

## WAS PAUL TOO BUSY?

*Scripture Reading: I Corinthians 1:14-17*

Too busy for what? Water baptism? Come now! Can God's man be too busy in God's work to do God's will—if indeed God's will includes water baptism? Preposterous!

Oh yes, Paul was busy; for in comparison with the twelve, he labored "more abundantly than they all" (I Corinthians 15:10). And for that matter, Paul's extensive imprisonments, sufferings, perils and "the care of all the churches" might have also been used by some to excuse Paul from the baptismal chore.

Why not listen to Paul's own stated reason for baptizing so few at the start and none in his later ministry. "Christ sent me not to baptize but to preach the gospel." Peter could not have said that—nor could any of the twelve for that matter! Those clearly instructed by the risen Lord before His ascension were told to "make disciples of all nations baptizing them..." (Matthew 28:19). Now either Paul was more disobedient than they all, OR perhaps he was not laboring under that so-called "Great Commission"! Read the Lord's words from Heaven to Paul on the Damascus Road and later. Where do we read of the Lord telling Paul to pitch in and help the failing, carnal twelve who so lazily stayed by Jerusalem? If we may judge by present day standards, used by some preachers to measure their success, what better indication of response to the message than the preacher's baptismal record. No indeed. I submit that it is impossible for one man to "out baptize" twelve, unless the twelve were really derelict in their duty. We therefore conclude that Paul's God-given ministry did not include water baptism, but it did include and center in the merits of Christ's cross and God's sacred secret which He deposited to Paul's care!

*Ivan L. Burgener*

*Notes:*

## WHAT IS THE MYSTERY?

*Scripture Reading: Ephesians 3:1-9, 2:16*

Some years ago we gave this question as a part of an assignment in one of our Bible classes, and we found the results to be quite interesting. Perhaps before you read this article you might like to write down your understanding of what the mystery is.

First of all, it should be understood that the word "mystery" is not confined to the writings of the apostle Paul; and secondly, in his writings the term is used in different passages and should be studied in context. For example, we read of "the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 13:11). In Paul's writings we read of "the mystery of godliness" (I Timothy 3:16), also "the mystery of iniquity," (II Thessalonians 2:7) as well as those which are directly related to the message of Paul (I Corinthians 15:51).

Turning now to our passage in Ephesians 3:1-9, Paul declares "his knowledge in the mystery of Christ." It is clear that Paul is revealing truth that he received by revelation, and it is not the subject of prophecy. We find that the "mystery" is essentially three things. "The Gentiles are FELLOWHEIRS, and of the SAME BODY, and PARTAKERS of his promise in Christ by the gospel whereof I was made a minister" (Ephesians 3:6, 7a). What we have is JOINT HEIRS, IN A JOINT BODY, and JOINT PARTAKERS of His promise. This is described in Ephesians 2:15 as a "NEW MAN." It is important for us to realize that Paul alone was given the responsibility and privilege of making known God's plan and purpose for the Body of Christ. We are not to confuse the "mystery" with God's program in prophecy for the Gentiles. (See Acts 15:13-18.) How precious should be the writings of Paul in understanding God's program today!

*Floyd Baker*

*Notes:*

## SEVEN CHURCHES OR SEVEN CHURCH AGES?

*Scripture Reading: Revelation 1:4*

“...For THE TIME IS AT HAND, John to the seven churches which are in Asia” (Revelation 1:3 & 4). I take this to mean that John wrote to seven literal Hebrew churches (synagogues). John names and locates them. This would not be hard to believe, except for the church Fathers and tradition who say this cannot be. They date this prophecy between A.D. 90 and 96. Their appeal is to history and the fathers and not to the Word itself. This would be some twenty to twenty-five years after the overthrow of Jerusalem. By this time, the churches of Asia had been thoroughly Judaized. “...all they which be in Asia be turned away from me” (II Timothy 1:15). This was A.D. 68. If this book was written after Acts 28:28, then all is confusion and contradiction: it simply does not fit in. If Paul had preached the gospel of the grace of God to these churches, and John some twenty or thirty years later exhorts them in the gospel of the kingdom, John contradicts Paul. But if John wrote to these synagogues about A.D. 43-45, just before the Jerusalem Council, all is in harmony, (except with the “church fathers and the historical church” who also turned away from Paul and led the Judaized church into the Dark Ages).

If in II Corinthians 12:2, the man in Christ above fourteen years ago was John and not Paul, talking about himself, it would date this prophecy about A.D. 43, just before the Jerusalem Council and contemporary with Matthew, Mark, James and Jude. John would be a young man in the Isle of Patmos for the Word of God (Revelation 1:9). He was still to “prophecy...before many peoples” (Revelation 10:11). He was admonished not to write the things that he heard (Revelation 10:4 confer with II Corinthians 12:4). Prophecy has a near and a future fulfillment. The overthrow of the temple under Titus would be the near fulfillment. The future fulfillment awaits the Rapture of the Church, when God resumes His prophetic kingdom purpose with Israel. Think about it. The Church, which is Christ’s Body, is nowhere seen in this book in type or symbol.

*John H. Balk*

## THE TRUE WORSHIP OF GOD

*Scripture Reading: Romans 12:1*

Christians of the late twentieth century have become very good at many things, but sacrifice is not one of them. Our churches seem to have developed the best in “Christian entertainment” and programs to satisfy all the senses, but we hear little in the way of sacrifice and self-denial. Yet, to truly understand Romans chapter twelve, we must come to appreciate the necessity of sacrifice as a prerequisite to genuine service.

With this in view, Paul begins with the familiar words, “I beseech you therefore brethren, by the mercies of God that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service” (Romans 12:1). We immediately recognize here that we are under grace, for Paul does not command us to “do this and live....” Rather he beseeches, or literally “begs,” us to present ourselves to God, not to earn our salvation, but because of the mercy God has already shown to us. It is only “reasonable” to do this when we consider what Christ has already done for us: He died for our sins. Is it too much to ask that we offer ourselves in service to God? No! It is the logical response of a grateful heart.

Interestingly, the word translated “service” in verse one is the Greek *latreia* which in its verb form is sometimes translated “worship.” Before the dispensation of grace, men worshipped God by bringing dead sacrifices. Now, we worship by bringing living sacrifices, that is, our bodies as willing instruments of righteousness in the service of God. We often think of worship as that which we do in a building on Sunday, but true worship is how you serve on Monday through Saturday!

*Joel Finck*

*Notes:*

**TRANSFORMED!**

*Scripture Reading: Romans 12:2*

It seems to be the undying goal of the world around us to “press us into its mold” and turn out uniform robots who are “politically correct.” To live as a Christian in a non-Christian world definitely causes one to stick out like a sore thumb! Yet this is exactly what God calls us to do in Romans 12:2, “And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.”

Being different than the world is not an end in itself. It merely comes with the territory of being saved. Paul begins with a negative admonition, “be not conformed.” This word “conformed” comes from the Greek word from which we get our word *schematic*. For those who are not electronics buffs, a schematic diagram is a detailed drawing of electrical circuits. It often seems that the church at large is attempting to see how closely it can imitate the world’s schematic, or pattern, whether it be in dress, music or view of life. We must be careful not to be guilty of this.

On a positive note, Paul tells us how to avoid conformity to the world “by the renewing of your mind.” True transformation (literally, metamorphosis) comes when the child of God fills his or her mind with the life changing Word of God. Only regular reading, study and meditation on the Scriptures will bring lasting and positive change in the believer. All attempts at mere self-reformation are bound to fail and do not glorify God. However, true transformation in the life of a believer proves, in a practical way, “that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” Is God’s will being demonstrated in your life?

*Joel Finck*

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**THE WINDS AND SEA OBEY HIM**

*Scripture Reading: Matthew 8:27*

The winds and the sea obeyed Him, but did His people? Having finished the sermon on the mount, the Lord began a series of miracles such as had not been seen in Israel for hundreds of years. As we begin Matthew chapter 8, it must be kept in mind that not since Elisha had there been a miracle-working prophet in Israel! Did that make the Lord’s miracles special? Absolutely! These things did not just happen routinely. The Man was different! He claimed to be none other than Israel’s Christ (or Messiah) and the Son (or personification) of God. This is precisely why the Lord did these miraculous signs—to demonstrate His Deity! John bears witness of this fact later in John 20:20, 31. Jesus was God, and He was Israel’s King!

With so many infallible proofs, we see the remarkable words of Matthew 11:20: “Then began He to upbraid the cities in which most of His mighty works were done, because they repented not.” Think of it! The Creator God, He who has control over the very elements of the physical creation, stands rejected by His people! Alas! But God knew from the beginning what would happen. He knew also of Israel’s next words: “Crucify Him!” He knew of their continued rejection of the kingdom offer through the risen Christ at Pentecost. He knew that they would stone Stephen and thus conclude themselves in unbelief along with the Gentiles. But the most glorious truth of all: He knew that then He would reveal the mystery of His will—His sacred secret given to the world through Paul—to display the riches of His grace in building from two, one NEW man, the Body of Christ! The Christ who once wrought miracles in Israel is now Head of a new Church—His Body! And what of the favored nation and her kingdom? Read Romans chapter 11, and see!

*Donald A. Webb*

*Notes:*

## SERVANTS OBEY YOUR MASTERS

*Scripture Reading: Colossians 3:22-24*

"Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God: And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; knowing that of the Lord you shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ."

God's Word through the Apostle Paul to the converted servants or slaves in the church at Colosse was just as clear to them as it is to us. These slaves, even though redeemed by the precious blood of Christ or rather *because* they were redeemed—were to obey. Really, blind obedience? Read the words—"in all things...." But what if their masters were not saved? Saved or not, the masters were held accountable for their commands. Slaves were to obey.

No doubt there was a sizeable number of the Colossian church saved in the social ranks of slavery. What should be their response to masters? We can well imagine the problem of a believing slave carrying out the orders of an unsaved master. And while serving a believing master might seem easier, yet there would be the problem of being subject to one who was a fellow member of Christ's one Body. To our aroused social consciousness continued slavery in the church might seem unthinkable, but the existing order was not abolished. Surely the grace of God would work out all these problems if given a chance to work. For those saved under that social system, they were to honor the Lord by being obedient and not just when their master was watching!

Perhaps the nearest setting in our free society today would be that of obeying our boss or supervisor in our work. We "serve the Lord Christ" by doing a good job!

*Ivan L. Burgener*

*Notes:*

## WHICH PROGRAM?

When we think of the many, many Christians who prefer the program of Jesus Christ in Matthew, Mark and Luke to the message and program of grace which the risen Lord later revealed to Paul, we are not surprised that most church members act as though they were Old Testament religious Israelites instead of members of the Body of Christ in this age and economy of grace.

Is it not significant that the apostle Paul was the only servant of the Lord to speak of the Church of the Mystery as "the Body of Christ," the Joint-Body? Paul wrote about one-half of the Books from Matthew to Revelation. In all of his writings and recorded oral ministry, Paul never referred to the kingdom parables of Jesus of Nazareth, the Sermon on the Mount, the "Our Father" prayer, nothing in detail as to what Christ did and taught while He was a Minister of the circumcision. On the contrary, Paul wrote: "Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we Him no more. Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God, Who hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation" (II Corinthians 5:16-19).

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I once was blind and did not see  
 What Christ, the Lord, had done for me:  
 But by God's grace I now have sight,  
 Through faith in Christ, Who is my light.

*J.C. O'hair*

*Notes:*