was "converted".

Along the way, we would note the "multitudes" that believed and perhaps have confirmed for us that a "great company of priests were obedient to the faith". If Luke was exaggerating, it would discredit the whole submittal. When we received confirmation that indeed such was the case, we would begin to appreciate just how "troublesome" Christianity was to the High Priest and his associates, not that we could care much about their problems because the Jews were as "troublesome" a people as any in the empire. In fact, we might begin to think that Christianity was good for the empire in that it might keep Judiasm in check. As the Emperor, we might lean back in our chair, put a finger to our lips and consider the possible implications of recognizing Christianity as a separate religion from Judiasm. Such an action might be a good thing for the Roman Empire.

When we came to the introduction of Stephen, his speech before the Sanhedrin, and his assassination, we would be sure to understand that Luke was presenting information showing Christianity as distinct from Judiasm. If an expert was called in to examine the verses of scripture quoted by Stephen, he would readily recognize that Stephen used the Samaritan Pentateuch rather than the Masoretic text and would therefore conclude that Stephen was in all probability a Samaritan rather than a full blooded Jew.

The history of the nation, contained in Stephen's speech, would seem favorable to the Christian position and unfavorable to the High Priesthood. The fact that the Grecians, including a proselyte from Antioch, made up the "seven", together with the later fact that the "believers" were first called "Christian" in Antioch, not Jerusalem, would remind us of our earlier thought that recognizing Christianity as a separate religion might not be a bad idea. And, realizing that Luke was a physician from Antioch, rather than a priest from Jerusalem, would lend credibility to his account in our mind. (Especially if Luke was a Gentile rather than a Jew as most theologians of the past hundred fifty years assume. If Luke was a Gentile, he has the unique distinction of being the only Gentile writer in the Bible).

The "great persecution" of the church at Jerusalem would probably enlist our sympathy, and seeing Paul as a persecutor and then a convert would cause us to have his activities since his "conversion" investigated to see if they constituted a threat to the Roman Empire. When we found that he had set up no "organization", had no wealth to speak of, had no "official headquarters" or any "power base" that could be construed as a threat to the Roman Empire, and that he was from Tarsus and had spent little time in Jerusalem for the past twenty five years, and yet had caused a major stir among the Jews of Jerusalem as well as the Jews of the dispersion, our sympathy would be sure to swing in his favor. This man had done nothing wrong and was in fact bringing money to Jerusalem when he was almost killed there.

As we read through Acts we would see that Paul's teaching among the nations caused no problems for the Roman Empire and we would be sure to notice Sergius Paulus "siding" with Paul (Acts 13), the fact that Manaen, who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, was a teacher in Antioch (Acts 13), that the Jews stirred up the chief men of the city of Pisidian Antioch against Paul (Acts 13), and that the Jews also stirred up the Gentiles against Paul in Iconium (Acts 14). In Acts 10 and 11 we would note with interest the "conversion" of Cornelius, the centurion, and probably would have someone enquire how his "Christianity" affected his life and attitude toward the Roman Empire in the past twenty years. The amount of time Luke spent with the account of Cornelius would not be lost on us and we would certainly come down on the side of Cornelius and Peter rather than the side of the Jerusalem Church under James.

The account of Herod Agrippa I having the apostle James killed, intending to kill Peter, and then being eaten of worms and dying, would well cause us to wince and squirm in our chair a little. In fact, we might reread Acts 12 just to make sure Luke was not trying to imply anything against the Emperor of Rome. In the process, we would notice that Peter had a report sent to James, the brother of Jesus, about his escape from prison and we would jot another note down to be briefed fully on James, who he was friends with, how extensive his influence was, and what his attitude toward the Roman Empire was. If we read his epistle, we would see clearly that he did not like "rich people" and when we read, "Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: but the rich, in that he is made low" (James 1:9-10) we could not help but think he was a "rabble rouser". And, when we discovered later in Acts that there were tens of thousands of Jews that believed and were under James' authority, we might conclude that he was a dangerous "rabble rouser".

We would probably note with interest, in Acts 14, that Jews from Antioch and Iconium came to Lystra and caused Paul to be stoned and dumped outside of town and left for dead. We might even send to Lystra for a report from the Roman authority there, to tell us if he thought Paul's work there was a threat to the Roman Empire or a benefit to it. In fact, we might send for a report to all the cities where Paul had been to get evaluations on Paul from the Roman authorities there.

In Acts 15, we would see that the Jerusalem church, under James, did their best to extend their authority beyond the confines of Jerusalem and we would undoubtedly give an order to have a study done of the growth of Judaism since 30 A.D. to see just how much more influence and power they had in the Roman Empire, if any, since that time. If the report came back that their influence, their number of converts and their wealth had dramatically increased, we would conclude that James and the people he associated with in Jerusalem were much more of a threat than Paul.

In Acts 16, we would note with interest that Paul was imprisoned illegally in Philippi and that he made the magistrates come to the jail and apologize for imprisoning a Roman citizen without cause. We might also send for a report to see how Christianity had affected the jailers life since Paul had been there and what his current attitude was toward the Roman Empire. In Acts 17 we would see from the account of Paul in Athens that the God Paul preached was not a God of the Jews but a God of all mankind, and although we might consider such a teaching as a threat to "Caesar worship", in our heart of hearts we would know that surely we were not God and after all, "Caesar worship" was only meant to insure obedience to Rome rather than to gain converts to an exciting new religion. Paul's speech in Athens would not appear to be a threat to obedience to Rome.

In Acts 18 we would be impressed that when the Jews in Corinth made a united insurrection against Paul, the Roman deputy, Gallio, dismissed the case as groundless and the Greeks beat up on the chief ruler of the synagogue while Gallio did nothing about it. A confirming report from Gallio (together with input from his brother Seneca) would certainly move us to the side of Paul and against the High Priest and Jerusalem. We would probably begin looking forward to hearing Paul present his case to see just how one man could cause such hatred among the Jews and yet enlist the sympathy of the Roman authority, time after time.

In Acts 19, we probably would not believe the claim of all the miracles Paul did at Ephesus in his stay there of two years and three months. We would certainly want a report from the Roman authorities there to see if Paul caused any trouble to the Roman Empire by his stay in Ephesus. We might even ask Luke to reveal the names of the "certain of the chief of Asia" (Acts 19:31) who were Paul's friends and see if they were acting subversively or were "solid citizens" in the Roman Empire. As for Paul causing a decrease in business for Demetrius, and his associates who made silver shrines for the gods of Ephesus, we would likely say, "good for Paul! Diana of the Ephesians is no god at all!"

When we finally got to Acts 20 and following we would be at the heart of the immediate problem. Paul went to Jerusalem and was almost killed there. And, he would have been killed had not Claudius Lysias and the Roman Soldiers come to his rescue. We would note with increasing anger that there were no charges against Paul and yet he was in Rome as a prisoner because of the hatred of the Jews toward him. Claudius Lysias found no fault in him. Felix found no fault in him, and the Jews had even exerted their influence to have Felix replaced because he would not turn over Paul to them. Festus also found no fault in Paul and King Agrippa was persuaded to become a Christian by Paul. He was in favor of Paul being released. It would also not be lost on us that King Agrippa's sister, Drusilla, was the wife of Felix and that Felix and Drusilla had talked quite often with Paul during the two years before Felix was dismissed. We would probably conclude that Agrippa and Drusilla (as well as Bernice and Felix) had talked quite often during that time about Christianity and that Agrippa's interest in hearing Paul in person was more than a casual interest. We might even comment to an aide that Agrippa certainly gathered together a formidable audience of illustrious persons to hear Paul. We would have to conclude that all the Roman evidence was on the side of Paul and even King Agrippa II, the king of the Jews, was on Paul's side.

As we finished reading the forty five page document that Luke had submitted in Paul's defense, we would note with interest that his ship had been wrecked on the way to Rome and the angel of God had told Paul

that he would appear before Caesar and therefore all the people on the ship would live. We would read of Paul's final meeting with the Jews in Rome and would probably say, "Good for you, Paul, it's about time you wrote the whole bunch off your list."

Was Acts written to Caesar?

The above exercise of imagining we are Caesar going through Acts is not given to make light of Acts or of Nero. It is given to see if the suggestion, that Luke's immediate purpose in writing Acts was to submit to Caesar a document in defense of Paul, has any merit. It clearly does have merit as is seen from the exercise above. Surely, books could be written on the subject, from a Roman historians perspective, from a Jewish perspective, from a political and psychological perspective. It is an exciting thing to consider that does not appear to have been given much serious consideration to date.

And, such a purpose on the part of Luke does not take away from our confidence that God revealed to Luke what to write and how to write it. It is an amazing document, especially considering that it is only about forty five pages long. The book you are reading is quite a bit longer and certainly cannot be compared to the book of Acts in value or impact. Thousands upon thousands of pages have been written about Acts and they all are a tribute to the unique position that Acts maintains in the world today. Even those books written to discredit Acts show what a powerful document it must be to have such attention paid to it. Hopefully, this work will show that its wealth has not been exhausted, even after two thousand years. If a serious and extensive reevaluation of Acts results from this effort, my purpose will have been achieved. If nothing else, hopefully the claim has been substantiated that the book of Acts is clearly the focal point of Christianity today.

Also, if we recall that James was assassinated by the High Priest about the time that Paul appeared before Nero in 62 A.D., we can well imagine the "dilemma" faced by James and his "many tens of thousands of Jews that believed" if Nero ruled that Christianity was a recognized religion in its own right. This same "dilemma" could have been involved in the Jews starting the war with Rome in 66 A.D. by ceasing the daily sacrifice for Caesar in the Temple. This "dilemma" could also have kindled the civil war which raged concurrent with the war with Rome. And, if Nero acquitted Paul at the expense of Jerusalem, then Jerusalem's actions in the years following that acquittal could well have been a reaction to Nero's decision. Even the fire in Rome of 64 A.D., could have been a subversive attempt on the part of Jerusalem to both hurt Rome and blame the Christians as well.

While these speculative suggestions are by no means conclusive, they hopefully will provide "fuel" for a reexamination of the commonly accepted explanations of the events leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem and the termination of Israel as a nation. If so, they will have served a worthy purpose.

Our Response to Acts

Having examined the book of Acts in some detail, we finally must ask the question, "How does this affect our lives today" or "What should this information encourage us to do?". Hopefully, the study of Acts will show that the church of the body of Christ is much more than groups of people meeting on Sunday morning to sing songs, hear a sermon, and offer prayer. The life of the Christian consists primarily in his relationship with Jesus Christ, not his relationship with various groups of people. Reconciling men and women to God is our primary task, not reconciling them to our group or community. Men and women will be reconciled to each other if they are first reconciled to God. But, try as we may, endeavoring to achieve harmony among men, without first reconciling them to God, is a fruitless task. The "social gospel" promoted by various church groups is devoid of God's power. And, what the world needs to see and experience is the power of God, not the "brain-power" of men. A new perspective on Acts will give us a new perspective on how we should live and relate to other Christians today. Certainly Christianity is more than merely "going to church on Sunday".

Salvation occurs in a moment of time. When we come to the position that our lives are worthless without the direction of Jesus Christ to show us the way, we accept Him as our Lord and find a new life. We find that a position of servant under the Lordship of Jesus Christ is far superior to any promise that the

ungodly, worldly system of power, prestige, and attainment by works, can offer. Striving for recognition, for power over others, for wealth, all become meaningless to a proper servant of Jesus Christ. Even the dawning realization that we are sons of God and that we can manifest God's power, must be kept in the perspective that such grace is given to us, not so that we can claim superiority over other men, but so that we can be fully equipped to serve Jesus Christ as Lord.

It seems evident that the "new" Christian has little problem with walking as a servant of Jesus Christ. He realizes his limitations, discovers the thrill of God's Word and, like a little child, he is full of energy, curiosity, enthusiasm, and expectation. He thinks about God and the things of God day and night. His world is brand new. He understands that "meditation" is not some ritualistic service he must perform but rather "a thinking about", a "considering", a "pondering" and it is in the nature of a child to do so all the time. He also does not need to be told to "pray without ceasing" because he does that all the time as well. But, his "prayer" is also not a ritualistic service accomplished only in a kneeling position with the hands folded. It is prayer in the true sense of asking, questioning, inquiring. And, like a little child, the "new" Christian is unabashed to ask, "What is this?", "Can I have that?", "How does this work?", and the question above all others asked by children the world over, "Why?"

But, what happens to this "new born" Christian as he "grows up"? Where is he likely to be ten or twenty years later? Has he found "his place in the world"? Has he ceased to ask, to inquire, to make demands on his Heavenly Father? Is God's Word still the refreshing, exciting, and revealing source of life to him that it was when he was a baby. Or have the cares of the world choked out his enthusiasm. Has he "settled down on earth and forgotten heaven"? Has he found a place to "park" in a church somewhere and settled for "follow the leader" instead of being an active servant of Jesus Christ? Has he stopped "going to church" altogether and relegated his Christian walk to "wishful thinking"?

These are troubling questions to ask because Christianity today seems to have focused so extensively on getting people "saved" and so little on the requirements for Christian maturity. Much more time, effort and money is spent on bringing the physical child to maturity than is spent on bringing the spiritual child to maturity. Many times, the Christian "child" assumes he has "grown up" simply because he is twenty years older and has gone through school and has taken his place in a trade or profession and is raising his own family. But, the ungodly do the same and so such maturing cannot be equated to a spiritual maturity. The rise in the Christian school movement in this country has helped to bring up children in the nurture and the admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4). But, what about the person who becomes a Christian when he is an adult? How is he or she to receive the training that brings Christian maturity?

Hebrews 5:14 says that "strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." The previous verse says, "for every one that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe." Two kinds of Christians are evident, mature Christians and "babes". In the physical world, babies are wonderful. But, if a baby never grew and never matured for twenty years, the situation would be tragic, not joyful. Likewise, if the physical child grew for twenty years and then reverted to childhood behavior, the situation would also be tragic. And yet, Christian "adults" seem to have an abundance of both kinds of tragedy. Paul describes the problem as returning to "the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage" (Gal.4:9).

Inhibiting and preventing such a situation is surely a major challenge worthy of acceptance by Christianity. Just as we desire children to grow up into responsible and capable men and women, so also we should look for the day when the Christian child "grows up" and "leaves home" to assume his or her place as an adult Christian, fully equipped to feed on "strong meat" and to be effective as an adult servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. As one author pointed out, religious education that brings a person only to the level of obedience, and not to the level of independent judgment and action, does not make the child a man but keeps him a child.

It is my sincere hope that this study of the book of Acts will help to enable the Christian community to meet the challenge of producing "grown ups" in Christ. One element in the contrast between Paul and

James seems abundantly clear. Paul was preeminently a teacher. James discouraged teachers (see James 3:1, where the word "masters" is more accurately translated "teachers"). Not only was Paul a teacher, he encouraged the function of teaching at every opportunity. There is nothing that comes through more "loud and clear" throughout Paul's epistles and his example in the book of Acts than the message that God's Word must be taught and learned and made the center of our lives as Christians. It alone is our "rule book", our "road map", our "food for life".

The Christian cannot afford to neglect the study of God's Word or treat such study as a convenience or a luxury. He can neither bask in the brilliance of another man's knowledge of the Scripture nor be content with the knowledge that those around him do not study the Word of God either. Learning God's Word is not a competitive endeavor. It is a need in every Christian's life. Just as we are not nourished by someone else eating dinner, so also we are not nourished by someone else studying the Word of God.

Our efforts as servants of Christ do not depend on how much or how little our friends know of God's Word. Paul says, "For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise" (II Cor. 10:12). However, our effectiveness as servants does depend on our understanding of God's Word. It makes us "wise unto salvation" (II Tim. 3:15). It is our "sword of the spirit" (Eph. 6:17). It is "the power of God unto salvation" (Rom. 1:16). We do not need to measure ourselves by some fictitious standard of what we should do or how much we should study. We need only ask ourselves if we are equipping ourselves to be increasingly effective servants of Jesus Christ. As we learn more, we can do more. The underlying principle to our study of God's Word should not be condemnation, guilt, or a feeling of inadequacy. It must be with thanksgiving and "heartily, as unto God and not to men". Whatever mental and physical capacities we possess should be used to the full. Realizing that God loves us will cause us to study His Word regardless of whether we are "preschoolers", "fifth graders", or "high school graduates" in God's scheme of things.

God's University

One author compared the system of higher education in this country to the organized church and called it "The Church of Reason". He pointed out that, like the church, higher education operated on two distinct levels. The visible level, (the one of pecking order, buildings, chairmen of departments, boards of Regents, Presidents, various national societies for Professors of various branches of learning with their International publications and conventions), behaves just as the organized church behaves with similar assets, control, hierarchy, and events.

But, he pointed out that The Church of Reason operates on another level as well and this level is independent of the "organized" church of Reason. This level needs no buildings, no control, no hierarchy. It is ruled by the realm of discovery, the realm of ideas, the realm of truth. It consists preeminently of a teacher and a student (many times one person fills both roles).

At times, the visible "Church of Reason" is threatened by the invisible "Church of Reason" when a new discovery, a refuting of an old axiom, or a revolutionary concept threatens the established order or embarrasses a "recognized authority". In contrast to the common man, who understands an "expert" to be "an ordinary guy away from home", academics, both in the religious world and the secular world, often place great emphasis on academic "credentials" and position in the visible Church of Reason. By doing so, they endeavor to define for us their rendition of what an "expert" is.

There is no question that everyone prefers the better trained person to do a job over the lesser trained person. However, when it comes to the teaching of God's Word, "better trained" is not so easily defined as in the case of a welder, a scientist, or a linguist. Training in "Godliness" is the requirement for this endeavor. It demands a training of heart as well as head. Such training may be found in seminaries and bible schools. But, the opposite may be found as well.

Training in godliness certainly is not the exclusive prerogative of seminaries or bible colleges. After all, these will only teach that which is acceptable to, and in conformity with, their organization. No

denomination or sect can "capture" Christianity any more than Judiasm could "capture" the Gentiles who became Christian. Christian groups must satisfy themselves that they are only part of Christianity and their standards, or laws, or regulations, do not define Christianity for us. Jesus Christ defines Christianity for us as we live the life of a servant to Him. Servants endeavoring to control other servants cannot be what Jesus Christ has in mind for us to do.

There certainly is nothing wrong with the idea behind seminaries and bible schools. The only danger in them resides in the tendency of them all to become exclusive. For example, Lutheran seminaries do not allow "95 Theses" to be published against them without opposition, just as the Catholic church did not retain Luther among their number after he published his "95 Theses". Consequently, the Lutheran church was born (and patterned itself, for the most part, after the Catholic church). Both groups have obviously done good in the world, as have many others like them. However, they also come in conflict with each other over doctrinal positions. Members of each group who defend their organization at the expense of seeking resolution to doctrinal differences from the Word of God, end up causing hatred and ill will among Christians. The root of the problem seems to be the same conflict that existed between Paul and James, namely, the question of authority.

With one Jesus Christ, with one Word of God, with one spirit, multiple positions adamantly defended over "laws" or "doctrines" can hardly be central to how the individual should live as a Son of God and a Servant of Jesus Christ. They are the "smoke and mirrors" of Christianity. They are the visible "Church of Reason" that has visible assets to defend. Breaking through the "smoke and mirrors" is our challenge as Christians and what follows is one suggestion as to how this challenge can be met.

Teachers and Students, Time and Money

Paul instructs the Galatian church, "Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things" (Gal. 6:6). Knoch's translation says, "Now let him who is being instructed in the word be contributing to him who is instructing, in all good things." We see in this verse both teachers and students and in the context we can clearly see that Paul is not talking about a formal educational setting as we understand it today, of schools, colleges, universities, and the like, but rather a general setting that includes all members of the church, not a select few.

When we realize that Galatians is a letter (six pages long in most bibles) and that it was written shortly after the Jerusalem council, the importance of this verse begins to dawn on us. Paul is not saying "support your local church" in this verse. Nor is he saying "give to the poor". He is specifically instructing those who are being taught to share with, contribute to, support, teachers of the Word of God. And, this verse appears to be the only specific function that Paul does call to our attention for support. Elsewhere Paul talks about giving to the poor, giving in general, and doing good to all men, especially those of the household (family) of faith. He also talks about giving to him personally (see I Tim.6:17-20, Phil. 4:14, Heb. 13:16, II Cor. 9:5-8). But, giving to teachers seems to be the only specific area of giving that he calls to our attention. Giving is obviously a way of life for a servant of Jesus Christ, but just as we do not spend our last dollar on clothes when we have no food, so also money should be provided so that we have an adequate supply of the food of God's Word. I submit that an adequate supply of godly food will only be assured if we commit our resources to encouraging the function of teaching in the church of Christ.

In the context of Galatians, nothing could be more crucial to defending the walk by the spirit against the proponents of law than the function of teaching the grace of God. From Acts 15:1 we saw that men came from Jerusalem and taught the believers in Antioch that they could not be saved unless they were circumcised after the law of Moses. In Acts 15:21 we saw James point out in the council that "Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day." Such a well organized and well funded attack against grace could hardly be matched dollar for dollar by those who stood for the grace of God. The answer to the problem seems clearly to be Galatians 6:6, those who are being taught God's Word are to support teachers of God's Word. Paul goes to the heart of the matter for he well knows that the truth sets men and women free. Truth taught by able men and women to diligent "students" will prevail against any heresy, regardless of how well funded, how well organized, or

how popular. Only those who are ignorant of satan's devices can be fooled by such devices.

The circumstances surrounding the Christian at the time Paul wrote Galatians are not all that different than those faced by the Christian today. Jerusalem as a center of authority has been replaced by synods, denominations, and hierarchical structures of all kinds. And, the primary relationship inherent in all hierarchical structures is the relationship of "superior and subordinate" rather than "teacher and student". One difference between a teacher and a "superior" seems to be the reality that a "superior" always remains a "superior" whereas a teacher's desire is that the student ultimately becomes "superior" to him in knowledge.

In first century Judaism, the minimum requirement for starting a synagogue was ten members, sufficient to establish an "authority". Jesus Christ, however, did away with this requirement by saying, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20). Jesus Christ is the "authority" and therefore the minimum size "meeting" coincides with the minimum requirement for any "meeting", two people. (One person is not a "meeting" although it is also clear that Jesus Christ is our "authority", individually as well as collectively.)

Wherever the "authority" of the group replaces the "authority" of Jesus Christ, the function of teaching is bound to suffer. And, it seems that the bigger the group, the more the function of teaching in the church suffers. In the largest denominations, the perception of "teacher" is either one who teaches at a seminary or a layman who teaches a "bible study" in the evening from a book of devotions after expending all his energy at a "job" that day. The concept of a well qualified teacher teaching the word of God to a group of two or six or ten people, and doing so on a full time basis in a community or from city to city is foreign to most Christians.

The experience of having someone come to town and teach like Paul did in Troas (Acts 20:7-12), from dinner time to midnight, with time out to raise a young man from the dead, and then continue to teach until day break, should be closer to the norm in the Christian church, rather than to the exception. The church of Jesus Christ has had two thousand years to build on Paul's example, but it seems that James' example has been the one that has caught the public's eye. We would do well to expect "a Paul" to come to our community and teach all night long. Well can we imagine being in the room where Paul taught and watching the young man fall asleep and then fall three stories to his death. We are not told how many disciples were gathered together in the house in Troas. Certainly it was not hundreds or thousands that got together to eat dinner and hear Paul teach in some believers home in Troas. Perhaps there were ten, perhaps thirty people. They need not have been the only Christians around. But, in any event, their lives were all changed that night. They were already Christians. But, the power of God that was seen in raising Eutychus from the dead would have caused the things that Paul taught for perhaps twelve hours not to be soon forgotten.

We are told in I Cor. 2:5 that our faith should not stand in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. This certainly does not mean that we need not study or learn God's word. And, it cannot mean that teachers in the church are unimportant and unworthy of our support. They certainly should be supported. The problem in the Corinthian church was not that people were taught too much of the word of God. The problem was that they magnified the messenger rather than the message. Factions developed over which teacher should be followed. Some said, "I'm of Paul", others "I'm of Apollos", etc.. Such attitudes caused strife, envy and divisions, and Paul tells these people that they are carnal and walk as men (I Cor. 3:1-23). I submit that this problem is best solved by more and more teachers, not by less and less.

A similar situation exists in the church today. Some say, "I'm a Lutheran", others, "I'm a Catholic", etc.. Jesus Christ is not divided and He gives all for the benefit of the believer. I submit that one effective way to overcome such factionalism is to encourage the function of teaching in the church. This can be done by individual Christians from various church groups, as well as those Christians not associated with any group, meeting in private homes in small groups for bible study and supporting individual teachers. Such "independent" bible studies with "independent" teachers need not have any "authority" superimposed over the authority of Jesus Christ. Let's face it, some people love to study and could spend their whole life

in a library or searching out men and women who have knowledge in certain areas that few study. Why not encourage them to do so by supporting them? Are we afraid that they might become our "superiors"? Or, do we feel that no need exists for such activity? It seems to me that few teachers of God's Word would be offended by being perceived as "errand boys", chasing down answers to questions, moderating discussions, and being "servants" to those who would love to know the answers but don't particularly love to wade through books or pursue "hunches". We readily pay for someone to fill up our cars with gasoline. Why not have the same attitude towards a "fill up" of God's Word?

In small groups of friends meeting in homes, there need be no corporate assets to worry about. There need be no buildings to be maintained. And, the legitimate functions of community churches need not be threatened by such bible studies. If they are threatened, it is only because a knowledge of the Word of God will be more generally known and, like the Sanhedrin being against the apostles in the early part of Acts, the churches will be faced with the option of conforming to the Word of God or resisting God's Word. Without such bible study, the individual has little choice but to conform to the church or the community or withdraw from them. Withdrawing is not the answer. The Christian needs to reestablish the truth in his church and community, not withdraw from them.

Practical Considerations on Learning

From a practical point of view, there are a number of things to consider when it comes to teaching and learning the word of God. First of all, there is probably not an educator in the world who will disagree that overshadowing any other factor in education is class size. In retail sales, the axiom is that three factors control: Location, Location, Location. In education, these are: Class size, Class size, Class size. Traditional Christianity is prone to think that "bigger is better" and churches strive for ever larger memberships. And, large groups are wonderful, at least for singing, and the enthusiasm that goes along with seeing hundreds or thousands of smiling faces that have similar interests. But, in such a setting, learning much of the word of God is not possible. The best that can be hoped for is a lecture format with no questions, no discussion, and no intimate knowledge of "where the student is coming from" by the teacher. Such a format is among the least effective in education.

Some educators go so far as to say that the less the teacher teaches, the more the student learns. And, in a sense it is true, especially when it comes to students in whom the spirit of God dwells. Questions, comments, suggestions, "speculation" as to possible meanings on the part of the student make a "bible class" a unique forum for learning God's word. And, the teacher who considers himself a "facilitator of learning" rather than an "expert" who dares not be questioned, will grow as much as the student in such a class. Such classes need to be encouraged and promoted in the body of Christ.

The opposite end of the spectrum from meetings with hundreds or thousands is individual study, such as reading the bible, reading this book, listening to a tape, or looking at a videotape. Such activities are certainly helpful and beneficial. But, they also are not a substitute for a teacher in a class setting. And, although there are adults that cringe at the word "class", for one reason or another, the word does imply a certain regimentation both on the part of the teacher and the student. The subject matter is identified, requirements are expected both of the students and the teacher, and a goal is stated at the start of a "class" and its achievement expected at the conclusion of the class. Such a format is ideally suited for bible study groups meeting in homes. And, whether a particular "class" is one day long or one year, the members of the bible study can decide what subjects they want to address, what form is best suited for the study, and to what extent the subject should be addressed. For those who do not like the word "class", "seminar" or other similar words define the same thing. The label is not important, the activity is!

Too often in "bible study", the time goes by without the bible being studied. The time becomes merely "visiting". Those who come to such a meeting thinking that the bible will be revealed to them end up being disappointed. I submit that this problem is solved by "a teacher" who is responsible for seeing that the meeting "starts" on time (and finishes on time). "Visiting" can happen before and/or after but the urgency is placed on learning God's Word rather than "putting in time" or "showing up for a meeting".

I fully believe that there are more qualified teachers in the body of Christ (that are currently doing other

things) than there are bible studies at which to teach (because Christianity has not placed near enough emphasis on bible study). When we realize that Christianity undoubtedly has more members and is more powerful than any other "organization" in the world today, because Jesus Christ is the head of it and He was given all power in heaven and in earth, our expectation will rise when we ask a teacher, however well known, to come and teach on a subject dear to his heart and in need of being learned by those in a bible study. The Lord knows how many He has that will travel land and sea for the opportunity to teach His word, just as Paul did. And, like Paul, many will come to spend a day, a week, six months or three years if need be. These people should not be held to a different standard than any other believer in the body of Christ. Nor should it take hundreds or thousands of people to pay their expenses or provide for their personal needs.

To emphasize the importance of "class size", allow me to give a personal example. Years ago I had the opportunity to teach a high school math class in western Ohio. The course was for ninth graders who basically did not like math. When I first walked into the room and saw thirty pair of blank eyes staring at me and dreading the coming hour in which they would have to suffer through a subject that intimidated them on the one hand and offended them on the other, I was at a loss to answer the question that came to my mind, "how do I get all these kids to love math?" For, love is the most powerful force in the world and people will do what they love to do. However, I felt as if I were holding a shotgun loaded with math formulas to be scattered around the room in the hopes that one or two "bullets" would hit one or two of the students. In the semester that I had with them, I did the best I could and undoubtedly some of them did learn some math. However, to this day, I am convinced that had I had five students, or seven students, instead of thirty, I could have gotten all of them to love math.

So I believe it is with bible study. While it may be a chore to attend a bible study with thirty people, it becomes an event not to be missed when five or seven "friends" get together (or two or three) and when they all love the subject they are studying together. Love never fails! And, the miracles, the provision, and the "neat little things" that God sends their way during the week become a feast for all to share when they meet. In such an environment, learning is truly an exciting adventure and learning God's word especially so because God confirms His word with signs following (Acts 14:3). If five such bible studies met on consecutive evenings in a community, they could easily pool their resources and invite the foremost expert in the world to come and teach on a subject for two or three hours a night for a week. It seems to me that relatively few teachers would prefer lecturing to hundreds or thousands of "spectators" rather than sharing information with five or ten "hungry" students. Most, I believe, prefer small groups. And, such teachers thrive on the realization that our faith dwells in the power of God rather than the wisdom of men. As Emerson wrote, "Love, courage, piety and wisdom can teach and these angels will bring to man the gift of tongues. But, the man that endeavors to teach as books enable, as synods dictate and as the fashion guides, babbles. Let him hush!"

One final point on the practical necessity of teachers functioning in the body of Christ. The average cost per student in the public school systems in America today is around \$6,000 per year. Of that amount, well over half goes to places other than the teachers salary. In many schools, the average class size is about 30 students which means \$180,000 going somewhere (certainly not in the teachers pocket). The churches in America today function with much the same inefficiency as money is spent on virtually everything except teachers of God's Word. It has been recently stated that the largest expenditure in Christianity today is to banks, for interest on money borrowed. Evidently, more money is spent on interest than is spent on all of mission work in the world. If this be true, Paul's instruction in Gal. 6:6 stands in vivid contrast to such reality.

Many able teachers of God's Word are forced by the necessity of feeding a family to work full time jobs and teach when they have time (which all too frequently ends up with their not teaching at all). I know of many such teachers. They are not people who were saved six months ago and want to teach. They are people who have been studying their bibles for twenty years or more. Many are repulsed by the thought of starting an organization to support them. Such a method usually ends up with a thousand people supporting one man and then tying him down to tend to the affairs of the organization. He ceases to be a teacher and becomes an administrator. Instead of "freely ye have received, freely give" (Matt. 10:8), the

concept of working for a wage creeps in and the very life of the church is perverted. Others worry that if gifts are given to an individual teacher to support him or her directly, rather than being filtered through an acceptable board or organizational structure, that the teacher will become rich and waste God's money. The few examples of such extravagance by "preachers" in the body of Christ are hardly comparable to the extravagance of many others inside the church and outside the church as well. Teachers of God's Word do not appear to be a financial threat to world markets.

It also seems to me that much more trust is required in a man to not "handle the word of God deceitfully" (II Cor. 4:2) than is required in trusting him with a gift. And, overriding all other considerations is the reality that if gifts are filtered through a board or an organization before being given to a teacher, the teaching will be filtered as well. I believe that Christianity would benefit much more by having independent and "cross-denominational" teachers and independent teaching than by having dependent teachers who can be coerced into conformity and who in turn may coerce the local bible study into conformity. The Word of God needs to prevail, not necessarily a group or organization. The power of God needs to be manifested, not the power of men. I submit that this is effectively encouraged by individual believers giving to individual teachers as Paul instructs in Galatians 6:6.

Observations on the Church Since Paul

The past few years have seen much scandal in the church, especially among T.V. evangelists. But, more than ever before, believers are calling themselves "Christian" rather than Lutheran, Catholic, or other denominational names. More than ever before, people are seeing that they are members of the body of Christ, not merely members of a particular group or sect.

The damage done to Christ's Church by the infamous or wicked deeds of its members, is easily healed. Jesus Christ is the head of that church, His body, and consequently, it heals rapidly. However, wounds in Christian organizations or churches that rely on men rather than relying solely on Jesus Christ seem to never heal. The seeds of death seem to be in the start of them all.

These churches or organizations seem to start for a worthy purpose, but as time goes by, they seem invariably to be perceived as bigger than life. Instead of being a vehicle of service, they become masters that demand service to them. Instead of faith being made possible by love, they promote obedience by fear. Such is not the method of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Since the Apostle Paul wrote, "Now we have received the spirit which is of God, that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God", innumerable people have had their lives changed by the power of God. Their works, the miracles and deliverance they've seen, the blessing they have been to their neighbors and enemies, are largely unknown. Nor is it necessary for us to know. God knows.

We do know that the church of the body of Christ is, and has been, alive and well. It has been established by Jesus Christ himself and not by man. The churches that men have established have come and gone and have no lasting or sacred value. Cooperative effort is needful, and helpful, in many areas. But the tendency in all cooperative effort, including churches, is for the pride of man to dominate.

Group decisions are seldom superior to individual decisions, despite what secular educators may propound. The world's failed experiment with communism over the past seventy five years shows the lifelessness of group planning and committee implementation. God did not make us so that we could hide behind "the will of the group". He made us so that we could be, not conformed to this world, but transformed by the renewing of our minds so that we can prove what is the good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God (Rom. 12:2). That "proving" is an individual effort, not a group effort.

With group effort, man's accomplishments begin to be magnified instead of the accomplishments of Jesus Christ being promoted. Man's power, wealth, and wisdom are respected instead of God's power, wealth and wisdom. Many times, man holds on to that which is seen, and is temporal, when he should be holding on to that which is not seen, and is eternal. When conflict arises in a Christian group, the response should be controlled by what God's Word says rather than an overriding concern to keep the group together.

Solutions achieved by way of appeasement and compromise result in dead churches. They have a form of godliness but deny the power of God. The Word of God is forced to the side and ceases to be the center of reference for truth. The bible becomes worshiped as a relic rather than studied as a vital necessity. In such churches, those who do not bother to study the scripture are given equal status in group discussions with those who do, and their comments and insights are given equal weight. Nothing could be more damaging to the Christian life.

Opinions, suggestions, questions are wonderful when they are based on a sincere desire to know the Word of God. They are tragic when they are only offered as a "smoke screen" to hide a lack of interest in what God has to say. Such a state of affairs exists all too frequently in the vast majority of "Christian Churches" today. In such situations, The Book, the Word of God, can only be discussed through a filter of unbelief. Little, if any, discovery of God's Will can be achieved in such an environment. No one would seriously discuss any other book with someone who had not taken the time to read it. It is one thing to have little knowledge and desire more. It is quite another to have little knowledge and pretend to be an "expert". Examination of any other book would soon expose the pretenders. The church should hold itself to the same objective standard in the study of God's Word. Ignorant speculation leads nowhere.

On the other hand, serious speculation based on previous knowledge and a desire to know more is often helpful. A Chemistry Professor once answered my "why" question with the statement, "The real question in Chemistry is What, not Why". The "Why's" may help to fit the "what's" together and may lead to major discoveries, but they are not a substitute for knowing the "what's". So also, the "what's" of the Word of God are the foundation upon which the "why's" must be built.

A man I knew became a Christian late in life and began to vigorously study his bible. His habit in his retirement years was to visit the race track every day and his friends there began asking him questions regarding his new found Christianity. Over time, he realized that their motive was not a desire to know about God but rather to see if they could talk him out of his faith. Their questions bothered him for some time until he discovered a proper response. When confronted one day, he responded that he considered it an amazing thing that they wanted to know the plays and they weren't even on the team. He said, "get on the team, and then we will talk about the plays." His problem was solved.

Jesus Christ told the saducees, "Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God." (Matt. 22:29). The "measuring stick" in any Christian group must be these same two vital needs. How much of the scripture is known? How much of the power of God is manifested? If the Christians in the world today would ask themselves these two questions, over and over as they go through life, a godly revolution would ensue. Some of the groups they associate with would have to change or else the people would associate with different groups.

A case can be made that the body of Christ exists in spite of worldly churches, not because of them. Where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. Where the spirit of man is, there is bondage. The fight is between the two. Paul says in Ephesians that we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against spiritual wickedness. The spiritual food of the Word of God and the visible reality of God's power are mandatory if the fight against spiritual wickedness is to be won.

James in Retrospect

I have attempted to show the contrast in the early church between what Paul stood for and what James stood for. My desire has not been to furnish a work that is so complete and so thorough that no questions remain on the subject. Rather, it has been to open a debate that starts with God's Word and ends with a practical application of God's Word to our lives. The size and extensiveness of the first century church should open our eyes and raise our expectations. The conflict in that church should alert us to similar conflicts today. The extent to which the power of God was visibly seen should cause us to pray for more boldness to speak God's Word as we see His power today.

It is clear that by 49 A.D., James, the brother of Jesus, was the head of the Jerusalem church. It is also clear from the Gospels that James resisted Jesus Christ. Any investigation of James must proceed from

Jesus words, "The world cannot hate you, but me it hateth because I testify of it that the works thereof are evil." Those who would defend James must proceed from what the scripture says about him and not from an assumption that he must have been a godly man doing God's work because three hundred years later the book of James was added to the cannon of Scripture. Many, many Christians that lived from the time of the start of the church age until 367 A.D. recognized that the letter of James was not God's Word. We need not feel intimidated in agreeing with them simply because sixteen hundred years have gone by in which the book of James has been silently accepted as "Gospel" (in spite of its many contradictions with Paul's epistles). James was party to wanting to put Jesus away because he thought Jesus was crazy. He was not chosen by Jesus to be an apostle, nor was he was chosen by the eleven to take Judas' place in the ten days between the Ascension and Pentecost. The record in Galatians 1 does not show that James was an apostle, but shows the opposite when the translation is investigated closely. The record in I Corinthians 15:7 does not say that James was an apostle. It merely say that James saw Jesus Christ after His resurrection, but does not say anything other than that. James also saw Jesus Christ many times before the resurrection and yet Jesus points out that James did not believe in Him.

The Scripture does not say that James was converted or was not converted. In fact, the debate is not over whether he was converted or not converted. Like many today, James could well have received the spirit of God and then chose to walk by the flesh rather than by the spirit. Where James will end up in God's scheme of things, God knows. That must be sufficient for us regarding his salvation. However, the Gospels, the book of Acts, and Paul's epistles reveal much about James and the Jerusalem church as does the book of James itself. We certainly should consider this information in our evaluation of James.

One author I read years ago made a case that, after the events of Revelation, in the "eon of the eons", God will reconcile all to himself. He stated that even satan would be reconciled to God. And, my thought after reading that was, "that would be just like God"! Paul seems to be saying the same thing in Ephesians 1:10, "That in the dispensation (administration) of the fullness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are in earth: even in Him."

Some will say that no one would be saved if such a position was taught. It is true that people could not be scared into salvation and perhaps many pews in churches would be empty. But, fear has never been a vehicle of salvation anyway. It may gain and keep converts to a man made organization, but the only method Jesus Christ ever used was love. He said, "I will draw all men unto me" (Jn. 12:32). And so, what will become of James, God knows. And that must be sufficient for us.

What About the Book of James?

The most unsettling question raised by this investigation of James is, "If James' rise to the head of the Jerusalem church is not godly, then what about the book of James in the New Testament? Is it God's Word or is it not?" In other words, did James receive revelation from God to write what he did, or are the words of James his alone and of no higher authority. There is no dispute that James, the brother of Jesus, wrote the letter of James. Although I do not claim to be an authority on the canon of Scripture, the evidence from those who are shows that as of the end of the second century (from the Muratorian fragment) the four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, 13 Epistles of Paul, two epistles of John, the Epistle of Jude, the Apocalypse of John and the Apocalypse of Peter were acknowledged as New Testament.

During the third century, the influence of Origen encouraged a wider Canon. Even so, he expressed hesitation about some of the books later included- specifically, James, II Peter and II and III John. It was not until the fourth century that the Canon assumed its present form. At the beginning of that century, there was still much uncertainty (see the works of Eusebius). The canon which finally won acceptance first appears in the 39th Festal Letter of Athanasius in 367 A.D. That is more than three hundred years after the book of Acts was written! Many, many Christians for the first three hundred years of the church age understood that the book of James was not God's Word. If we say the same today, we are not offending them or doing injustice to the Word of God they recognized. We are only pointing out that the organized church of the forth century was wrong in accepting the epistle of James as God's Word.

As we have mentioned briefly, the farthest we can go back in history regarding a Canon of Scripture, is to

Marcion. His was the first Canon and he was evidently excommunicated by the church in Rome in 140 A.D.. He excluded from his cannon everything except the Gospel of Luke, The Acts of the Apostles (because Luke traveled with Paul) and Paul's writings. Most writers on the Canon of Scripture refer to Marcion as "The Heretic Marcion", as if Heretic is his first name. However, Harnack makes a case that he is the Father of the Roman Catholic church!

In any event, the question of whether the book of James was authored by God or merely by James, cannot be decided, to the spirit-filled Christian's satisfaction, by a council meeting three hundred years after the events recorded in Acts. The record of Acts itself must decide. If this is not sufficient, then the information in Paul's Epistles and the book of Luke should be searched as these books have never been disputed as to God's authorship- they are the earliest Canon.

The Question of Authority

This work is not meant to be of merely academic interest. The practical question that is as applicable today as it has been throughout the last two thousand years, is "Who decides?". It is a question of authority. We are either complete in Jesus Christ or we are not complete. If we are complete in Him, then the "Authorities" in the church are only "Helpers" and not "Superiors". The distinction is of critical importance. We are either responsible to God for our actions or we are responsible to some "Higher Authority" who is responsible to God.

We see this distinction clearly in the contrast between Paul and James. Paul never declared himself as Head of the church and there is no evidence in any of his writings that he considered any Christian superior to any other Christian. He continually points to Jesus Christ as the Head of the Church. He does mention Bishops and Deacons, but only on a local level and that for service, not for establishing a hierarchy.

Ephesians 4:11 does list apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. But again, these are not hierarchical in nature but are for service- for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ. Some have called these "Gift Ministries" as though they are special gifts given to some people that make them superior to other people. The text in Ephesians will not substantiate such a teaching. Verse seven tells us that God has given to every one of us GRACE- according to the MEASURE OF THE GIFT OF CHRIST. None have received less than a full measure.

Verse eleven does not say, "And He gave some the Gift Ministry of an Apostle..." It says, "And He gave some, apostles..." In other words, apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers are gifts given to the church rather than being "special gifts" given to an individual. The gift resides in the blessing manifested as these people function in the body of Christ. If they do not function, the church does not receive the benefit. It seems quite possible to me that the questions asked in I Cor. 12:29, 30, "Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Have all the gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?" could be answered with an emphatic YES! While this is not the place to discuss I Cor. 12, 13, and 14 in detail, it is a fact that the questions above are a matter of interpretation by the translators. They could as well be translated "All apostles. All prophets. All workers of miracles. All have the gifts of healing. All do speak with tongues. All do interpret." Or, as a matter of interpretation we could say, "All can be apostles. All can be prophets. All can be workers of miracles. All can have the gifts of healing. All can speak with tongues. All can interpret." The point is that there is nothing about the ministries of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers that make them superior to any others in the body of Christ. The service they perform is certainly unique. But, such service is not superior to any other Christian's activity as a servant of Jesus Christ. Understanding the "gift ministries" in this light should cause us to encourage one another to do more and more rather than to magnify some and set them on a pedestal while at the same time instilling in others a feeling of "not measuring up".

The statement of Ephesians 4:11 that God gives to some apostles, to some prophets, to some evangelists, to some pastors and to some teachers should cause us to expect their arrival when we need them. In other words, to some believers are sent apostles, when they need them (especially when they want them and ask

for them). Some are given teachers, when they need them (especially when they want them and ask for them). If local Christians feel they are lacking in help, their proper response should be to ask God (and/or ask the person they feel can help them). Many times we do not receive simply because we do not ask.

The picture seen in Ephesians 4 is one of God providing local fellowships and individual Christians with everything they need, when they need it. If an individual or group needs a teacher, God will send a teacher. If he, or they, needs a prophet, God will send a prophet. The picture seen in Ephesians 4 is not a picture of God providing a special gift to an individual so he or she can be an apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor or teacher and then gather people under him to control! We are all servants. Jesus Christ is the master. We are complete in Him, who is the Head, Jesus Christ! We can learn, grow, become more effective, by that which "every joint supplieth" (Eph. 4:16) but are not to be "brought under the power of any" (I Cor. 6:12).

The question of "authority" in the church is answered by the realization that Jesus Christ was given, and still has, all power in heaven and in earth. The established churches in the world seem to confuse the authority of Jesus Christ with the authority of men. Somehow, the very genuine and good attitudes of honor and respect get corrupted in many churches and obedience to a man or men is the result. Instead of being followers of Jesus Christ, many seem to become followers of followers and their unique position in the body of Christ is compromised.

It is the supreme joy in life to see people thrill in the knowledge of God's Word. It is the height of sorrow to see them brought back under bondage. The issue is "authority". The advantage that Christians have is in having Jesus Christ as head of the church. They can bring every thought captive to Christ. They can rest in His Peace and can work with others in the body of Christ as fellow heirs.

Every member of this body can reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. They need not wait for blessings to flow through "channels" to get to them. Blessings do not come from man. They come from God! We may not fully appreciate what devastation and destruction man made organizations can effect. But, in many cases, they certainly do. They can spread lies and hatred much faster and farther than one objecting member can spread reproof and correction. Paul's experience in Jerusalem shows that fact.

Teachers and Students, Time and Money: Part II

When Paul says in Gal. 6:6 that those who are taught the Word should support those who teach the Word, his advice is much bigger than "give to get" or "you owe me" or "you can't be blessed if you don't tithe". Such statements are totally bankrupt and belong in front of a circus tent, not in the church of God. We love God because He first loved us. (I Jn 4:10-11). Any other motive for our actions, other than being overwhelmed and thankful for God's love toward us, is doomed to fail. These motives will result in deception, lies, and every evil work. They will never result in God's blessings being "poured out".

We do not work for rewards. We work because we have already received the greatest reward of all, Jesus Christ died for us! The Christian is instructed to "labor, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth." (Eph. 4:28). In other words, the Christians goal in life should be to give as much as he can in as many ways as he can rather than to accumulate wealth. Our motive is not "give to get" but rather "work to give". Our motive must be love if we are to reap love's benefits. It is absurd to see churches with thousands of members supporting one or two or three teachers.

On the basis of the Old Testament tithe, ten believers should be able to support one teacher. This certainly is an extreme position to many, but it allows the other extreme to be put in perspective. We have no danger in the Christian church of having an overpopulation of teachers of God's Word. We also have no danger from the prospect of too much money being given to the work of the ministry of reconciliation. The danger clearly lies on the other end of the spectrum, too few willing to teach and too few willing to give financially. And, which is the more scarce is a debatable question, not to mention teachers who are tied up with administration and money that is wasted or given to things that do not profit.

We are clearly not under any kind of compulsion to give even one dime. However, love's answer to Old

Testament compulsion goes far beyond it, not beneath it. In the early church "the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and one soul: neither said any of them that ought which he possessed was his own" (Acts 4:32). Their attitude went far beyond the tithe to the realization that as servants of Jesus Christ everything they possessed belonged to Him. The Christian's question is not "How much SHOULD I give?" but "How much CAN I give?". With this frame of reference we will look for ways and resources to give more rather than measuring how we are doing by some "law of giving" and the size of our bank accounts. Implied in our willing acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord is the reality that our resources are His as well as our lives. We are stewards of our resources rather than owners of them. If giving based on such an understanding was practiced extensively in the church today, God's Word could well revolutionize the world again as it did in the first century (without a revolution).

In many churches, ninety percent of the people give ten percent of the money and ten percent of the people give ninety percent of the money (and, it is not necessarily the wealthiest who give the most). The net result is that the ninety percent want a say and a vote on the spending of the money and only serve to hold down the ten percent who desire to do all they can to be proper servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. The ninety percent will readily voice their objection that we are not under the Old Testament tithe. And, they are technically correct. The members of the body of Christ are not compelled, by God, to give one dime. But, if the motive behind the objection aims at "saving money" and not giving, then these people should practice giving twenty percent of their income, or thirty per cent, and then talk about tithing. Motive, in financial giving as in everything else, is all important. Any motive other than love must fail to promote a knowledge of the scripture and the power of God. Love wins. Compulsion does not win but only instills fear. And, fear brings a snare.

God's Word could well prevail to an extent not known since the first century if the ninety percent of the people in the churches that do not give as they should were preempted from hiding behind an "organization" by the ten percent giving at least a part of their gifts directly to a teacher or teachers of God's Word. As one author pointed out, "There are a thousand hacking at the branches of evil for every one striking at the root." I submit that giving directly to teachers of God's Word is one effective way to strike at the root of evil. It seems to clearly be Paul's method in his advice of Gal. 6:6. The love of money is the root of all evil (I Tim. 6:10). The love of God is the only way to overcome this evil. Money must somehow be obtained and used within the church today. But, if it is only given to a church and then used by the church to control the actions and teaching of a pastor or teacher, that church will soon find out that what is presented is only what it wants to hear and not necessarily what it needs to hear.

Some will argue that a teacher cannot be trusted to receive "offerings" without the oversight of a church or non-profit organization of some kind. To respond to such a position it should first be pointed out that "offerings", like tithes, are not the standard for the church age. Both tithes and offerings imply a duty, a payment, an obligation. We do take on duties, accept responsibilities, and assume obligations just about every day of our lives. But, these are different from the New Testament concept of "freely ye have received, freely give" (Matt. 10:8). We buy a house, take a job, assume a mortgage. In all of them there is a benefit received for the commitment of our time and money. Likewise, we become members of a church so our children can go to Sunday school and we can enjoy the many benefits of the church being in the community. We make a commitment of money to sustain these benefits as well. But, Christian giving starts where no benefit is expected. The churchgoer who thinks he is "giving" when his "offerings" are not even his fair share for the services he receives, deceives himself.

Giving begins after such services are paid for. Giving to a teacher or missionary sent out from the church, is one example of proper giving. No direct benefit is expected. A "sharing in the labor" is the attitude of such giving. And, if the money given for such work is given directly to the man or woman, rather than to the church and then from the church to the teacher or missionary, it is much more likely that all the money will get to them rather than a part being taken out for "expenses" or "overhead". It seems much more reasonable to trust that God will direct the teacher or missionary rather than to hold them accountable to a board of deacons or elders as inevitably happens if the money flows from the church instead of from individuals directly. If for no other reason, such direct giving disallows the perception that "the church" is supporting missionary work and encourages the perception that individual members in the

body of Christ support other members in the body of Christ. Our strength is not in numbers but in the power of God. The common "worry" over teachers misspending "God's money" should be of no more concern than "worrying" over any Christian's misuse of the resources that God has given him.

It is the unbeliever who chortles and clamors for retribution when a self-proclaimed "preacher" is found guilty of fraud or other misuse of money. Meanwhile, the unbeliever does far worse himself. We should not be discouraged from giving to Christian causes because of the chortling of the unbeliever.

Paul says in Philippians 4:17, "Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account." Some who read that may say, "Sure Paul wanted a gift, why would he be asking otherwise?" I believe Paul truly did not want a gift. I believe he would have preferred to earn his own livelihood. And, at times he did, for it is true that "it is more blessed to give than to receive." (Acts 20:35). Everyone knows that in their heart of hearts. When we help someone, we feel far better than when someone helps us. But, teachers of God's Word have to live, just like everyone else, and that requires money. The Christian should not hold teachers to a different standard than he holds himself.

Many people buy new cars when the old one would do. Some people are not satisfied with a teacher of God's Word unless he is walking. Such an attitude is the cause of a dismal lack of knowledge of the Word of God within many churches today. Many Christians expect God's teachers to provide for their own needs and then wonder why there are so few teachers available to teach. They are all busy providing for themselves and their families! The church gets the "left overs". This should not be. It hinders "fruit" abounding to the Christians account.

On the other hand, many people in denominational churches will say, "we have a full time pastor." But, they have, many times, so "locked up" the pastor that he is not free to teach either. If the church owns the pastors home, his car, and pays him a minimal salary, how free is he to teach? If he discovers a concept that has been misunderstood, can he dare to teach it if such teaching is unpopular, even though it is the truth? Few men will risk the well-being of their families to stand against a recalcitrant congregation that desperately needs to change it's ways. In such a situation, the pastor is as effectively chained down as the bible teacher who works a full time job and belongs to no denominational church.

The church of the body of Christ needs to address the issue of giving. And, it needs to confront it head on. I submit that one way to do so is to support individual teachers. I fully believe that if such direct giving is practiced, once again men and women who have that special talent to search out and teach God's Word will be able to do so, without the shackles of a board of deacons or a superior to whom they must give account or starve. Once again, the believer can show a teacher "the Way of God more perfectly", as did Aquila and Priscilla in Acts 18:26 to Apollos, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, without fear of being ostracized by the "congregation". Correction has little chance of succeeding in large groups whereas in small groups, error and misunderstandings can readily be "worked out".

The individual is responsible to God for his time and his money. How he spends both is of vital interest to Christianity. Jesus Christ did come that we might have life and have it more abundantly (John 10:10). But, withholding money from God's teachers, and then pointing at them and saying "get your believing up" is the height of hypocrisy. Such action will not make known the life that Jesus Christ came to establish. Nor will magnifying "Our Teacher" make known the life that Jesus Christ came to establish. Only providing "shoe leather" for the feet of those who teach the Gospel of Peace will do. Such, I believe, is the intent behind Paul's instruction in Galatians 6:6, "Let him that is taught in the Word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things."

In Conclusion

As there were "Two Ways" in the first century church, so also there are "Two Ways" today. We choose who we will serve, and the choice is critical. We either allow ourselves to be brought back into bondage or we continue in the grace of God to the best of our ability. Only one way leads to a rich and full life of being blessed and being a blessing. Only one way allows us to develop our abilities to their maximum potential. Only one way equips us to see through the subtle snares that can so easily beguile. Jesus Christ

said to Paul, "My grace is sufficient for thee". It must be sufficient for us as well.

The words in John 10:10 translated "more abundantly" are better translated "transcending abundance", or "above abundance" or "more than abundant", or "beyond abundance". Knoch translates it, "superabundantly". Moffatt says, "have it to the full". Part of that life is an active learning of "the ways and means" of Jesus Christ as Lord in our lives. The life that Jesus Christ came to make available was unknown to the world until the day of Pentecost. Teachers of God's Word who use John 10:10 to teach about a life of mere worldly abundance err. Jesus own words in Luke 12:15 make it very clear that a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesses. The abundance that Jesus Christ brought transcends "things" and "possessions". It consists of the love of God being shed abroad in our hearts by the holy spirit (Rom. 5:5).

The book of Acts clearly demonstrates that the Christian can live a life filled with miracles, filled with joy, and filled with purpose. It is true that "man wants not so much something to have, but something to do, and above that, something to be." In Christ all three are fulfilled. We are a new creation in Christ Jesus (II Cor. 5:17), we are called to the ministry of reconciling men and women to God (II Cor. 5:18), and we are given the Word of reconciliation with which to accomplish this worthy task (II Cor. 5:19). And God is able to make all grace abound to us so that we can always have all sufficiency in all things and be able to abound to every good work (II Cor. 9:8).

The Christians primary work is to reconcile men and women to God rather than reconciling men to each other. God will reconcile men to each other when they are reconciled to Him. The work of reconciling men to God only begins at salvation. Many questions remain in the "new" Christians mind after salvation. Many erroneous concepts remain to be changed to bring the person to the full realization the God is at peace with him and will never leave him nor forsake him (Heb. 13:5). This growth process is best facilitated in small local fellowships rather than big meetings. The life of the church is at its most vital in such meetings where friends can help one another accomplish their goals, their ambitions, their hearts desires and answer their questions from the Word of God rather than from "man's wisdom". It is primarily in these independent bible studies where the Word of God can become and remain the center and focal point of the Christian life. Such bible studies cannot help but to revitalize local churches and local communities as more and more of God's Word is known.

Jesus Christ came that we could have a life that was never known before. He made available a life that overshadowed man's concern with mere abundance. As Adolf Harnack said in the close of his book, "The Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries", "Christianity was a religion which proclaimed the living God, for whom man was made. It brought men life and knowledge, unity and multiplicity, the known and the unknown. Born of the spirit, it soon learnt to consecrate the earthly. To the simple it was simple, to the sublime, sublime." May God's Word prevail in our lives so that this life which we have in Christ Jesus our Lord may be seen and read of all men. To God be the glory, great things He has done. I am thrilled that He loves me! Even so, Lord, quickly come!



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