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Do We Make Too Much Of Paul?

BY RICHARD JORDAN

Sometimes those who do not fully understand "*the preaching of Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the mystery*" wonder whether or not we give undue prominence to the Apostle Paul. Isn't Christ our pattern and shouldn't we walk in His footsteps? By emphasizing Paul and the special message committed to his trust, are we casting a shadow on the Lord Jesus Christ?

In considering these objections we should be careful to notice Paul's words in I Timothy 1:13-16. Here he presents himself as a *great sinner*—"a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious," yea, the "*chief*" of sinners—while presenting Christ as a *great Savior*:

"AND THE GRACE OF OUR LORD WAS EXCEEDING ABUNDANT with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.

"THIS IS A FAITHFUL SAYING AND WORTHY OF ALL ACCEPTATION, THAT CHRIST JESUS CAME INTO THE WORLD TO SAVE SINNERS; OF WHOM I AM CHIEF."

What a marvelous combination: a *great sinner* and a *great Savior*? It is with this in mind that the apostle goes on to say:

"Howbeit FOR THIS CAUSE I OBTAINED MERCY, THAT IN ME FIRST JESUS CHRIST MIGHT SHEW FORTH ALL LONGSUFFERING, FOR A PATTERN TO THEM WHICH SHOULD HEREAFTER BELIEVE ON HIM TO LIFE EVERLASTING."

Thus it is the Scriptures themselves that establish Paul as our pattern for salvation today. When we think it through it soon becomes apparent that the Lord Jesus Christ could not be the example and pattern for our salvation. He did not need to be saved—indeed, His *perfect, sinless life* only shows up our *imperfections*. His *life* condemns us; it is His *death* that *saves* us.

The chief of sinners, saved by grace, however, makes a fitting pattern for us, for as we take our place with him and trust in the Savior who died for our sins:

"...we have redemption through [Christ's] blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace" (Eph. 1:7).

Paul is the only man in the Bible, apart from our Lord Himself, who says again and again, "*Follow me.*" And this is not because he was anything in himself, but because Christ had given him the message of grace and had made him the pattern for this age of grace. This is not a question of personal excellence, but of divine revelation and God-given authority and position. Note his words carefully:

"For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I AM THE APOSTLE OF THE GENTILES; I MAGNIFY MINE OFFICE" (Rom. 11:13).

"PAUL, AN APOSTLE (NOT OF MEN, NEITHER BY MAN, BUT BY JESUS CHRIST, AND GOD THE FATHER, WHO RAISED HIM FROM THE DEAD)" (Gal. 1:1).

"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..." (Eph. 3:1-3).

PAUL AND CHRIST

A key passage to properly understand the relationship between our Lord's earthly ministry and that later committed to Paul is Romans 15:8-12. It begins with this declaration:

"Now I say that JESUS CHRIST WAS A MINISTER OF THE CIRCUMCISION FOR THE TRUTH

OF GOD, TO CONFIRM THE PROMISES MADE UNTO THE FATHERS" (v. 8).

The next few verses contain the words "And again...and again...and again," referring to the prophetic promises that one day the Gentiles would "rejoice...with His people" Israel, as they with Christ as King "reign over the Gentiles." The prophets had often predicted that the blessing of God would go to the Gentiles through the rise of redeemed Israel to Kingdom glory (e.g., Isa. 60:1-3, Zech. 8:13, 20-23). Hence Paul, here in Romans 15, quotes no less than four direct references to this glad day of millennial blessings; for this was the clear focus of our Lord's earthly ministry.

We know, however, that "His own received Him not" at His first appearing (John 1:11), declaring, "We have no king but Caesar," and demanding His crucifixion.

After His resurrection the Lord commissioned his apostles to again offer repentance to Israel, and Peter thus proclaimed:

"Ye are the children of the prophets; and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, AND IN THY SEED SHALL ALL THE KINDREDS OF THE EARTH BE BLESSED.

"UNTO YOU FIRST God, having raised up His Son Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities" (Acts 3:25,26).

But again they rejected Him. Thus Paul continues in his declaration to the Romans:

"Nevertheless, brethren, I have written the more boldly unto you in some sort, as putting you in mind because of THE GRACE THAT IS GIVEN TO ME OF GOD,

"THAT I SHOULD BE THE MINISTER OF JESUS CHRIST TO THE GENTILES, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost" (Rom. 15:15,16).

Here we have God sending salvation to the Gentiles—not in the manner predicted by the prophets, to be sure, but sending it nonetheless. Indeed, salvation now is going to the Gentiles through the fall of Israel:

"I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather THROUGH THEIR FALL SALVATION IS COME UNTO THE GENTILES, for to provoke them to jealousy" (Rom. 11:11).

From His ascended position in heaven the Lord Jesus Christ poured out His grace to a rebellious world by saving the very leader of their rebellion and sending him forth as both the *herald* and the *living demonstration* of His grace. Hence Paul, now "the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles," could proclaim:

"...I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man.

"For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ" (Gal. 1:11,12).

This was no afterthought on God's part, no make-shift arrangement, for the Apostle adds that God has "separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by His grace, to reveal His Son in me" (vs. 15,16).¹

Today Jesus Christ is revealing Himself to the world through the writings of the Apostle Paul. Paul was in Christ and Christ was in Paul. The Lord first revealed himself to Paul and then through him to the world.

Those who continue to pit "the words of Paul" against "the words of Christ," should carefully consider the *word of God* in I Timothy 6:3,4:

"If any many teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, EVEN THE WORDS OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness;

"He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words..."

It is hard to imagine how he could more emphatically set forth the truth that his words were in fact the words of Christ. He again insists upon this in his stern rebuke to the carnal Corinthians:

"...If I come again, I will not spare: SINCE YE SEEK A PROOF OF CHRIST SPEAKING IN ME" (II Cor. 13:2,3).

Thus our ascended, glorified Lord is now sending a message of love and grace to a world of *sinner*s, through "the chief of sinners," himself "saved by grace"—a message committed to him by special revelation (Gal. 1:11,12, Tit. 1:3, I Cor. 14:37).

1. Compare the word "revealed" in verse 16 with the words "show forth" in I Tim. 1:16.

PAUL AND THE TWELVE

The evidence is overwhelming that Paul was not one of the Twelve.

First, he never qualified for this position. Acts 1:20-22 clearly states that Judas' successor must be one who had "compained with [the Twelve] *all the time* that the Lord Jesus went in and out among [them], *beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from [them]*" (cf. Matt. 19:28, John 15:27). Thus Paul's name never could have been "on the ballot."

Neither was Paul given the same commission as the Twelve. A comparison between Christ's instructions that the Twelve "go baptizing" (Matt. 28:19, Mark 16:16) and Paul's statement, "*Christ sent me not to baptize*" (I Cor. 1:17) easily demonstrates the point. Also, the Twelve were sent forth to "teach them all things whatsoever I have commanded you"—which clearly included the faithful observance of the Law (Matt. 5:19; 23:1-3), while Paul later proclaimed Christ as "*the end of the Law,*" and says, "Ye are become *dead to the law* by the body of Christ....For ye are *not under the law, but under grace*" (Rom. 10:4; 7:4; 6:14). No. Paul is never to be considered as one of the Twelve.

As if the obvious contrasts above were not enough, the Holy Spirit himself has sealed the question shut by divine revelation. Notice the inspired reference to "the Twelve," at a time when numerically there were only eleven:

"And that He was seen of Cephas, then of THE TWELVE" (I Cor. 15:5).

This inspired reference to "the Twelve" between the resurrection and ascension of Christ is irrefutable evidence that the Holy Spirit considered Matthias as one of the twelve Apostles. And this is further confirmed by the fact that when Matthias was added, they were "*all filled with the Holy Ghost*" (Acts 1:26; 2:4).

Further, Paul and the Twelve represented different programs. Not only is the number 12 associated particularly with the nation Israel, but we are told that the *twelve apostles* were her official representatives, destined to "*sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel*" (Matt. 19:28; Luke 22:28-30). Paul, on the other hand, was *by birth* both a Hebrew and a Roman (Acts 16:37; 22:28), and thus an appropriate representative of the "one Body," composed of reconciled Jews and Gentiles.

Again, Paul and the Twelve proclaimed different messages. The very heart of the message of the Twelve was the establishment of Messiah's kingdom on earth, while in Paul's message the kingdom program awaits a future day, having been *interrupted*. Today all centers in the riches of God's grace to a *Christ-rejecting* world, as He reconciles believing Jews and Gentiles to Himself in one body, giving them a position in heavenly places with Him.

Aside from this—and much more could be said—it has always puzzled this writer how those who insist on following Peter and the Twelve never come to grips with the following:

"And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me [Paul], THEY GAVE TO ME AND BARNABAS THE RIGHT HANDS OF FELLOWSHIP; THAT WE SHOULD GO UNTO THE HEATHEN, AND THEY UNTO THE CIRCUMCISION" (Gal. 2:9).

How could the record here in Galatians 2 be clearer? James, Peter and John, along with the whole Jerusalem church, recognized the further revelation given through Paul and take part in a public act of recognition and endorsement of the fact that God had now appointed Paul as the Apostle of the Gentiles.² If Peter's present day admirers would ask him, he (and the Twelve) would tell them, "Follow Paul: he is God's spokesman for the present day."

PAUL AND US

Just as our ascended Lord, as it were, says, "*Follow Paul*, I have revealed myself to you through him;" just as the Twelve say, "*Follow Paul*, he is God's appointed spokesman for the dispensation of grace;" so Paul himself exhorts us by divine inspiration:

"BE YE FOLLOWERS OF ME, EVEN AS I ALSO AM OF CHRIST" (I Cor. 11:1).

While we firmly believe and contend that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable," we also recognize that we can only obtain the profit God has placed for us in His word when we "*rightly divide the word of truth.*" Frankly put, we need those divine instructions which are appropriate to the age in which we live. The Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount simply will not do, for who among us is sufficient to keep them?

2. Cf. II Peter 3:3-16 and Peter's own inspired explanation of the *delay* in the completion of the prophetic program.

The next time you hear the so-called “Lord’s Prayer” recited, think for a moment: Are we to be praying, “*Thy kingdom come*”? Are we not *going* to be with Christ, rather than waiting for Him to come to earth to reign? Again, do we gain forgiveness from God in the measure that we “forgive our debtors”? Should we not rather forgive others “as God for Christ’s sake *hath* forgiven us” (Eph. 4:32)? Would God have us to twist and misapply this important passage into a mindless and meaningless ritual?

Neither does the Pentecostal program provide an adequate basis upon which to operate today. Its legalism, baptismal salvation, signs and wonders, “all things common,” “Jerusalem first” and apostolic powers to remit sins are only some of the things which produce confusion when attempted today.

No. It is not until we turn to the epistles of Paul that we find instructions appropriate to the age in which we live. It is Paul who has so much to say about salvation by grace through faith, about the spiritual life and walk of the believer and how to achieve a walk that will truly glorify God. It is Paul who tells us how to function as members of the Body of Christ. Indeed, he is *our apostle*—God’s spokesman for the dispensation in which we live.

HEAR YE HIM

When Peter, on the Mount of Transfiguration, started talking simply because “he wist not what to say,” God interrupted him, saying, “This is my beloved Son; *hear ye Him*” (Mark 9:7, Matt. 17:5). But now, from heaven’s glory, our Lord says, as it were: “I have saved the chief of sinners by My grace, and have given him to you as My representative, a living example and pattern of My grace to you: *Hear ye him!*” And in hearing him, we are thus giving heed to our risen, glorified Lord (John 13:20).

The Twelve echo in tune: “God has interrupted the prophesied program and He has given a further revelation through Paul; we commend you to him—hear ye him.” And Paul himself adds:

“In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began,

“But hath in due times MANIFESTED HIS WORD THROUGH PREACHING WHICH IS COMMITTED UNTO ME ACCORDING TO THE COMMANDMENT OF GOD OUR SAVIOUR” (Tit. 1:2,3).

“[Christ] gave Himself a ransom for all, TO BE TESTIFIED IN DUE TIME,

“WHEREUNTO I AM ORDAINED A PREACHER, AND AN APOSTLE...A TEACHER OF

THE GENTILES, IN FAITH AND VERITY” (I Tim. 2:6,7).

What a glorious message Christ has sent down from heaven for us today—a message that makes *Him* everything! Rather than giving undue prominence to the Apostle Paul, as we recognize His unique position of God-given authority and its importance for us today, we are in fact being faithful to our God-given message. God has put a high premium on faithful obedience to His word. By His grace may we refuse the wine of the religious system and its attempts to draw us away from the path of obedience to God’s particular word *to us*.

MY LOST BIBLE

Some years ago I lost my Bible on the way to church. When we left home on the way to midweek Bible study my Bible was in the car—when we arrived at church it was missing. Although my wife immediately retraced our steps—while I taught that evening from my son’s Bible—my Bible was nowhere to be found. I had lost my Bible on the way to church and it was never recovered.

Then just a few years ago my Bible went missing from my study at church. Again, after a thorough search, it simply was nowhere to be found. One of our men soon realized that a young man who had recently begun attending services had stolen it. After he was confronted, gratefully, he returned it.

I mention these incidents because they are reminiscent of the truth found in Amos 8:11,12:

“Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God that I WILL SEND A FAMINE in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but OF HEARING THE WORDS OF THE LORD:

“AND THEY SHALL WANDER FROM SEA TO SEA, AND FROM THE NORTH EVEN TO THE EAST, THEY SHALL RUN TO AND FRO TO SEEK THE WORD OF THE LORD, AND SHALL NOT FIND IT.”

This passage, of course, looks ultimately to the future tribulation period and does not describe events in the dispensation of grace in which we live. However, the background for this future famine of the word of God is being readied during the present age. One of the great wonders of our day is how so many believers are so blinded to the work of Satan with regard to Bible mutilation.

If we compare the vast array of modern versions to the *King James Version*, we note disturbing differences. Modern versions eliminate words, phrases, verses and even whole passages of Scripture. They frequently contradict the *KJV*, often contradict each other and sometimes even contradict themselves. But aren’t they all equally the word of God? Don’t they all really say the same thing, in different words? Don’t they just update the language?

No, they are *not* all the word of God. No, they do *not* all say the same thing. No, they do *not* just update the language. The fact is that there are *vast* and *significant* differences among the version and especially between the modern versions and the *KJV*. These differences are *so* vast and *so* significant that it is obvious that they cannot *all* be the word of God. Are *some* of them the word of God? Is *one* of them the word of God? Do we even have the word of God *today* at all? This, in reality, is the bottom line—and many believers would no doubt be shocked to discover that many Christian leaders answer this last (and most important) question with an emphatic, “*NO!*”

Scores even in evangelical ranks have resorted to neo-orthodox language with regard to the Bible. When they say “bible” they do not mean any book in existence *today*. When they refer to “all Scripture being inspired,” they mean only “the original writings”—nothing else. They do not believe any Bible in existence today (in any language) is or can be God’s word without error. For them, the Bible becomes a *concept* rather than a book and they speak in glowing terms of its *message* being preserved down through the centuries and of *truth* being available to us today. Non-existent, however, is the infallible, pure, inerrant word of God in the form of a book that can be seen, handled and studied.

How different all this is from what the Bible itself teaches as to its own identity. In scripture, God’s *word* is looked upon as consisting of His *words*. Hence when the famine Amos predicted arrives it will be the *words* of the Lord men are seeking as they go to and fro searching for His *word*.

The repeated promise of scripture that God *will* preserve His word point not simply to some generalized preservation of its message and truth but to the preserving of the very *words* that make up the word. For example,

“As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the Lord; My spirit that is upon thee, and MY WORDS WHICH I HAVE PUT IN THY MOUTH, SHALL NOT DEPART OUT OF THY MOUTH, NOR OUT OF THE MOUTH OF THY SEED, NOR OUT OF THE MOUTH OF THY SEED’S SEED, SAITH THE LORD, FROM HENCEFORTH AND FOR EVER” (Isa. 59:21).

And if there is any doubt as to the meaning and extent of this promise to Israel, Isaiah 29:18 adds an amazing statement about the Kingdom age:

“And in that day shall the deaf HEAR THE WORDS OF THE BOOK....”

Our Lord was equally settled in His pronouncements as to exactly what was being and what was to be preserved:

“Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law...” (Matt. 5:18).

“Heaven and earth shall pass away, but MY WORDS SHALL NOT PASS AWAY” (Matt. 24:35).

“And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass than one tittle of the law to fail” (Luke 16:17).

“But as touching the resurrection of the dead, HAVE YE NOT READ THAT WHICH WAS SPOKEN UNTO YOU BY GOD...” (Matt. 22:31).

In spite of such evidence the common approach of our day is to assume that the infallibility and inerrancy of the scriptures have long ago been lost and are, therefore, unrecoverable. This, we believe, is not only *unscriptural* but is in fact *dangerous*. As Dr. Edward F. Hills observed, “If God has allowed the New Testament to *lose* its infallibility, why should we suppose He *created* it infallible in the first place?” Indeed, if we cannot trust the scriptural declarations as to the former—why should we trust them on the latter?

One thing is clear about those who declare the *King James Bible* has errors in it is this: They do not believe there actually is an infallible, inerrant Bible in existence *today* in any form or language. For them, the pure word of God was long ago lost and can no longer actually be *possessed* by believers. What we do possess is declared to be filled with varying degrees of error and incompleteness.

We gladly count ourselves among the number who refuse to abandon the text and translation God has honored and providentially placed in our hands through the execution in history of the Bible doctrine of preservation. Simply put: We believe the *KJV* is the word of God for English speaking people. Frankly, I would much rather go to the Judgment Seat of Christ having believed the Bible God’s providence has placed in my hands too much than believing it *too little*.

The great enemy of Christianity in our day is not outside the church. The greatest enemy is the ignorance and blasé attitude of believers toward the “bible-business.” We are actually losing our Bible while going to church—it’s being stolen from us at church! As a believer you better be sure you know where your Bible is—that you have your Bible *in your possession*.

CHECK AND SEE

So our readers can actually “check and see” the textual differences between the KJV and modern versions, we offer the following sample check list. A comparative reading of the rendering of these passages by any modern version and the KJV will quickly and objectively demonstrate the latter’s superiority. The verses marked with an asterisk(*) have textual *changes*, unmarked verses have *omissions*.

Short List: Matt. 1:25, Mark 1:2;* 16:9-20, Luke 2:33,* Matt. 5:22 (cf. Mark 3:5), John 1:18;* 7:53-8:11, Acts 8:37; 20:28,* Rom. 9:5;* 14:10,* Col. 1:14, I Tim. 3:16,* Heb. 1:3; 3:16.*

For further study: Matt. 6:13; 23:14; 24:36; 27:54,* Mark 9:44,46, Luke 1:34;* 2:14;* 9:55,56,* John 3:13,15,16; 4:24; 18:36, Rom. 8:1; 13:9, I Cor. 15:47, Eph. 5:30, Col. 2:9, Jas. 5:16,* I John 5:7, Rev. 1:8, 11; 11:15, etc., etc.

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