

Why Paul?

In the seventh chapter of the book of Acts, the persecution of the fledgling Christian church had reached a climax with the stoning to death of Stephen. At the end of that chapter, and the beginning of chapter eight, we see a new figure arise on the scene, Saul, who **“was consenting unto his (Stephen’s) death”** (verse 1), and had apparently taken the lead in the persecution of the church. In chapter nine, while on the way with orders to arrest some of these Christians in Damascus, Saul has his famous meeting with the Lord:

“And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do. And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man. And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus.” (Acts 9:3-8) (KJV)

Saul is taken into Damascus to the house of a man named Ananias, regains his sight, is told that he will bear the Lord’s name **“before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel...and straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God”** (verse 20). This confounded the Jews there in Damascus, and they sought to kill him. Some of the disciples helped him to escape to Jerusalem where he is shunned by all but a disciple named Barnabas, who gets him accepted by the leadership (Peter, James and John - see Gal. 2:9). He continues his preaching there, fomenting another assassination plot against him, and flees to Caesarea and then Tarsus (verses 23-30). At this point he disappears and Peter, who had dominated the first 7 chapters of the Acts, appears back on the Scene, and Saul disappears. In chapter 11 he reappears with Barnabas in Antioch where they spend the next year teaching among the brethren there. In chapter 13 he and Barnabas are separated by the Holy Ghost from the other disciples, **“for the work whereunto I have called them,** and his name is changed from Saul to Paul. From this point on he dominates the rest of the Acts (we only hear from Peter, who had been the prominent figure through the first twelve chapters, one other time in chapter 15).

The question must arise in the inquiring mind: “why has this fellow, Saul (Paul), suddenly taken such a prominent role in things during this tumultuous period of time for the early church?” Since he was never in the scheme of things from the beginning, and it was Peter who was given the **“keys of the kingdom”** (Matt. 16:19), where does he fit into all this? Traditional Christian theology offers at least a couple of stock answers to these questions : 1. He was the true replacement for the betrayer, Judas, or the “true” 12th apostle; 2. He was the apostle who would take the gospel (the same message being preached by the 12) to the Gentiles, or the “13th” apostle. While there is no scriptural truth whatsoever in the first assertion,¹ there is in the idea of him being sent to the Gentiles; chapter nine, verse 15 makes this clear. This stance goes astray, however, by presupposing that Paul would be taking the same gospel message to the Gentiles that Peter and the other disciples in the Jerusalem church were preaching to Israel. This is based on the fact that he started out preaching what he later referred to as **“the gospel of God** (Romans 1:1-4): that Jesus was

¹ Judas was replaced by Matthias (who had fulfilled the requirement of having been in company with the disciples during the Lord’s three year ministry), through the Old Testament practice of casting lots (about 16 references to this practice in the O.T.), which was absolutely in order. This was of necessity to fulfill the requirement of having 12 apostles for 12 tribes (of Israel).

“**the Christ, the Son of the living God**” (Acts 9:20-22; Matt. 16:16). Apparently, it is assumed that, because he preached this, he also preached repentance and baptism for salvation (Acts 2:38), even though there is no written record that he did. In Acts 13 it is made evident that the apostle did, indeed, preach something quite different from the Acts 2 message.

The Acts 13 Separation, And The Gospel Of Christ

We find in Paul’s letter to the Galatians, the explanation for the apostle’s absence between Acts 9 and 11 (1:17,18). In chapter one of this letter Paul clearly establishes that during this absence he received a gospel that was “**not after man...but by the revelation of Jesus Christ**” (1:11,12), i.e., he was not taught it by the other apostles.² In the Acts we see this message emerge in chapter 13, when he and Barnabas get separated out from the other disciples by the Holy Ghost, “**...for the work whereunto I have called them.**” (verse 2). That work would be the preaching of the “**gospel of Christ**” (Romans 1:16), which is revealed in the sermon Paul preaches in Antioch:

“But he (Jesus) whom God raised again (from the dead), saw no corruption. Be it known to you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.” (Acts 13: 37-39).

Contrast this with what Peter preached at Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost:

“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye crucified, both Lord and Christ. Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their hearts, and said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do (to rectify this situation)? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. (Acts 2: 36-38)

First of all, Peter charges Israel with the crime of crucifying Jesus Christ, their Messiah. Paul charges those Jews and Gentiles he’s preaching to in Antioch with no such crime. Second, Peter’s remedy for this specific crime is to repent and get baptized (with/in water). This means, “admit you did it, and repent (show Godly sorrow for what you did); then, to seal the deal, get baptized.” (Notice that this is the very same prescription John the Baptist preached to Israel in Matthew 3 and Mark 1.) For those who did this the payoff is the gift of the Holy Ghost, which empowers them to produce the signs that “**shall follow them that believe**” (Mark 16:17), and to “**endure unto the end to be saved**” (Matt. 10:22). Since Paul charges no one with a crime, he therefore calls for no one to repent (or to be baptized - see 1 Cor. 1:17), but rather establishes the fact that their sins *are* forgiven, and, furthermore, anyone who is willing to believe this will be “justified from all things.” Whereas Peter is speaking of a temporary remission, which will only be in force so long as the believer continues (endures) in faith (Acts 2:42-46), Paul is offering his hearers a permanent pardon with no strings attached. He confirms this in Romans 3,4 and 5:

“Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the

² Certainly he was familiar with the gospel they preached.

prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God". (3:19-23)

"To him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." (4:4,5)

"Therefore, being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God." (5:1,2)

...and later on in the letter to the Ephesians:

"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast. (2:8,9)

The clear and consistent theme in all these passages is that salvation and justification cannot be obtained by works (the deeds of the law), but only by ceasing from such, and simply believing something, which is:

"...how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures....for our justification." (1 Corinthians 15:3,4; Romans 4:25)

All this together makes up what the Apostle referred to twelve times in his letters as, **"The gospel of Christ."** It is never referred to as such anywhere else in the New Testament, including the four "gospels," Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. There is a perfectly sound explanation for this: it could not have been revealed before Paul revealed it because he said it was a "mystery:"

The "Mystery"

"Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to *my gospel*,³ and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of *the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith.*" (Romans 16:25, 26)

If, as it clearly says in this passage, this gospel was kept a secret until revealed by Paul, it could not have been revealed by the Lord in his earthly ministry, or by the twelve apostles in the first part of the Acts. If it was revealed in those parts of scripture, then Paul is a liar and his letters need to be expunged from the canon of scripture. This would be the honest thing to do, rather than what the traditional religious teaching does in its attempt to "blend" Paul's revelation in with the New Testament/Covenant/Kingdom message given to the 12. The fact is, Paul's revelation isn't part of the New Testament, nor does it establish a N.T. church: It reveals and establishes a new dispensation wherein a "new man" is being formed.

³ Whenever Paul refers to "my gospel", he is referring to "the gospel of Christ," and by referring to it as his gospel establishes it as his exclusive message.

The Dispensation of Grace

“For this cause, I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, if ye have heard of *the dispensation of the grace of God*, which is given me to you-ward: how that by revelation he made known unto me the *mystery*....that the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel...(Ephesians 3:1-3;6)

The Gentiles are to be made *fellowheirs*, and partakers of his promise in Christ. This is not the case in the New Covenant, where the Gentile Nations will not be fellowheirs, but servants of Israel (see Isaiah 60,61,62; Jeremiah 31). Whereas the New Covenant promises an earthly inheritance, the promises of the dispensation of grace are strictly heavenly (Ephesians 1:3; 2:8). Those who are to be partakers of this heavenly calling are individuals who have trusted in the word of truth (the gospel of Christ), and are thereby placed, through a spiritual baptism into a “.. **new man... which is his (Christ’s) body**” (1 Corinthians 12:13; Eph. 1:23; 2:15). The only way this new man could be instituted was to abolish any and all religious observances:

“But now in Christ Jesus, ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; *having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances*; for to make in himself of twain one new man so making peace...” (Eph. 2:13-15)

Contrary to what the Christian establishment teaches, Paul was not raised up to take the gospel of the kingdom to the Gentiles, nor to establish a new religion with a litany of new religious practices, but, according to what it says in the above passage, to abolish religious observance altogether, and to usher in a new dispensation with a new message: **Christ died for our sins...was buried....and raised again the third day...for our justification. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved....sealed, and bound for glory in heaven.** The “our” in these verses is *you*, my friend. No matter who you are, where you are, what you’ve done or failed to do; *you* can be saved eternally by simply trusting Christ and what he did on your behalf at Calvary. If you’ve never done this, why not now?

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