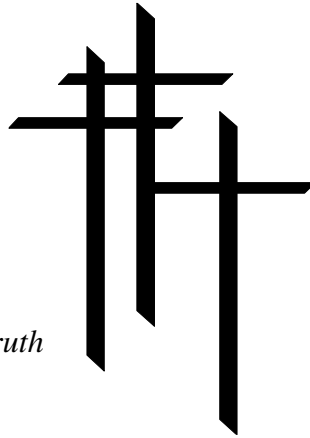


Timely Messenger

*Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth
Speaking the Truth in Love*



Volume 66 No. 8

August 2006

PAUL — AN APOSTLE OF JESUS CHRIST

by Gregg Bing

Continued from last month

“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God.”

In our last three issues we have studied the ministry and apostleship of Paul. We have looked at his dramatic conversion on the road to Damascus, his distinct calling to be God’s apostle to the Gentiles, and his diverse commission. This commission began with Paul’s ministry during the Acts period, which we reviewed last month, but

after the close of the Acts period, we see another aspect of Paul’s commission from the Lord.

Paul’s Post-Acts Ministry

During the Acts period, Paul’s ministry was to the Jew first; however, when the Jews rejected the Word of God spoken through Paul, he pronounced blindness upon them and turned to the Gentiles. The book of Acts closes with Paul’s final pronouncement of blindness upon the nation of Israel.

“The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers, saying, Go to this people and say: Hearing you will hear, and shall not understand; and seeing you will see, and not perceive; for the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them. Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!” (Acts 28:25-28)

This pronouncement marked God’s setting aside of Israel as a nation and the postponement of His prophesied plans and purposes for them, particularly the promise of an earthly kingdom. While it is not directly stated in Scripture that Israel was set aside at this time, Paul’s writings after this point clearly indi-

cate this was the case.

From his prison house in Rome, Paul wrote letters to three churches: Ephesus, Philippi, and Colosse, as well as a letter to his friend, Philemon. In these “prison epistles” the Apostle Paul unveiled a new plan and purpose of God which was ordained before the foundation of the world, but kept secret from men of other ages. This truth was a mystery; it was hidden in God until it was given to Paul by direct revelation from the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul made mention of this mystery in his earlier epistles, written during the Acts period (Rom. 16:25-26, 1 Cor. 2:6-8), but the full revelation of the “mystery of God’s will” is not found until we get to Paul’s prison epistles, especially the books of Ephesians and Colossians (Eph. 3:1-9, Col. 1:24-29).

The mystery is that God is now calling out a new body of believers known as the Church, the Body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23). This Church is primarily composed of Gentile believers (Eph. 3:1), be-

cause the majority of those in Israel had rejected the Lord Jesus Christ; a rejection that continues in the hearts of most Jews today. However, what is unique about this Church is that the difference between Jew and Gentile is completely done away with in God’s eyes.

From the call of Abram in Genesis 12, God made a clear distinction between Israel, His chosen nation, and the rest of the nations (Gentiles). This distinction continued during the earthly ministry of the Lord Jesus (Matt. 15:21-28) as well as throughout the Acts period. Even Paul’s ministry during this period was “to the Jew first and also to the Greek (Gentile)” (Rom. 1:16). When Israel, as a nation, was set aside at the close of the Acts period, Paul revealed that this distinction between Jew and Gentile has been done away with in the Church, the Body of Christ.

Paul described the Gentiles’ past condition this way:

“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.”

(Eph. 2:11-12)

What a terrible condition Gentiles were in: without Christ, separate from Israel, having no hope, and without God in the world. This was all changed through the cross of Christ!

“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were 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.”

(Eph. 2:13-16)

Through the shedding of His blood, Christ broke down the middle wall of separation between Jew and Gentile, a wall erected by God and set forth in the Mosaic Law. The enmity that existed between Jew and Gentile was put to death, and Christ Himself became their peace. He brought these two separate groups together and made them one—a new man, created in Christ Jesus—one body of believers reconciled to God through the cross. The preposition used here is “through” the cross, not “at” the cross. The cross made it possible for Jew and Gentile to be brought together in this way, but this truth was not made known at that time. The formation of this new Church is the essence of the mystery revealed to and through the Apostle Paul.

The mystery also revealed that God is dealing

with the Church under an entirely new dispensation—the dispensation of the grace of God” (Eph. 3:2). The word “dispensation” comes from the Greek word “oikonomia,” which literally means “household law.” It refers to the way in which a household is ordered and managed. Throughout history, God’s dealings with mankind have consisted of a series of different dispensations; God has dealt with different groups of people (households) under different arrangements (laws).

Most of God’s dealings with His earthly people Israel were under the dispensation of law. This law was given through Moses, God’s steward or administrator at that time. The law specified God’s requirements for His earthly people, the nation of Israel; it governed every aspect of their lives: their relationship with God, their worship, their walk, their purpose, and their hope.

The dispensation of the grace of God was given to the Apostle Paul, who
(Continued on page 4)

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(Continued from page 3)

served as its steward or administrator, much as Moses did for Israel under the law. God's orders for men under the present dispensation of grace are vastly different from those who lived under the law. The law was given that men might know they were sinners and become guilty before God (Rom. 3:19-20). The law was a tutor or schoolmaster to "bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith" (Gal. 3:24). All the requirements of the law: its commandments, its judgments, and its ordinances, were merely a shadow of things to come. The substance, the reality of what was only pictured by the law, is found in Christ (Col. 2:14-17). In Christ, we are complete; nothing needs to be added to His finished work. This truth is a key part of the mystery given to Paul, as he states in Colossians 2:9-10:

"For in Him (Christ) dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the Head of all principality and

power."

No physical circumcision is needed today, because we are circumcised in Christ "with the circumcision made without hands," a spiritual circumcision that is of Christ, not of the law (Col. 2:11). No water baptism is needed today, because we are "buried with Him in baptism" and "raised with Him through faith in the working of God," (Col. 2:12) a spiritual baptism performed by God's Holy Spirit, not by some priest or preacher. Physical circumcision and water baptism were part of the law; but they were only a shadow of things to come. Why hold onto the shadow when we now have the reality in Christ?

Why is it so important to see the distinctive nature of Paul's apostleship and ministry? Because he is God's apostle to us today. Because he is God's steward to the Church during the present dispensation of grace. If we truly desire to know God's will for our lives today, we must see it can only be found in the writings of the Apostle Paul. This does not mean

that we discard the rest of Scripture. Paul himself told Timothy:

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." (2 Tim. 3:16-17)

Though all Scripture is written "for" us, "for our learning," not all Scripture is written directly "to" us, for our obedience. Paul also told Timothy:

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth." (2 Tim. 2:15)

If we want to find approval in God's eyes, and be workers who need not be ashamed before Him, we must "rightly divide the Word of truth." This means we must take note of the divisions God has placed in His Word; we must see the

different dispensations (or dispensings) of God's will throughout the ages. In particular, it is vital that we heed His instructions to us during the present dispensation of God's grace. It is this dispensation that was given specifically to the Apostle Paul by God. That is why his apostleship, his ministry, and his writings are so important.

THE HAVES AND THE HAVE NOTS

By R.B. Shiflet

Almost all societies throughout history have been divided between the "Haves" and the "Have Nots." Efforts have been made to eliminate the distance between the two, but no one has been successful, including the Founding Fathers of our own republic.

We have heard the story (probably apocryphal) of Marie Antoinette, wife of Emperor Louis XVI, who during the dark days of the French Revolution was told the people had no bread. She allegedly replied, "Let them eat

cake." In more modern times, Imelda Marcos, "First Lady" of the Philippine Republic, openly boasted of her closets full of shoes in the Malacanan Palace, while her fellow citizens walked bare footed down the streets of the Islands. More recently, we have read that federal monies designated to help the unfortunate flood victims in New Orleans, have in some cases been used for frivolous cosmetic surgery.

Unfortunately, there are the "Haves" and the "Have Nots" in the spiritual realm also. 1 John 5:11 says:

"This is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He that hath the Son hath life; he that hath not the Son of God hath not life."

It is easy to see the "Haves" and the "Have Nots." If we have the Son, we have life. If we have not the Son of God, we have not life.

But how do we know we have the Son? Not by religion or ritual; not by works of the Law nor by

our attempts to live holy lives. "These things have I written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that ye may know that ye have eternal life." If we are trusting Christ and Christ alone for salvation, we are the "Haves" and we can know it. It is a sad fact that many who are "Spiritual Haves" do not have the assurance of their salvation. How wonderful to have eternal life; how sad to have it and not know it. Let us rest in the assurance of our eternal life (See John 5:24; 10:28,29; Philippians 1:3-6; 2 Timothy 1:12; Ephesians 2:8,9; Colossians 2:9-13).

We can also be very sure that we **have** God's complete revelation today. We do not need *Science and Health With Key to the Scriptures*; we do not need the *Book of Mormon*, nor any of the other false "additions" to God's complete revelation. God gave the Apostle Paul the revelation of the mystery to "fulfill (complete) the Word of God."

To God be the Glory!



THE FAITH THAT SAVES

by Charles Wages

"Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples; and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come." (1 Cor. 10:11)

In the world system in which we live it is commonly spoken of as having three major faiths: Protestant, Catholic and Jewish. Of course, there are numerous other faiths that people proclaim, or hold to in their religious beliefs. This type of classification, of course, is unknown in Biblical Truth. These designations have come about through man's study of church history or religion as it has

developed across the years; however, we are going to see that as far as the Bible is concerned, for this age, God only recognizes one faith. In this presentation of Bible Truth, the definition of this one Faith will be presented.

Source of Faith

For faith to be saving faith it must be that which comes from God because only God can save a sinner from his or her sin. In Galatians 2:20, it is stated:

"I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."

We notice that this is the faith of (or in) the Son of God. The good news we believe for salvation is the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). Since this faith is that which the Lord Jesus worked out, there can be no salvation or victori-

ous living apart from Him and His work. M. R. Vincent in *Word Studies in the New Testament*, states that this 'faith' is the element in which the new life is lived.

Securing of Faith

The Bible surely teaches that a person must believe and appropriate the work of Christ in order to obtain or secure the faith that saves. The word *believe* and its derivatives are numerous, especially in the gospel of John. Belief is simply having faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The *Companion Bible* in its Appendix 150, shows that the noun *pistis* (GR) occurs 242 times in the N.T. and is translated *faith* in almost every instance. This faith or belief implies the living, divinely implanted principle. When the verse in Acts 16:31 states: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house," it is saying, in essence, have faith in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ and God will save you on the basis of the finished work of Christ in redemption.

Living Faith

This faith could be defined as trust or a willingness of the saved person to throw themselves upon the strength of God in order to overcome daily. The object of our faith must always be the Lord Jesus Christ, whether we are talking about saving faith, securing faith, or living faith. Living faith comes from the heart and mind of the believer and is directed upward to God, whereas saving faith comes from God and is directed downward to the sinner. A very fine Scripture that shows this very clearly is Colossians 2:6-7:

“As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him; Rooted and built up in Him, and established in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.”

Abraham of old, really exhibited faith or trust, but he did so because of his firm belief that God could raise his son up (Hebrews 11:17-19). We might not

always see God work, but, He does! Abraham didn't see all of God's promises fulfilled in his day, but he trusted God to carry them out in His own way and time. We are told of Abraham in Romans 4:20-21:

“He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God. And being fully persuaded that, what He had promised, He was able to perform.”

Abraham showed real faith or trust in God. A remarkable faith! We, as believers today are not Abrahams, but it is very pleasing to God for each of us to trust Him and His Word as well as love Him.

Additional Scriptures:

Gal. 2:20; Eph. 4:5;
Eph 2:8-9; Col. 2:6-7;
Rom. 4:20-21; Rom. 10:17;
Rom. 3:23-26; Heb. 11:6

This article is from the book: *Written for Our Learning*. Write to us if you would like a copy.

For by grace
are ye
saved through
faith; and
that not of
yourselves: it is
the gift of God:
Not of works,
lest any man
should boast.
For we are his
workmanship,
created in Christ
Jesus unto good
works, which
God hath before
ordained that we
should walk in
them.

Ephesians
2:8-10

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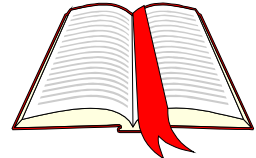
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