

THE CALLING OF PAUL AS THE APOSTLE TO THE GENTILES

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INTRODUCTION

One important key to studying the beginnings of the Christian church as recorded in the book of Acts is to observe the unique calling and ministry of the apostle Paul. Some may not recognize the importance of this line of Bible study. "After all," they think, "everyone knows of the remarkable conversion of Paul and then his enthusiastic evangelism." However, over and above this assessment, there is in reality a very crucial importance to Paul's unique ministry and apostleship. Paul is actually Christ's messenger to the Gentile world today. Some Bible teachers have observed, "As Moses was to Israel, so Paul is to the church of Jesus Christ." Now in saying that, many people will be awakened to the vital importance of listening to Paul's message to them, and weighing its content and authority in their lives.

Out of the first twelve chapters of Acts the apostle Peter is in primary focus in eight of those chapters. In Chapters six and seven we read of the ministry of Stephen, the first martyr. In chapter eight we read of the ministry of Philip. Chapter nine describes the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, later called Paul. However, beginning in chapter thirteen all the way through the next sixteen chapters the ministry and evangelism of Paul are primarily and almost exclusively in focus. The transition out of Judaism into pure Christianity is primarily revealed and directed to the church by Jesus Christ through His agent, Paul.

Many scholars have observed that the recognition of Christianity as a separate and distinct religion apart from Judaism came as a result of the vigorous ministry of the apostle to the Gentiles. Having just read a book review of another author writing about Paul, I noted the statement, "Without Paul there would be no Christianity." And again, "His letters to the various churches scattered throughout the Roman Empire articulated, for the first time, the beliefs that make up the heart of Christianity" (*Rabbi Paul: An Intellectual Biography*, by Bruce D. Chilton, *Doubleday*). There have been many statements like this especially among the Jewish writers who wish to point out that Christianity really got its start from "Rabbi Paul," and not actually from Jesus Christ. None of this is stated in order to discount the ministry of Christ. That could never be done because it stands as the most powerful and unique ministry in human history. However, Christ's ministry was directed towards Israel. They explain that it was Paul who interpreted Christ on behalf of the Gentile world that made Christianity an acceptable religious alternative to Judaism in the Roman Empire.

Christendom's Delusion

On the other hand, it is amazing how many Christian ministers totally ignore the unique calling of the apostle Paul. They generally view Paul as merely a dynamic, new, evangelistic

soul winner, who was willing to suffer great persecution on behalf of Christ. And to them, that by itself epitomizes Paul's apostleship. In the main the Christian church today is under the delusion that Christ came to earth, and was born of a virgin, to preach and establish the church and Christianity, and this was what His ministry was all about. They think that the Kingdom of God Christ talked about in the Synoptic Gospels was the Church, that it did not pertain to Israel's future anticipated Kingdom promised in their own Hebrew Scriptures. They remain totally blind to the strict "ministry" of Christ "to the circumcision," "confirming God's promises to the fathers (of the Jewish people)" (Romans 15:8). Consequently, on the one hand this faulty theology sets aside the Jewish nation because it rejected Christ. Therefore they think there is absolutely no other future for them. Then on the other hand, this theology relegates Paul's ministry into a sort of secondary place of importance. They have no real appreciation for the uniqueness of Christ's revelations through the apostle Paul for this particular dispensation of time. Paul's epistles are shoved into a sub-station on the sidelines because they think the four Gospels tell the main original story of Christianity and that is where their focus should be. Most of the liberal churches fall into this category. In most cases these liberalized teachers don't even believe in some special "dispensation" other than the one Christ talked about.

Roman Catholic Delusion

One of the greatest delusions Christendom suffers from, as a result of this type of theology, is that manifested by Roman Catholicism. That institution claims to be the true church on earth today. It has literally bathed the earth with a whitewash of fabricated delusion as to what actually composes true Christianity. In this grandiose theological delusion the Roman Catholic Church has called Peter "The prince of the Apostles," and then makes the audacious claim of tracing their own Pope's apostolic succession down through two thousand years directly to Peter, as if that gives them the authority over all. In making this boastful claim they seem to forget all about their own admission that between the present Pope and Peter were literally dozens of popes who were whoremongers, adulterers, perverts, murderers, misers, thieves, covetous, a few women, bribers, drunkards, rank hypocrites, etc, etc.

And then when they get to Peter, they forget all about the fact that Peter was specifically assigned, by Jesus Christ the real Head of the church, as an apostle to the Jewish people (Matt. 10:5 & Gal. 2:7-9). Peter writes to the very same people "(Jews of) the dispersion" that James wrote to (I Pet. 1:1 & James 1:1)—"the twelve tribes of the dispersion." The "dispersion" (Greek, *diaspora*) simply means all the Jewish people who are scattered throughout the world. This clearly makes Peter an apostle to the Jewish Christians—not to the Gentile Christians. If the modern Popes are legitimate descendents of Peter's apostleship, then they are, in reality, only shepherds to all Jewish converts. And this particular Age of Grace is a time period when national Israel has been set aside in God's dealing with mankind. Today, as James says in the first inspired counsel (Acts 15) of the true Christian church, "God is now calling out a people from among the Gentiles for His Name" (Acts 15:14). I am sure that this factual truth does not sound very appetizing to Rome. But that is their problem, not mine. They simply, in spiritual ignorance, picked the wrong apostle to claim their allegiance to. Of course, I do not think or believe for one second that Peter, or any apostle for that matter, would want his name linked in any way, shape or form to the blasphemous Roman Catholic Religious Conglomerate.

A NEW ECONOMY

Anyone who believed in the Ten Commandment Law system had to believe in the Mosaic authorship of that religious system. God spoke through Moses. In a similar way, anyone who believes in the “Dispensation of the Grace of God” must believe in the Pauline authorship of that revelation. The One Who was resurrected, ascended, and seated at the right hand of the Father revealed this system of Grace primarily through the agency of the apostle Paul. As Moses went up on the mountaintop of Sinai to receive the Law for the people of Israel, so the apostle Paul was caught up into the third heaven to receive divine revelations for the church of Jesus Christ (II Cor. 12:1-4 & Eph. 3:1-7). The economy of God on earth today, or we might say the rule of God over His people, is revealed in, as it were, the blueprints of Paul’s writings (I Cor. 3:10). Paul was the “wise master builder” who “laid the foundational” truths for the operation of the church of Jesus Christ in the Gentile world. This was done, as we shall see, because of the distinctive revelations given to Paul. Thus, it is primarily through the epistles of the apostle Paul that we learn all the distinct characteristics of the church of Jesus Christ as it is to carry on and function on earth today.

In this Bible study we will be giving a listing of the Scriptures that spell out this Mystery dispensational program. Those Scriptures you can read and muse upon for yourself.

A NEW CONGREGATION—AND THE OLD SYSTEM

The church began on the Day of Pentecost several years before Paul was even saved. Though there was a new group of people, yet in the early days of the church of Jesus Christ it was totally indistinguishable from Judaism. Most of Christendom today just thinks that when the church began, on one corner stood the old Jewish Synagogue and on the other corner they built a new Church. Such was absolutely not the case! At the time of the church’s beginning the church functioned in its assembly life much like another Jewish Synagogue. As I said before, the church was totally indistinguishable from Judaism. At first all the believers were Jewish. And the Jewish believers were all zealously practicing the Law of Moses. At this time there was no revelation given that they should do otherwise. Christ in His life and ministry endorsed the Law and the Temple and they would continue to do the same.

The difference of the first assemblies from other Jewish assemblies was simply that they believed Jesus was Israel’s Messiah. In Jerusalem where the twelve apostles continued to minister, their assemblies were no doubt separate for the most part from the regular synagogues. Their meetings were conducted in homes and facilities that were available. This was because they had much more in common with their faith in Christ. In addition, there was a greater intensity of devotion and consequent discipline in their new faith. However, much of their activity was also conducted with the rest of the Jewish people right in the old Temple area. In the epistle of James he still describes their assemblies by the word “synagogue.” See James 2:2—“For if there should come into your synagogue (literal translation) a man...” In addition we need to remember that James was writing to “the twelve tribes scattered abroad” (James 1:1).

However, where they were allowed, many of the Jewish believers simply continued to meet in the regular Jewish synagogues of their local areas. They, no doubt, felt free to attend any synagogue where they were allowed. This continued late into the book of Acts time frame. For

instance, Aquila and Priscilla were regular attendees at the synagogue in Ephesus (Acts 18:24-26). In reality we do not have any specific statement to the effect that believers were to get out of the synagogues until such situations where they were forced out, as in Corinth—see Acts 18:7. Here, Paul simply moved his meetings to a house next door to the synagogue. Also in Ephesus, Paul “withdrew the disciples” from the synagogue (Acts 19:9). Obviously, with large numbers of Gentiles present, they could not conduct their meetings in the synagogues.

Most all Biblical historians recognize that Christianity did not emerge as a distinct religious group until near the end of the book of Acts time period. In many cases it was another decade before the Jewish believers themselves stopped the practice of the Law (approx.70 A.D.).

A NEW CONGREGATION—AND A NEW PEOPLE

The Gospel of Jesus Christ literally exploded in that ancient land of Judaism. Actually on the Day of Pentecost itself, as recorded in Acts chapter two, the explosion of truth sent fiery embers spreading throughout the whole Roman Empire, because there were Jewish representatives of every nation present at that Feast who took the message back to their lands. Locally, like a wild fire that could not be contained, the gospel message spread throughout all Judea and Galilee and then into Samaria (Acts 8:4-25). However, even the Jews who were scattered because of the persecution by Saul preached the “Word to none but the Jews only” and this was as late as Acts 11:18. This would now change.

As we realize, Israel was occupied by a new world empire—the Roman Empire. A Roman ruler was actually responsible for the execution of Jesus Christ. The Roman military carried out that execution. The Roman government set down the rules and regulations for all Israel and the various nations surrounding Israel. The whole economic status was set through the auspices of Roman commercialism. And now, in actuality the Roman world is going to be aflame with this new message. In this respect it would seem very proper that God would select a *Roman Citizen* to also propagate this message to its citizens throughout its empire.

Very soon indeed, the Gentile peoples were attentive to the message. Shortly after Paul’s conversion and calling (Acts 9) Peter receives revelation to go to the first Gentiles (Acts 10 & 11:17,18). This fact has the necessary effect of confirming to the Jewish apostleship the distinctive calling of Paul to the Gentile people. Because of Peter’s experience, the leadership at Jerusalem knows that something new is coming in God’s divine plan regarding the Gentile peoples. Therefore, they will be spiritually open to hear and understand concerning Paul’s message to the Gentile people. In Antioch the Word was preached to the Gentile Hellenists (Acts 11:20,21). Thus a large contingency of Gentiles joins the assembly at Antioch.

A NEW CONGREGATION—A NEW PEOPLE—AND A NEW APOSTLE

To look closely at the truth of the distinctive ministry of Paul is an absolute prerequisite to understanding the transition of the early church out of Judaism into pure Christianity. In this study I am going to primarily list the Scriptures for your examination and consideration. The Scriptures will speak for themselves and give a solid foundation for understanding Paul’s place in the divine revelation for the church’s conduct on earth today. You will find in these Scriptures an abundance of truth confirming the fact that Christ is still speaking to His people through the

agency of Paul. Christ had said before His death that “He had yet many things to say to them, but they could not bear them at that time” (John 16:12). In addition Christ said, “However, when He the Spirit of truth is come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come” (John 16:13). So we know from this that later in time they would hear a lot more from the Head of the Church. In fact, if we were to make a real “red letter” edition of the New Testament, it should include all the rest of what Christ had to say to His people. I think you will agree with me, that in light of all these Scriptures we will be reading, it would have to include all the epistles of Paul. It is very clear in many of these statements that Christ speaks to the church through Paul.

In this study of Paul’s ministry we will classify the information under seven (7) headings.

- No. 1) Paul’s initial calling and salvation.
- No. 2) Paul’s special calling to minister to the Gentile peoples.
- No. 3) The Appearances of Christ to Paul.
- No. 4) Paul’s receiving Revelations and Visions.
- No. 5) Paul’s receiving the revelation of “the Mystery.”
- No. 6) Christ Speaking to the church through Paul.
- No. 7) Paul’s special Authority.

No. 1) Paul’s Initial Calling and Salvation

The unique circumstances of Paul’s initial calling and salvation are recorded for us three times in the book of Acts. It is as if God wanted this event to be deeply impregnated upon our consciousness, just as, no doubt, it was upon the heart and consciousness of Paul. No one will doubt that the events surrounding Paul’s salvation were rare. In fact, it would be more accurate to say, this salvation was “one of a kind” as to the particular circumstances surrounding it. Luke records the initial event.

Acts 9:3-9 “(3) As he (Paul) journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. (4) Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’ (5) And he (Paul) said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ Then the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus, Whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’ (6) So he, trembling and astonished, said, ‘Lord, what do You want me to do?’ Then the Lord said to him, ‘Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.’ (7) And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one. (8) Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. (9) And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.”

The second time this is repeated for us is by Paul when he was addressing the crowd of Jews in the Temple area who had wanted him killed.

Acts 22:6-11 “(6) Now it happened, as I journeyed and came near Damascus, at about noon, suddenly a great light from heaven shone

around me. (7) And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’ (8) So I answered, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And He said to me, ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth, Whom you are persecuting.’ (9) And those who were with me indeed saw the light and were afraid, but they did not hear the voice of Him Who spoke to me. (10) So I said, ‘What shall I do, Lord?’ And the Lord said to me, ‘Arise and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all things which are appointed for you to do.’ (11) And since I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of those who were with me, I came into Damascus.”

The third time this is repeated for us is by Paul when he is speaking before king Agrippa and Bernice, and Festus, and all the commanders and prominent men of the city.

Acts 26:12-18 “(12) While thus occupied, as I journeyed to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, (13) at midday, O king, along the road I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me. (14) And when we all had fallen to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew language, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’ (15) So I said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And He said, ‘I am Jesus, Whom you are persecuting. (16) But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of those things which I will reveal to you. (17) I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, (18) to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.”

Each of these accounts gives additional information. For instance, one beautiful thing is seen in that Paul’s description of the light is more pronounced each time. It is as if the light gets brighter each time. And no doubt, through the years of Paul’s service to Jesus Christ the joy and truth of that light becomes more important. The first mention by Luke states simply “a light.” The second time as stated by Paul, it was a “great light.” And the third time as it is again stated by Paul, “a light brighter than the sun.” So it is that the joy of one’s salvation grows.

One apparent discrepancy shows up where Luke says the men who traveled with Paul stood “speechless, *hearing a voice* but seeing no one.” When Paul was describing it to the Temple crowd he said of those who traveled with him, “They *did not hear the voice* of Him Who spoke to me.” This seeming incongruity has a plausible answer. The men who traveled with Paul could have heard the *sound* of the voice that spoke to Paul, but at the very same time did not hear the *words* of that voice so as to understand the message that was given to Paul.

It becomes obvious from this stupendous event that Paul is going to have a very important ministry. The uniqueness and magnitude of the event surrounding Paul’s calling and

salvation are in direct proportion to the uniqueness and magnitude of Paul's ministry to the Gentiles and his revealing the "mystery" of this age of Grace.

As confirmation to this event and its meaning comes a testimony from the voice of a respectable Jewish man of Damascus named Ananias.

Acts 9:10-16 "(10) Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, 'Ananias.' And he said, 'Here am I, Lord.' (11) So the Lord said to him, 'Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold he is praying. (12) And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him, so that he might receive his sight.' (13) Then Ananias answered, 'Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. (14) And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name.' (15) But the Lord said to him, 'Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. (16) For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake.'"

This is recounted again for us in—

Acts 22:12-16 "(12) Then a certain Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good testimony with all the Jews who dwelt there, came to me; (13) and he stood and said to me, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight.' And at that same hour I looked up at him. (14) Then he said, 'The God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know His will, and see the Just One, and hear the voice of His mouth. (15) For you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.'"

In this initial calling of Paul there are certain ingredients which we will segregate and look at again under the next headings. However, as to Paul's initial salvation we all realize that there were miraculous circumstances wherein God got Paul's attention like no other person. Paul was saved by faith in Christ just like every sinner is saved. And yet the circumstances surrounding that salvation are "one of a kind." And of course, God knows that the unique circumstances of Paul's salvation are parallel to the unique calling that God is giving to this man in his ministry and testimony to the world.

God alone knew Paul's heart. God knew that although Saul was a vicious persecutor of the early Jewish Christians, he did so under the delusion that he was serving in loyalty the God-given Mosaic revelation. Saul was persecuting the saints in ignorance (I Tim. 1:13). In reflection upon his own condition before his salvation, Paul knew he had been a "blasphemer," a "persecutor," and "insolent." Consequently, Paul regarded himself to be the "chief of sinners" (I Tim. 1:15). He reasoned that if Christ could save him out of such blindness, then he would be an example of the magnificent grace of God's mercy to the rest of the world (I Tim. 1:16). So in

Paul's initial salvation he did become an example of the matchless grace of God which he will be preaching to the lost and dying world.

I don't think any of us would doubt that many times tears flooded Paul's eyes as he explained his testimony of conversion before the lost. I have often wondered about the statement that, "as it were scales" fell from Paul's blinded eyes when he received his sight (Acts 9:18) and was saved. No doubt the "scales" of religious blindness will fall from our eyes as well when we fully open our hearts to the beautiful truths of God's salvation, grace and spiritual liberty.

No. 2) Paul's Calling to Minister to the Gentile Peoples

Many are the passages that establish the calling of Paul to minister to the Gentile peoples. It should always be kept in remembrance that this is the opposite of the ministry of Jesus Christ while He was ministering here on earth (Rom. 15:8). Christ had instructed the twelve to only go to the Jews (Matt. 10:5,6). In addition, Christ had specifically instructed his twelve apostles to "Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans; but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 10:5,6). The direction of this ministry was still being practiced by the Jewish apostles. So in this calling of Paul, the Head of the church is going to be doing an entirely new thing, in an entirely new direction.

Christ had initially said to Paul at the very first glorious appearance—

Acts 26:17,18 "I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the *Gentiles*, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me."

Acts 9:15 "But the Lord said to him, 'Go, for he is a chosen vessel of mine to bear My name before *Gentiles*, kings, and the children of Israel.'"

And again at the Temple in Jerusalem just three years later—

Acts 22:21 "Then He said to me, 'Depart, for I will send you far from here to the *Gentiles*.'"

As it was acted out in Paul's travels—

Acts 13:46,47 "Then Paul and Barnabas spoke grew bold and said, 'It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the *Gentiles*. For so the Lord has commanded us, 'I have set you as a light to the *Gentiles*, that you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.'" (Isa. 42:6 & 49:6).

Acts 18:6 "Your blood be upon your own heads! I am clean. From now on I go to the *Gentiles*."

Acts 28:28 "...will let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the *Gentiles*; and they will hear it."

Throughout his epistles Paul stresses that this is the direction of his ministry—

Rom. 11:13 “For I speak to you who are *Gentiles*; Inasmuch as I am an apostle of the *Gentiles*, I magnify my ministry...”

Rom. 15:15,16 “I have written more boldly to you on some points, as reminding you, because of the grace that given to me by God, that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the *Gentiles*, ministering (as a priest) the gospel of God, that the offering of the *Gentiles* might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.”

Gal. 1:16 “...that I might preach him (Christ) among the *Gentiles*...”

Gal. 2:2 “...and (I) communicated to them that gospel which I preach among the *Gentiles*...”

Gal. 2:7-9 “But on the contrary, when they saw that the gospel for the *uncircumcised* had been committed to me, as the gospel for the circumcised was to Peter (for He Who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the *Gentiles*), and when James, Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the *Gentiles*, and they to the circumcised.”

Eph. 3:1 & 8 “For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you *Gentiles*...” “To me, who am less than the least of all saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the *Gentiles* the unsearchable riches of Christ.”

Col. 1:27 “...what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the *Gentiles*: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”

I Tim. 2:7 “...a teacher of the *Gentiles*...”

II Tim. 1:11 “...a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of the *Gentiles*...”

II Tim. 4:17 “...so that the message might be preached fully through me, and all the *Gentiles* might hear.”

The direction of Paul’s ministry to the Gentile peoples meant two very important things. Primarily it would mean that there must eventually be first the question settled as to the *Gentiles*’ relationship to The Law of Moses. Throughout Israel’s history and right up until this time any of the Gentile peoples who became believers in the God of Israel would also become proselytes to the Jewish religion. That was automatic, especially if they were to associate with all the rest of the Jewish people. The males must be circumcised. All were also to experience purification and an animal sacrifice to complete their identity to the Mosaic Law system.

Secondly, if the *Gentiles* were NOT to become proselytes and subscribe to an acceptance of rule under the Law of Moses, then the next question comes, what rule or governing truths would direct their lives? The distinct revelations given to the apostle Paul answered both of these questions. As one sees when they read through the book of Acts and Paul’s letters, it is clear that the Law of Moses was not to be imposed upon them. They would be free from it.

However, they would be under law to Christ—“the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:2) with all its beautiful principles covering every aspect of their new life in Christ.

In fact, there would be a whole new dispensation plan revealed through the apostle Paul. That dispensational economy would come to involve not only Gentiles, but Jewish believers as well. Eventually the Jewish believers would also be free from the Mosaic Law system.

No. 3) The Appearances of Christ to Paul

I Cor. 15:8 “Then last of all He was *seen by me* also, as one born out of due time.”

I Cor. 9:1 “Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not *seen* Jesus Christ our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord?”

The twelve apostles, who dwelt in Jerusalem, had all “seen” Jesus Christ. This is one of their qualifications as apostles. And now, Paul also says he has “seen Jesus Christ.” Indeed, this is a clear indication that Paul was an apostle. But, does this fact, in and of itself, raise a question? Yes, indeed! There is an age old question among the fundamentalists. This has to do with the selection of Matthias as the “twelfth apostle,” who took the place of Judas Iscariot, as recorded in the first chapter of Acts. Many have argued that this was only man’s choice, whereas God chose Paul as the real “twelfth apostle.” I first remember a discussion of the pros and cons of this supposition back in 1952 in Bible School, as I sat in a class under the ministry of J. Vernon McGee. At that time I had no idea who was right, and McGee offered no solution to the problem. There was confusion in my mind as I looked at the apostleship of Paul. Was he to be listed with the Twelve or was he not? Later I saw the importance of settling this issue.

In the process of time, when I thoroughly understood the distinctive ministry of Paul, I could see that the presumption of making Paul the “twelfth apostle” had no merit whatsoever. In fact, it would only confuse Paul’s unique apostleship. Please consider the following:

- 1.) The clear qualification for being one of “the twelve” was that the individual must have been with Christ “from the baptism of John until that day when He was taken up from us,” and must “be a witness of the resurrection” (Acts 1:21 & 22). The reason this is the qualification is because this is how Christ initially chose the twelve. Now Paul was certainly a witness of the resurrected Christ, as stated above. But, by no stretch of the imagination, was Paul an associate with Christ during His earthly ministry from the baptism of John. That by itself leaves Paul out as a candidate for that particular office.
- 2.) It has been argued that the method of selecting from the candidates by the casting of lots was not spiritual. However, the facts are that they didn’t just cast lots. According to the inspired text (Acts 1:15-26) it was placed as God’s choice in the matter. “You, O Lord, Who knows the heart of all, show which of these You have chosen to take part in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas by transgression fell.” Actually the casting of lots was long used in Israel’s history as a method whereby God demonstrated His choice to people—see Lev. 16:8; Josh. 14:2; I Sam. 14:41,42; Neh.10:34 & 11:1; Prov. 16:33, etc. So, in the case of the selection of Matthias he was thus recognized as God’s choice.

- 3.) The inspired historian, Luke, states that at this crucial time the church regarded the vacancy as filled by Matthias, and there is no indication whatsoever of any problem—“*he* (Matthais) *was numbered with the eleven apostles*” (Acts 1:26). Furthermore, sometime later long after the feast of Pentecost the church had the problem of proper distribution of food and living necessities for the Christian community. Luke tells us that “*the twelve*” counseled for the selection of qualified men to serve the church in directing the proper distribution of items (Acts 6:1,2). It is obvious that Paul, who was not even saved at this time, was not at all considered as “*one of the twelve.*”
- 4.) Furthermore, the apostle Paul, himself, did not even consider himself as one of “*the twelve.*” Paul states in I Corinthians 15:5 that the resurrected Christ was seen “*by the twelve.*” Then Paul adds, “*last of all, He was seen by me also*” (verse 8 above). Now this statement by Paul is some twenty-five years after the selection of Matthias. It is obvious that Paul considered the selection of Matthias as perfectly proper. By this statement Paul ratifies the fact that the words “*the twelve*” do not include himself. This should most certainly explode the supposition that somehow Paul was “*the twelfth apostle.*” And this further ratifies the fact that Paul had an entirely *distinct* apostleship. **Unless one realizes the distinctive apostleship of Paul, he will miss a lot of fundamental principles about the church age, and even about distinctive prophecies that relate to the church alone.**
- 5.) In another effort to get Paul listed as one of “the twelve,” some have argued that according to Revelation 21:14 “there are **ONLY** 12 apostles.” Of course, Rev. 21:14 does not say that. It is only making the same statement as I Cor. 15:5, Acts 6:2 and Acts 1, concerning “the Twelve.” That there were others selected for apostleship is clearly indicated in the Scriptures. James, the Lord’s brother, though not one of “the twelve,” is nevertheless an important figure in the early church, and he is called “an apostle,” (Gal. 1:19). Likewise Barnabas is called “an apostle” in Acts 14:4 & 14, and he was not one of “the twelve.”
- 6.) The “Twelve” is a particular grouping of apostles to serve for Twelve Tribe Israel, to whom they were sent—“These twelve Jesus sent out after instructing them, saying, ‘Do not go in the way of the Gentiles...but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel’” (Matt. 10:5,6). **This becomes a foremost reason why Paul should never be included as one of “the twelve”—Paul was sent in the opposite direction, to the Gentiles.**
- 7.) Did the Holy Spirit guide the apostles in the selection of Matthias since this took place *before the Day of Pentecost* when the Holy Spirit actually baptized the believers? This is a “last ditch” effort to get Paul in as “No. twelve.” In answer, it is obvious that all the apostles were selected before the Day of Pentecost by the Lord Jesus Christ, Himself. Certainly they did not have to wait until Pentecost to make the selection valid. The Holy Spirit was in the lives of the apostles in a miraculous way (Matt. 10:1) before Pentecost when they performed many miracles in their ministry of the gospel of the Kingdom. In addition, the Holy Spirit was given to the apostles for their comprehension of truths (Acts 1:2) when Christ ministered to them after His resurrection (John 20:22). Therefore, the timing does not invalidate their selection, and there are no Scriptures that indicate it does.

A Continuation of the Appearances—

It is obvious that the first appearance of Christ to Paul was in the brilliance of light that was blinding to him—Acts 9:3-6; 22:6-10 & 26:12-18. On this occasion the Lord said, “*I am Jesus, Whom you are persecuting.*” And again, “But stand on your feet; for I have *appeared* to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have *seen*, and of the things which I will *yet reveal to you.*” It becomes obvious from this first encounter with Christ that Paul would continue to experience other revelations of Christ to him. Obviously there would be much more information that Christ would want Paul to share with the saints in his special service to the church.

Annianus was inspired to tell Paul, “The God of our fathers has chosen you that you shall know His will, and *see the Just One*, and *hear the voice of His mouth*, for you will be a witness to all men of what you have *seen and heard*” (Acts 22:14,15).

On several occasions in the book of Acts we are told of personal appearances of Christ to Paul. While Paul was in a trance in the Temple praying he said he “*saw Him* saying to me...”—Acts 22:18. While in the city of Corinth, in Acts 18:9,10 we are told, “*Now the Lord spoke to Paul in a night vision* ‘Do not be afraid, but speak and do not keep silent; for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city.’” As recorded in Acts 23:11 the Lord again appeared to Paul. “But the following night *the Lord stood by him and said*, ‘Be of good cheer, Paul, for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome.’”

There will obviously be a blending of the appearances of Christ to Paul with the specific Visions and Revelations that Paul received. But the many times the word “revelation” is used makes it appropriate and needful to reserve this for a separate category.

No. 4) Paul Receiving Revelations and Visions

The distinctive revelations that Paul received are what characterizes Christianity and the Age of Grace in which we live. From what Paul said about his first encounter with Jesus Christ it becomes evident that there will be a *progression* of revelations to Paul. Christ had said, “But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen ***and of the things which I will yet reveal to you***” (Acts 26:16). These revelations to Paul would be *progressive* in nature and expressed through his epistles to the various churches that Paul wrote to.

In Acts 20:24 Paul thus speaks of this ministry, “...and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.”

Gal. 1:11,12 tells us “...the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the *revelation* of Jesus Christ.” Furthermore, concerning this ministry, Paul says,

Gal.1:15-17 “But when it pleased God, Who separated me from my mother’s womb, and called me through His grace, was pleased *to reveal His Son in me*, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.” And even when Paul did go up to Jerusalem to contend for the uniqueness of his gospel to the Gentiles he says,

Gal. 2:1 & 2 “ Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and also took Titus with me. And I went up by *revelation*, and communicated to them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles...”

II Cor. 12:1-4, 7 “It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast. I will come to *visions and revelations* of the Lord. I knew a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a one was caught up to the third heaven. And I know such a man—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which is not lawful for a man to utter...And lest I should be exalted above measure by *the abundance of the revelations*, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure.”

The remaining expressions about the revelations given to Paul will be found in those passages that tell us of the “Mysteries” concerning this dispensation of time and the church.

No. 5) Paul’s Receiving the Revelation of “the Mystery”

Rom. 16:25,26 “Now to Him Who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the *revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began, but now made manifest*, and by the prophetic Scriptures, made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith—.”

Eph. 1:17-23 “That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church which is His body, the fullness of Him Who fills all in all.”

Eph. 2:11-22 “Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands—that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. **But now in Christ Jesus you who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, Who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. Now therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with**

the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in Whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in Whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.”

Eph. 3:1-12 “...if indeed you have heard of the *dispensation of the grace of God* which was given to me for you, how that *by revelation* He made known to me **the mystery** (as I have briefly written already [Eph. 1:17-23 & 2:11-22] by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in *the mystery of Christ*) which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: **that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel**, of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power. To me, who am less than the least of all saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all men see what is the fellowship (lit.—*dispensation*) of *the mystery*, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God Who created all things through Christ, to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord...”

Col. 1:25-27 “of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill (fill-full or complete) the word of God, the *mystery* which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this *mystery* among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”

See also concerning the mystery such passages as—I Cor. 4:1; Eph. 1:9; 5:32; 6:19; Col. 2:2 & 4:3. The whole uniqueness of the Church of Jesus Christ and the particular economy of God today is encompassed within this “Mystery” revelation.

It would be appropriate however, to include in this listing several specific passages that speak of the “*Mystery*” conclusion of this age of Grace. This concerns what has commonly been called “The Rapture of the Church.”

I Cor. 15:51-53 “Behold, I tell you a *mystery*: **We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.”**

I Thess. 4: 15-17 “For this we say unto you *by the word of the Lord*, **that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.”**

Col. 1:24-27 “I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship (or lit. *dispensation*) from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill (or *complete*) the word of God, *the mystery* which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this *mystery* among the Gentiles: **which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.**”

No. 6) Christ Speaking to the Church Through Paul

The night Christ was betrayed He told the disciples. “*I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now*” (John 16:12). The disciples would need the Holy Spirit’s presence (verse 13) in order to guide them as further truth was presented to them. Those who print “Red letter Editions” of the New Testament really do an injustice to the readers. They only place in “red” those things that Christ said while ministering on earth, and in the few occasions where He is specifically said to speak after His resurrection. This can be very misleading because it is not at all faithful to the reality that the basic information regarding this church age, as revealed through Paul, is also given by the revelation of Jesus Christ. That Christ spoke through Paul is plainly stated in several Scriptures.

II Cor. 13:3 “Since you seek a proof of *Christ speaking in me*,...”

I Thess. 4:2 “You know what commandments we gave you *through the Lord Jesus.*”

I Thess. 4:15 “This we say unto you *by the word of the Lord.*”

Gal. 1:16 “To *reveal His Son in me*, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles.”

Gal. 4:14 “...but you received me as an angel of God, *even as Jesus Christ.*”

I Cor. 4:17 “(Timothy) will remind you of *my ways in Christ,*”

I Cor. 7:10 “Now to the married *I command*, yet not I but *the Lord...*”

Eph. 4:20 & 21 “But you have not *so learned Christ*, if indeed you have *heard Him* and have *been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus.*”

I Tim. 6:1-3 “(Paul gives instruction for believing slaves and their masters) If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, *even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ*, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness, he is proud...”

Consequently, when one reads the epistles of Paul, wherein is contained the special revelations given to the apostle for the church of Jesus Christ, he should be cognizant of the God-ordained fact, that it is as if he were reading the instructions of Jesus Christ as “the Head over all things to the Church which is His body” (Eph. 1:22,23), speaking through the instrumentality of His servant Paul. These are the messages that are presented to us from Christ who is “seated at

the right hand of the Father.” These messages are the real guiding truths that are written directly to us Gentile believers in this Age of Grace today.

Furthermore, the reader of Paul’s epistles must realize that Christ is now addressing primarily the Gentile peoples, from whom God is “calling out a people for His name.” Christ’s directions for this group will be quite different from His message to national Israel. First it becomes clear that the Gentile believers are not to assume the practice of the Mosaic Law system. Then, the truths for the collective body, the “One New Man,” will be quite distinct from any allowance and hope of the Jewish believers in their connection to the “Hope of Israel.”

No. 7) Paul’s Special Authority

In showing or demonstrating the subject of Paul’s God-given authority, in light of his unique calling and imparted revelations to the church, it will be sufficient to limit ourselves to the first four epistles that Paul was inspired to write. There are many statements in I and II Thessalonians and I and II Corinthians that demonstrate Paul’s authority as Christ’s representative in this new era of time.

Before Paul’s salvation he received “authority” that was derived from the High Priest of Israel at that time—Acts 9:14 & 26:12. With and under that authority he could imprison or even destroy individuals in the church of Jesus Christ. After Paul’s conversion, his authority is as a special messenger direct from the Head of the Church, Jesus Christ, Himself. Under that authority he could preach and “build the very faith he once destroyed.” In addition, this authority was for “the edification” of the saints and not their “destruction” (II Cor.13:10).

There was both *general authority* as a spiritually guided apostle (I Cor. 9:18 & II Cor. 10:8) and *direct authority* as speaking from a specific revelation as on Christ’s behalf, which we will see in many of the following references (I Thess. 4:2). These two sources of authority are also illustrated in I Corinthians 7, where on the one hand Paul would speak by direct command from the Lord—“Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord” (7:10). Then on the other hand he would distinguish his speaking as an apostle led by the Holy Spirit—“But to the rest I, not the Lord, say” (7:12). This is illustrated again in the same chapter, “Now concerning virgins: I have no commandment from the Lord (no direct revelation); yet I give my *judgment* (speaking as a Spirit-guided apostle) as one whom the Lord in His mercy has made trustworthy (7:25) ...according to my *judgment*—and I think I also have the Spirit of God” (7:40). It is very important that Bible readers note and recognize Paul’s faithfulness in making this distinction for the saints who read his letters.

Those who were the recipients of the truths and revelations from Paul’s ministry would properly look to Paul as the chosen vessel through whom Christ has revealed “the dispensation of the grace of God.”

I Thess. 4:2 “For you know what *commandments* we gave you through the Lord Jesus.”

4:11 “...as we *commanded* you.”

5:27 “*I charge* that this epistle be read to all the holy brethren.”

II Thess. 2:15 “...*hold the traditions* which you have been taught.”

3:4 “And we have confidence in the Lord concerning you, both that you *do and will do the things we command you.*”

3:6 “But we *command* you brethren, *in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ...*”

3:10 “..we *commanded* you this...”

3:12 “Now those that are such we *command and exhort* through *our Lord Jesus Christ...*”

I Cor. 3:10 “According to the grace of God which was given to me, *as a wise master builder* I laid a foundation...”

4:16 “...be imitators of me.”

4:17 “(Timothy) will remind you of *my ways which are in Christ*, just as I teach everywhere in every church.”

I Cor. 4:19 “...and I shall find out, not the words of those who are arrogant, but the *power (authority).*”

7:6 “But this I say as a concession, not as a *commandment.*”

7:10 “Now to the married *I command*, yet not I, but the Lord.”

7:17 “...*so ordain I* in all the churches.”

7:25 “Now concerning virgins, *I have no commandment from the Lord.*”

7:40 “...according to *my judgment*, and I think I also have the Spirit of God.”

11:1 “*Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.*”

11:2 “Now I praise you brethren, that you *remember me* in all things and keep *the traditions just as I delivered them to you.*”

11:23 “For I *received from the Lord* that which I also delivered to you.”

11:34 “And the rest *I will set in order* when I come.”

14:36 “Or did *the word of God come* from you? Or was it only to you that it reached?”

14:37 “The things that I write to you are the *commandments* of the Lord.”

15:3 “For I delivered to you first of all that which *I also received.*”

II Cor. 2:10 “Now whom you forgive anything, I also forgive. For if indeed I have forgiven anything, I have forgiven that one for your sakes in the presence of Christ.”

8:8 “...I speak not by *commandment...*”

11:5 “For I consider that I am not at all inferior to the most eminent apostles.”

11:22-12:12 “(The “boasting” of Paul) ..in nothing was I behind the most eminent apostles, though I be nothing.”

13:2,3 & 10 “...that if I come again I will not spare—since you seek a proof of Christ speaking in me...according to *the authority* which the Lord has given me for edification and not for destruction.”

Sad to say, many Christians today set aside the special authority of Paul by not recognizing his special ministry and the uniqueness of the revelation of “the mystery.”

In Conclusion and In Summary

It is very important to observe that the apostle Paul did not want anyone to associate his apostleship as deriving from any other source other than the resurrected, ascended and seated Savior in the heavens.

“Paul, an apostle not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father Who raised Him from the dead” (Gal. 1:1).

“But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ” (Gal. 1:11,12).

“But when it pleased God, Who separated me from my mother’s womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus” (Gal. 1:15-17).

The reality above being the case, and in light of all the Scriptures we have listed before, it should be established very conclusively that the ministry of the apostle Paul was unique and his apostleship stands in a class by itself. The distinctive truths for this Church Age are primarily revealed through the agency of the apostle Paul. That simply means that the epistles of Paul are specifically the letters of God given directly to the Gentiles and to the Church today. Of course, all Scripture is profitable for us. However, what I am saying is that the epistles of Paul are those Scriptures directly to us, and for us, in our walk in this present age.

There is obviously an overlapping nature of those epistles and letters written by other Jewish apostles and leaders, whose writings are, in the main, to the Jewish believers of the early church—James, Peter, John and Jude. These latter epistles will no doubt also be appropriate for the saints that will be alive on earth during the time covered by the book of Revelation. The book of Revelation, of course, is not written to cover our conduct in this Church Age of the Grace of God. In the book of Revelation grace will not be “reigning” (Rom. 5:21).

THE END