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# *Paul – Apostle or Fraud*

*By*

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## *Introduction*

*“Paul is not essential. He’s not a requirement to be a Christian.”*

*“You only have Paul’s word for being a ‘light to the gentiles’ and let’s face it Paul was known as a liar, he said so.”*

*“Jesus never tells us to follow Paul. Paul tells us to follow Paul.”*

*“Paul did not meet the criteria for being an apostle, therefore he wasn’t one except through his own mouth.”*

*“Why did none of the other apostles or disciples of Jesus ever actually call Paul an apostle??”*

*“No, the early Church did not accept Paul. He was utterly rejected by the Ephesians, even Paul testifies to that. Ephesus found him to be a false apostle and a liar.”*

These comments probably appear strange on a Christian apologetics blog, but they are quotes from recent online discussions I’ve had with people who believe the Apostle Paul was a fraud. Was he? Are none of his epistles to churches of any worth to followers of Christ? What about the the Gospel of Luke and Acts of the Apostles? Are they also

fraudulent?

I first came across people who didn't believe Paul was a legitimate apostle of Christ about 40 years ago. However, the anti-Paul sentiment has been around for a lot longer than that. It goes all the way back to the 1st century AD.

*“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? If I am not an apostle to others, yet doubtless I am to you. For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.” 1 Corinthians 9:1-2*

People who believe Paul was a fraud seem to be in agreement that some of the writings of the New Testament should not be there. They are in general agreement that all of Paul's letters are fraudulent. Most also agree that 2 Peter is also a fraud. That's convenient for them since 2 Peter 3:15-16 supports Paul's apostleship. There is some divergence of opinion from there. Some of the anti-Paul group believe that all of the Gospels are Scripture, including Luke's Gospel, some don't. I find that interesting since Paul mentored Luke. Some who accept Luke don't accept John's Gospel. Many of those people also don't accept John's letters and Revelation. They are anti-Paul and anti-John. It's a bit hard to keep up with all of the different nuances of what they do and don't accept as being God's Word.

Some of the anti-Paul group don't accept Luke's Acts of the Apostles even though they do accept Luke's Gospel account. Others accept the first several chapters of Acts, but not after chapter 6 because Paul is introduced in chapter 7. Do they believe that Acts 7 – 28 is not part of God's Word because of some textual reason? Not that I've seen. The main reason seems to be that the rest of Acts is pretty much about Paul and they believe Paul is a fraud, so what Luke wrote must be fraudulent. I do wonder why they would trust Luke at all in Acts or in his Gospel account if they think he's a liar and party to a fraud about Paul. That's not logical. Luke wrote a long narrative to his friend Theophilus that began in Luke 1 and ended in Acts 28. Why trust any of it if you believe Luke is a liar and manipulator? There is no reason to believe that Luke was a liar and fraud, but if you believe that at least be consistent. If you believe Luke was a liar and fraud, then you can't and won't accept either one of his narratives to Theophilus.

For the person who does not accept Luke, Acts, 2 Peter, Hebrews and all of Paul's letters, I don't think there's anything anyone can do to help you. You've chosen to throw out every possible piece of evidence that would tell you anything about Paul. That's like a trial judge who disallows every piece of evidence that would prove the defendant not guilty just because the judge does not want the defendant found not guilty. The court is stacked against the person in that case. The same is true in the way many people handle the

evidence for Paul's apostleship. If the evidence could possibly support Paul's legitimacy as an apostle of Jesus Christ, they throw it out. That's not reasonable, logical, ethical or legal, so there's nothing I can do to convince you because your mind is made up and closed to the possibility of being wrong. You have come to the table of discussion with presuppositions, preconceptions and thick ear plugs. You do not want to know, so you won't know.

However, if you have questions about whether Paul was an apostle or a fraud and you're open to looking at all of the evidence, then we can look at the evidence together and see what's there. Once you have seen all of the evidence you can make your own informed decision about Paul. From talking with many anti-Paul people and reading their literature for years I'm convinced they have not seen all the evidence, have incorrectly interpreted the evidence they have seen and are closed to looking at it with fresh eyes and open minds.

## *Starting at the Beginning*

The evidence for Paul's legitimacy as an apostle of Jesus Christ begins in the Gospel of Luke. Luke wrote an extraordinary narrative to a Greek friend for the purpose of explaining what happened in Israel 2,000 years ago.

*“Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed.” Luke 1:1-4*

Luke is clear from the first sentence of his Gospel account that he was doing what many other people had done – “to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us.” Those others may have included Matthew and Mark. Luke's Gospel has been known for centuries as an excellent account of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and to be synoptic with Matthew and Mark's Gospel accounts.

Luke continued his narrative about the events in the life of Jesus Christ in what we know as The Acts of the Apostles.

*“The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.” Acts 1:1-3*

Luke established clearly in the early part of Acts that Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit were in charge of what was going to happen in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the rest of the world. Jesus promised His disciples they would “receive power when the Holy Spirit” came upon them, and that they would be “witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:8) Jesus, acting in His High Priestly and Prophetic Office, spoke and it was done. The Holy Spirit came upon the disciples in Jerusalem and the preaching of the Gospel began (Acts 2-3).

Thousands of people were saved on the first day of preaching. They continued steadfastly in the apostle’s doctrine, in fellowship, breaking of bread and in prayers. Fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. All who believed

were together, and had all things in common. They sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all the people, as anyone had need. They continued daily with one accord in the Temple. They broke bread from house to house, ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people (Acts 2:41-47).

Peter was the primary preacher from the beginning of this new movement of the Spirit of God in response to the prophecy of Son of God, Jesus Christ. What was Peter's message? That the Jews had killed the Messiah and God had raised Him from the dead.

*“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know— Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it.” Acts 2:22-24*

*“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” Acts 2:36*

*“The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified His Servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and*

*denied in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go. But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses.” Acts 3:13-15*

*“Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, ‘Rulers of the people and elders of Israel: If we this day are judged for a good deed done to a helpless man, by what means he has been made well, let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. This is the ‘stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.’ Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” Acts 4:8-12*

*“But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: ‘We ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him.” Acts 5:29-32*

What did Peter tell the Jews to do because of what they had done to Jesus Christ?

*“Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call. And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, ‘Be saved from this perverse generation.” Acts 2:38-40*

*“Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.” Acts 3:19-21*

The tension is powerful in Jerusalem. Peter is preaching, the apostles are working wonders and miracles, the people are being saved and following the teaching of the apostles. The Jewish rulers are arresting Peter and the other apostles and demanding that they stop preaching in the Name of Jesus Christ. Peter and the others refuse to obey the

Jewish rulers. Even though the rulers beat the apostles and threatened them, Peter and the apostles “daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.” (Acts 5:42) The rulers wanted to kill the apostles and began to plot how they could do it without causing themselves problems with the citizens of Jerusalem who were excited about the new Messianic fervor surrounding the preaching of the apostles.

That is the tension that brings us to Paul, known first as Saul of Tarsus.

## *Paul Is or He Isn't*

Jesus told His disciples to do everything He commanded them to do and if what Paul wrote to the churches includes the commands of Jesus Christ, we must obey them. However, if Paul was not an apostle of Christ and was in fact a fraud, then we must not do what he wrote in his epistles because they are a lie and do not contain the commands of Christ. Whether we include Paul's writings into our churches and our lives is all based on certain historical facts which can be verified. In other words Paul is who he said he is or he isn't. We need to figure out which one is the truth.

When we last saw Christ's apostles in Acts 5, the Jewish rulers had beaten and threatened Peter and the others not to preach in the Name of Christ again. The first thing Peter and the other apostles did was to "daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ." Some of the rulers wanted to kill Peter and the apostles; other rulers did not want to do that. However, the plot to stamp out the apostles' movement was underway.

Members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen secretly induced men to falsely accuse one of the newly chosen “deacons” (Stephen) of speaking blasphemous words against Moses and God. They stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes, then seized Stephen and brought him to the council of elders. They set up false witnesses who said, ‘This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law; for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us.’(Acts 6:13-14) The high priest turned to Stephen and asked him if those things were so. Stephen spoke eloquently about Israel’s history of disobeying God, then said this:

*“You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it.” Acts 7:51-53*

The people who were listening to Stephen were cut to the heart. They gnashed at him with their teeth, but Stephen, “being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and said, ‘Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!’” (Acts 7:55-56) The people were so angry that they “cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; and they

cast *him* out of the city and stoned *him*. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.” (Acts 7:57-58)

We have just met Paul (Saul) for the first time. He is described as a “young man.” It appears he may have some position of responsibility or authority because the witnesses to the stoning of Stephen laid their clothes at Saul’s feet. We learn more about him in the next sentences in Luke’s narrative to Theophilus.

*“Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison.”*  
*Acts 8:1-3*

Paul (Saul) had both responsibility and authority from the Jewish rulers and his job was to put an end to the Messianic uprising led by Peter and the other apostles. Saul was motivated by righteous anger. “Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.” (Acts 9:1-2) Saul received the letters he needed and

headed for Damascus. It was on the road to Damascus to carry out his threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord that Saul met Jesus for the first time.

*“As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’ And he 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.’ 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. And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one. 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. And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.” Acts 9:3-9*

If you believe that Luke’s letters to Theophilus are true (Gospel of Luke and Acts of the Apostles), then you must believe that Jesus changed Saul’s heart on the road to Damascus. Saul didn’t ask to meet Jesus. He didn’t want to meet Jesus. He wanted to arrest and kill people who believed in Jesus. Jesus wanted Saul. Jesus called Saul by name, twice, and asked Saul why he was persecuting Him. What that means is Jesus saw Saul’s persecution of the apostles and disciples as a personal persecution of Him. Saul’s life was changed

that day.

Jesus also spoke to one of His disciples in Damascus; one of the people Saul wanted to arrest. By doing this, Jesus opened an introduction for Saul into fellowship with His disciples, regaining of his sight and insight into what the Lord would have him do for the rest of his life.

*“Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, ‘Ananias.’ And he said, ‘Here I am, Lord.” 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. 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.’ Then Ananias answered, ‘Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name.’ 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. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake.’ And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy*

*Spirit.' Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized. So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus." Acts 9:10-19*

Ananias became a bridge for Saul between who he was and who he was to become. Ananias was also a witness to the disciples in Damascus that Saul was not pretending to be a disciple of Christ so he could get into the inner circle and arrest and kill the apostles. Saul's encounter with Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus changed his life forever. As we will see further in the Acts of the Apostles, Saul would never oppose Jesus again.

## *Against Paul*

Paul made it clear in his epistles that he was “an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God” (Ephesians 1:1) and that he was speaking and writing what Jesus had revealed directly to him (1 Corinthians 9). So, for a group of Christians to deny that Paul was an apostle and to declare his writings as fraudulent is a major problem.

This is not the first time in the history of the Church that groups have opposed Paul’s apostleship and questioned his writings. As we continue laying the historical foundation for answering serious questions by these groups, we will also look at the history of anti-Pauline theology.

The problem between the Jewish leaders and the apostles and disciples of Christ had been growing bigger for months and exploded with the stoning death of Stephen, a deacon in the congregation of Christ followers. Saul was a part of the crowd that stoned Stephen and was a leader in the great persecution of believers that followed.

*“At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. And*

*devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison.” Acts 8:1-3*

The result of that persecution was not what Saul or the Jewish leaders had intended.

*“Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.” Acts 8:4*

Instead of running wildly for their lives and hiding from Saul and the soldiers from the high priest, the Christ followers preached the message of Jesus everywhere they went. The remaining verses in Acts 8 contain stories about what happened as they preached.

As we saw in our last study, Saul was on his way to Damascus with letters from the high priest written to the synagogues of Damascus giving Saul permission to arrest “any who were of the Way, whether men or women” (Acts 9:2) so he could arrest them and bring them bound to Jerusalem.

We also saw that Jesus interrupted Saul’s trip and blinded him with a great light that “shone around him from heaven” (Acts 9:3) Saul heard a voice calling to him saying, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” (Acts 9:4) Saul asked the voice who He was and the Lord said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting” (Acts 9:5).

Jesus told Saul to get up and go into the city where he would be told “what you must do” (Acts 9:6). The soldiers and others who were with Saul heard a voice but didn’t see anyone. Because Saul was blind the soldiers led him by the hand into Damascus. Saul was blind for three days and didn’t eat or drink. (Acts 9:7-9)

The next event Luke wrote about was a conversation between Jesus Christ and one of His disciples in Damascus. Question: how did Luke know what Jesus and Ananias talked about that day? Answer: Luke was an excellent historian. The work of a journalist is also historical in nature, so I understand how Luke got his information. In fact, he’s already told us.

*“Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed ... The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen.” Luke 1:1-4; Acts 1:1-2*

Luke did what historians do – he interviewed the people who made the history. Luke said that he had “perfect understanding of all things from the very first” and used that understanding to write an orderly account to Theophilus so he would “know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed.” One of the people Luke most likely interviewed was Ananias.

It’s also important to remember that the Holy Spirit is at the center of everything going on in Israel, Samaria, Syria and other places where He spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Spirit of God spoke directly to those early believers, as we will soon see, and may have given information to Luke that he was not able to gain from personal interviews.

Jesus spoke to Ananias, who lived in Damascus, in a vision. The Lord told him to get and go to a “street called straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying.” Jesus went on to tell Ananias that Paul had already seen Ananias in a vision coming to put his hands on him so he could receive sight again. You might imagine Ananias’ response.

*“Then Ananias answered, ‘Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name.’ Acts 9:13-14*

That statement by Ananias confirms Luke's earlier information about Paul being an enemy of Christ and His followers. How Jesus responded to Ananias give us great insight to the unique ministry He had planned for Paul.

*“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. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake.’ Acts 9:15-16*

Look at those words closely:

- he is a chosen vessel of Mine
- to bear My name before Gentiles
- before kings
- before the children of Israel
- I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake

We've already seen that Jesus chose Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus. Now, we see that Saul (Paul) was a “chosen vessel of Mine.” That is an extremely personal phrase pointing to Paul's purpose and position. Paul belonged to Jesus Christ and would perform the duties of a “chosen vessel.” The Greek is *skeuos ekloges estin moi* – literally, “a vessel of choice is to me.” The word for “vessel” (*skeuos*) means “container, implement.” The word for

“chosen” (*ekloges*) means “the act of picking out, choosing.” The words for “is to me” (*estin moi*) carry the idea of personal choice. Jesus told Ananias that He chose Saul to be a container/implement for Himself. The Lord made a personal choice that Saul would belong to Him and be useful as a container for His purpose.

The work that Jesus purposed for Saul was “to bear My name.” Jesus intended for Saul to be His “chosen vessel” (container) to bear His Name “before Gentiles,” followed by “before kings,” and “before the children of Israel.” To top it off, Jesus said that Saul would “suffer for My name’s sake.” Paul would suffer in his position as a “chosen vessel” for the Lord.

When you look at the life that Saul (Paul) lived after his conversion, did it look anything like the life that Jesus prophesied to Ananias? If it did, then Paul was obedient to his calling. If not, then Paul was not obedient. The words of Jesus to Ananias are key to whether Paul was a true apostle of Christ or a fraud.

Ananias went to the house where Saul was staying, entered the house and laid hands on him. Ananias accomplished four things in his message to Saul:

- called him “brother Saul” ... that carried with it the powerful sense of acceptance, inclusion and purpose
- reminded him of his encounter with the “Lord Jesus” on the road ... what happened to Saul on that road would forever be a

- milestone in the life of Saul and the followers of Jesus Christ
- that Jesus sent Ananias to Saul so he could receive his sight ... the Lord wanted Saul to see again physically, but see as a believer for the first time. The last thing Saul would remember seeing before going blind was his blind anger against God. The first thing Saul would remember seeing after his ‘Damascus road’ experience would be a brother in Christ who accepted him and partnered with him in the ministry Jesus had called him to do.
  - and be filled with the Holy Spirit ... Saul would go from being a young Jewish rabbi who only knew God from a distance to a follower of the Way he had once persecuted having the very Spirit of God living inside him and filling him with His power and glory.

Saul received his sight immediately when something like scales fell from his eyes. He arose, was baptized, received food, was strengthened and “spent some days with the disciples at Damascus.” Acts 9:18-19

What happened next is quite remarkable. “Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God.” (Acts 9:20) Saul went from being an angry pharisee arresting God’s people to being one of God’s people preaching that Jesus Christ “is the Son of God.” What an amazing theological change was wrought in Saul.

*Then all who heard were amazed, and said, 'Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?' But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ." Acts 9:20-22*

What caused this amazing change in Saul? Two things: he was filled with the Holy Spirit and he spent time with the disciples at Damascus (Acts 9:17-19). We're only into the first several days of Saul's life as a follower of Jesus Christ and already the evidence is mounting in favor of the future of Pauline theology.

- Jesus revealed Himself personally to Saul on the road to Damascus
- Jesus revealed Himself personally to the disciple Ananias, verified the call of Saul to a special ministry to Gentiles, kings and Jews
- Ananias the confirmed disciple of Christ met with Saul and told him what Jesus said about the ministry that Saul would have for Christ
- Ananias the confirmed disciple of Christ told Saul that Jesus had sent him so that Saul would receive his sight and be "filled with the Holy Spirit"
- Ananias the confirmed disciple of Christ baptized Saul and introduced him to the Lord's disciples in Damascus
- Saul spent time with the Lord's disciples in Damascus and

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preached in the synagogues that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

- People in the synagogues recognized that Saul was the Pharisee who “destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem” and that he had come to Damascus for that same purpose, “so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests.”
- Saul increased in strength and “confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this *Jesus* is the Christ.”

## *Paul's Connections*

When we last saw Saul he was preaching in synagogues in Damascus that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He “confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this *Jesus* is the Christ” (Acts 9:22). The Jews were confused by this for a short time because they recognized that Saul was the same man who the chief priests had sent from Jerusalem for the express purpose of arresting followers of Christ to take them back to Jerusalem for trial.

It wasn't long before the Jews in Damascus had enough of Saul's preaching and plotted to kill him. However, Saul found out about the plot and the Lord's disciples took Saul by night “and let him down through the wall in a large basket” (Acts 9:25).

Saul headed back to Jerusalem and tried to join the disciples there, but they were all afraid of him. They did not believe that Saul was a disciple of Christ. “But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles” (Acts 9:27). The evidence for Paul's apostleship is about to gain more strength. So, let's review a little history to see the impact of what just happened.

As a former investigative journalist it was important for me to discover connections and corroborations. What connected to what, who

connected to who, what and who corroborated what and who. Investigating a news story is often like putting together the pieces of a big puzzle, but eventually the pieces come together and the picture is clear.

We've already seen how Jesus connected to Paul, Jesus connected to Ananias, and Ananias connected to Paul. Then Ananias, who was connected to the other disciples in Damascus, connected Paul to the disciples in Damascus.

The fact that Jesus spoke to Ananias and told him about speaking with Paul was corroboration for Ananias speaking with Paul about what Jesus had told him about Paul and his future as an apostle of Christ. The puzzle pieces are coming together.

Saul leaves Damascus and heads back to Jerusalem. He wants to talk with the apostles and disciples there. However, they want no part of Saul. That's what I would expect to find. Why would the apostles and disciples in Jerusalem, who knew Saul and the terror of his persecution of Christ followers, want to meet with him? I would be suspicious of the accuracy of the story in Acts if they had acted differently.

Enter Barnabas. We first meet him in Acts 4:36-37 – “And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, having land,

sold *it*, and brought the money and laid *it* at the apostles' feet.”

Anyone who shows up in the first four chapters of Acts is one of the early disciples of Christ. Barnabas is mentioned right after the first arrest of the apostles as being someone the apostles knew well enough to give him a special name, Barnabas – Son of Encouragement. That means Barnabas (Joses) had been a disciple of Christ long enough to have earned that reputation with the apostles. That also means Barnabas would have been close to the apostles and deacons when Stephen was arrested and killed (Acts 7). Barnabas would have experienced some of Saul's persecution and would have known how dangerous Saul was to followers of Jesus Christ.

Barnabas was a Levite from Cyprus and also a land owner. He sold his land and gave the money to the apostles. That's what the disciples did in those early days of being a Christ follower.

*“Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as*

*anyone had need.” Acts 4:32-35*

It's important in our investigation of Paul's credibility to witness the strong and enduring credibility of Barnabas with the 12 Apostles.

They trusted Barnabas and appreciated his love for Christ and those who were following Christ. It is Barnabas' love for Christ and His followers that leads us into this exciting new chapter about Saul (Paul).

All of the disciples in Jerusalem were afraid of Saul and did not believe he was a disciple of Christ. Barnabas would have understood that because he had also felt the sting of Saul's earlier persecution of the disciples. So, what was it that changed Barnabas' thinking about Saul?

*“But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.” Acts 9:27*

What could have changed Barnabas' thinking about Saul? Why would Barnabas trust Saul enough to want to take him to meet with the apostles? One possibility is that Ananias introduced them. Ananias would have understood how difficult it would be for the disciples and apostles in Jerusalem to just take Saul at his word about his conversion. Ananias may have traveled to Jerusalem with Saul and

sought out Barnabas, knowing his spiritual giftedness as an encourager and how the apostles trusted him. Barnabas probably knew or knew about Ananias and would have accepted his word as true. Another possibility might be that Ananias sent one or more trusted disciples from Damascus with Saul carrying a personal letter of introduction from Ananias to Barnabas or the apostles corroborating Saul's story about the Lord speaking to him, and his preaching boldly about the name of Jesus in Damascus. Yet another possibility is that Jesus or the Holy Spirit revealed Saul's conversion directly to Barnabas in a vision or dream, though I think Luke would have included that fact in his record.

Let's add more connections and corroborations to our investigation. Barnabas was an early disciple of Christ in Jerusalem and knew the 12 Apostles well. More importantly, they knew Barnabas well and included him as an important part of the Jerusalem congregation. Barnabas meets with Saul, is convinced of his true conversion, and takes Saul to meet with the apostles in Jerusalem.

Barnabas → Apostles → Barnabas → Saul → Apostles →  
Christ Jesus → Saul → Ananias → Christ → Apostles

The connections and corroborations just keep getting stronger and the evidence is mounting.

Saul ran into major problems in Jerusalem. He spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Hellenists, but they attempted to kill him. When the disciples found out, they took Saul to Caesarea and sent him to Tarsus. Interestingly, the disciples throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. They walked in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit and multiplied (Acts 9:28-31).

Why was that? Saul was the chief priests' top prosecutor and enforcer. What happened to the persecution of Christ followers when the chief persecutor became a follower of Jesus Christ and removed from the area? Apparently, a brief period of peace for believers while the priests came up with another plan of attack.

While Saul was back home in Tarsus receiving multiple visions from God about the ministry to which he was being called (2 Corinthians 12), Jesus moved forward with His bold, new plan to open the door for Gentiles to come to faith in an unexpected and previously hidden way. What the Lord did through Peter would also prepare the way for Saul to accomplish the goals Jesus revealed to him in Damascus.

## *What About Peter?*

Luke, the human author of Acts, turned his attention to the ministry of the Apostle Peter. Most of the people I've spoken with who believe Paul was a fraud look to Peter as one of the true apostles of Christ. That's helpful to know because God used Peter in a special way to prepare the apostles and Jewish disciples to acknowledge and accept the special call Jesus had for the ministry of Paul.

“Now it came to pass, as Peter went through all *parts of the country*, that he also came down to the saints who dwelt in Lydda.” (Acts 9:32) Lydda is a town about 30 miles northwest of Jerusalem and about 11 miles southeast of Tel Aviv. It was known in ancient times as Lod, reportedly built by men from the tribe of Benjamin (1 Chronicles 8:12). Following the exile to Babylon in the early part of the 6th century BC, some of the Jews who returned to land in many years later settled in Lod (Ezra 2:33). By the time we get to the 1st century AD the town is known as Lydda. It was near the Plain of Sharon and Christianity had a strong presence in Lydda and Sharon by the 2nd century AD, most likely because of Peter's ministry.

When Peter arrived in Lydda he found a man named Aeneas who was paralyzed and had been bedridden for eight years. Peter spoke to Aeneas and said, “Aeneas, Jesus the Christ heals you. Arise and make your bed.” (Acts 9:34) Aeneas got up immediately and walked. Many in Lydda and Sharon saw Aeneas, heard how he was healed and turned to the Lord Jesus.

Peter moved on from Lydda to Joppa (now the southern part of the city of Tel Aviv). Joppa, located on the Mediterranean coast, became an important city for Israel. It became the property of the Tribe of Dan after Joshua and the army of Israel conquered the land of Canaan. King Solomon used Joppa as a port to bring giant cedars logs from Lebanon to Jerusalem to build the first Temple.

The reason Peter traveled from Lydda to Joppa was because some disciples of Christ in Joppa heard that Peter was in Lydda. They knew his reputation for healing people, so they traveled to Lydda to get him and bring him to Joppa. A disciple named Tabitha (translated Dorcas), who was well known for her good works and charitable deeds, became sick and died. The disciples took Peter to the upper room where the body of Tabitha lay. The people who were in the room mourning the death of Tabitha showed Peter the tunics and garments she had made while she was alive. Peter asked them all to leave the upper room so he could be alone with the dead woman. Peter knelt down, prayed, turned to the body and said, “Tabitha, arise.’ And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat

up. Then he gave her *his* hand and lifted her up; and when he had called the saints and widows, he presented her alive.” (Acts 9:40-41) You can imagine the people’s reaction to this miracle. “And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed on the Lord.” (Acts 9:42) Peter stayed in Joppa with Simon, a tanner, for many days.

Everything was in place for God to reveal something He had kept hidden from the apostles. An angel of God visited a Roman centurion named Cornelius in a vision. Cornelius served in Caesarea, almost 40 miles north of Joppa. He was a devout man who feared God with all his household. Cornelius gave alms generously to the people and prayed to God often.

The angel in the vision called to Cornelius and said, “Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God. Now send men to Joppa, and send for Simon whose surname is Peter. He is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea. He will tell you what you must do.” (Acts 10:4-6) After the angel departed, Cornelius called two of his household servants and a devout soldier, told them about the vision, and sent them to Joppa to find Peter.

The next day, while the servants and soldiers from Cornelius were making their trip to Joppa, Peter went up on the housetop to pray. He became very hungry and wanted to eat, but fell into a trance first. Peter saw heaven opened “and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth. In it

were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. And a voice came to him, ‘Rise, Peter; kill and eat.’ But Peter said, ‘Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean.’ And a voice *spoke* to him again the second time, ‘What God has cleansed you must not call common.’ This was done three times. And the object was taken up into heaven again.” (Acts 10:11-16)

Keep in mind that this was something new to Peter. He had never had a vision like this before. In fact, Peter refused to do it based on the Levitical Law concerning clean and unclean animals. Interestingly, the angel explained this to Peter three times (three seems to have been a number of importance in Peter’s life). After the third time, the object was taken up into Heaven again.

Peter woke up and while he was considering what the vision meant, the men from Cornelius arrived at Simon’s house and asked to see Peter. The Holy Spirit spoke to Peter and said, “Behold, three men are seeking you. Arise therefore, go down and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them.” (Acts 10:19-20)

Peter went down to meet with the men from Cornelius. They told him about the vision Cornelius had from the angel. “Cornelius *the* centurion, a just man, one who fears God and has a good reputation among all the nation of the Jews, was divinely instructed by a holy angel to summon you to his house, and to hear

words from you.” (Acts 10:22) Peter invited them to lodge with him for the night, then they headed off to Caesarea the next day, along with some of the disciples from Joppa.

They arrived in Caesarea the following day and Cornelius was waiting for them. He had already called together his relatives and close friends. Cornelius was so taken with Peter’s presence that he fell down at the apostle’s feet and worshiped him. Peter quickly lifted him up and said, “Stand up; I myself am also a man.” (Acts 10:26)

This next part is VERY important to understand because it became a major shift in how God dealt with Gentiles. Theological aspects of preaching the Gospel began to change right there. Watch how Peter dealt with this as he spoke to Cornelius and his family and friends. You might also compare Peter’s first message to Jews in Acts 2 and his first message to Gentiles in Acts 10. There are some big differences.

*“You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean. Therefore I came without objection as soon as I was sent for. I ask, then, for what reason have you sent for me?” So Cornelius said, ‘Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, and said, ‘Cornelius, your prayer has been heard, and your alms are remembered in the*

*sight of God. Send therefore to Joppa and call Simon here, whose surname is Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the sea. When he comes, he will speak to you.’ So I sent to you immediately, and you have done well to come. Now therefore, we are all present before God, to hear all the things commanded you by God.’ Then Peter opened his mouth and said: ‘In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him. The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ—He is Lord of all—that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they killed by hanging on a tree. Him God raised up on the third day, and showed Him openly, not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before by God, even to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead. To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins.” Acts 10:28-43*

One of the first things to notice here is that Peter addressed the issue of how it was against Jewish law for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to someone from another nation. Peter is aware of the law. He was also aware that God had shown him something new — that he should not call any man common or unclean. Because of that, Peter said he came without objection as soon as he was asked. It's clear from the context of Peter's response to the angel that he would have objected if God had not given him the vision. It was the vision and the direction of the Holy Spirit that changed Peter's view concerning preaching the Gospel to Gentiles.

One of the major differences between his first sermon to Gentiles in Acts 10 and first sermon to Jews in Acts 2 is that Peter didn't blame the Gentiles for the crucifixion of Christ, but did blame the Jews. "And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they killed by hanging on a tree." Compare that with what Peter preached to Jews in Acts 2: "Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death ... Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." (Acts 2:23, 36)

Another difference is that the Holy Spirit fell on the Gentiles before Peter finished speaking, possibly a sign from God that He approved

of Gentiles coming to faith. That would be important in the future as Peter explained to the other apostles what happened in Caesarea.

*“While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Then Peter answered, ‘Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?’ And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to stay a few days.” Acts 10:44-48*

Peter was convinced. He saw the vision with the angel about the animals, heard the words of the Holy Spirit telling him to go and meet with Cornelius, then saw the evidences of the Holy Spirit falling on the Gentiles. The Jewish disciples from Joppa who were with Peter were astonished, but Peter asked if anyone could forbid water baptism for the Gentiles seeing clearly that the Holy Spirit had chosen to fall on the Gentiles.

Question now is this: how would the rest of the apostles react to what Peter had done preaching to Gentiles and baptizing them?

*“Now the apostles and brethren who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision contended with him, saying, ‘You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!’ Acts 11:1-3*

Uh-oh, Peter’s in trouble. The other apostles and brethren who were in Judea heard what had happened in Caesarea. Those of the circumcision (Jews) “contended” with Peter about his going into the home of uncircumcised men (Gentiles) and eating with them.

Watch what happens next because it sets the stage for what God is going to do through Paul (Saul).

*“But Peter explained it to them in order from the beginning, saying: ‘I was in the city of Joppa praying; and in a trance I saw a vision, an object descending like a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came to me. When I observed it intently and considered, I saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. And I heard a voice saying to me, ‘Rise, Peter; kill and eat.’ But I said, ‘Not so, Lord! For nothing common or unclean has at any time entered my mouth.’ But the voice answered me again from heaven, ‘What God has cleansed you must not call common.’ Now this was done three times, and all were drawn*

*up again into heaven. At that very moment, three men stood before the house where I was, having been sent to me from Caesarea. Then the Spirit told me to go with them, doubting nothing. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered the man's house. And he told us how he had seen an angel standing in his house, who said to him, 'Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon whose surname is Peter, who will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved.' And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning. Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, 'John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' If therefore God gave them the same gift as He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?' When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, 'Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life.'" Acts 11:4- 17*

Many things to see here, but let's look at two specifics that will relate later to Paul.

- Peter knew nothing about God's plan to save Gentiles and would have opposed it if he had not experienced the vision of the sheet and heard the Holy Spirit tell him to go with the Gentile men to preach the Gospel of Christ to Cornelius and his family
- The other apostles and brethren in Jerusalem knew nothing about

God's plan to save Gentiles and would have opposed it if Peter had not confirmed that God told him to do it and the Holy Spirit fell on the Gentiles while he was still speaking

Think back to what Jesus told His disciple Ananias about Saul – “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. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake.’” (Acts 9:15-16) Jesus chose Saul separately from Peter and the other apostles to be a “chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel.” Why? Why did Jesus choose Saul separately and much later than the Jewish apostles?

Jesus spent months training Peter, James, John and the other apostles for the work He had for them to do after He returned to Heaven and sent His Holy Spirit to empower them. The Lord spent 40 days after His resurrection “speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.” (Acts 1:3) The Holy Spirit filled all of them on the Day of Pentecost and Peter preached boldly in the streets of Jerusalem to every Jew who would listen to him. The thousands of Jews who became followers of Christ “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine” (Acts 2:42) Do you find it a little unusual that with the years of personal training with Jesus Christ and being filled with the Holy Spirit and taught by Him what they would teach the disciples, that none of them had any idea Jesus planned to save Gentiles without them first converting to Judaism and that the Holy Spirit would

fill them even as He did the Jewish disciples? Gentiles were unclean. How could this be?

We don't have to go far to find out what God was doing. The very next verses in Acts 11 begin the unfolding of the Lord's plan for Paul and the Gentiles, immediately following the salvation of Cornelius and his family and friends and Peter rehearsing what happened to the other Jewish apostles who were upset by what he had done. It was apparently vital to God's plan that Peter be the apostle to preach to the Gentiles and for the other apostles to accept that it was the work of the Holy Spirit.

*“Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only. But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord. Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch. When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord. For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. And when he had*

*found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch. And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar. Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.” Acts 11:19-30*

Remember Barnabas? He had a direct connection to the apostles in Jerusalem and Saul (Paul). God used Barnabas to introduce Saul to Peter and the other apostles years before and God used Barnabas again to introduce Saul to the church in Antioch Syria. More corroboration and confirmation of Saul having a direct connection to the apostles.

So far in the historical account in Acts we have seen Jesus speak with Saul, Jesus speak with Ananias, Ananias speak with Saul, Saul speak with Barnabas, Barnabas introduce Saul to Peter and other apostles, the apostles send Barnabas to Antioch of Syria to find out what was happening there, Barnabas saw what God was going in Antioch and encouraged the new believers, Barnabas went to Tarsus to find Saul and bring him back to Antioch, Barnabas and Saul taught “a great many people” in Antioch and that’s where the disciples “were

first called Christians,” and Barnabas and Saul took a relief donation from Antioch to the elders in Jerusalem. I must say, that’s a pretty impressive list of connections for Saul so far, but we’re not done.

*“And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their ministry, and they also took with them John whose surname was Mark. Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away. So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus.” Acts 12:25-13:4*

The Holy Spirit told the prophets and teachers in Antioch (Barnabas, Simeon, Lucius, Manaen and Saul) to “separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” The Christians at Antioch fasted and prayed and laid hands on them and sent them away, but who really sent them? “So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit.”

God the Spirit joined God the Son in choosing Saul for a special ministry to Gentiles. (It’s important to remember that Jesus did His

Father's Will, so we can easily see that God the Father is involved in the selection of Saul for this special ministry.) Jesus said that Saul was His "chosen vessel" to bear His name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. The Holy Spirit told the prophets at Antioch to separate Barnabas and Saul to Him for the work He had called them to do. The next verses are crucial to see the connection between what Jesus called Saul to do and what the Holy Spirit called Saul to do. Would it be the same or different?

*"So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus."*

Jesus said Paul would bear His name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel and the Holy Spirit sent Paul to Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. That's what I would expect to happen "if" Paul was really called by God to be an apostle. God is not divided. Jesus and the Holy Spirit are not going to have different ideas about where to send Paul. Jesus called Paul to bear His name primarily to Gentiles and the Holy Spirit sent Paul to bear the name of Jesus primarily to Gentiles.

As we follow Paul and Barnabas during their first missionary journey we find them starting by preaching in Jewish synagogues about Jesus as Messiah, but it wasn't long before Paul announced his special calling from God.

*“On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul. Then Paul and Barnabas 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.’ Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.” Acts 13:44-47*

Paul’s famous words, “behold, we turn to the Gentiles,” ring true because of his special calling by Jesus and the Holy Spirit. However, just because Jesus and the Holy Spirit called Paul to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles did not mean the apostles and other leaders in Jerusalem were in agreement with what he and Barnabas did.

## *What About The Apostles?*

*“Now when they had come and gathered the church together, they reported all that God had done with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. So they stayed there a long time with the disciples.” Acts 14:27-28*

Saul (Paul) and Barnabas returned to Antioch of Syria after many months on a journey that began with the Holy Spirit saying, “Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” (Acts 13:2) That “work” included preaching the Gospel in several countries and opening “the door of faith to the Gentiles.” This was something that “both” Barnabas and Saul did, so again we see a powerful connection back to the Jewish apostles in Jerusalem who sent Barnabas from Jerusalem to Antioch as their representative.

It was Barnabas, representative of the Jewish apostles in Jerusalem, who saw what God was doing in Antioch and traveled to Tarsus to find Saul. It was Barnabas, representative of the Jewish apostles in Jerusalem, who brought Saul back to the Antioch Church to minister to the congregation of Gentiles and Jews. It was Barnabas, representative of the Jewish apostles in Jerusalem, who the Holy Spirit sent with Saul to open the door of faith to the Gentiles. It was

Barnabas, representative of the Jewish apostles in Jerusalem, who returned to Antioch with Saul to tell the church congregation all that God had “done with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.” It was Barnabas, representative of the Jewish apostles in Jerusalem, who traveled with Saul to Jerusalem to face those same apostles about what they had done in opening the door of faith to the Gentiles.

Was Paul an apostle or a fraud? Let’s see what happened when he and Barnabas met with the apostles in Jerusalem. If they thought Paul was a fraud, this would be their opportunity to call him out and set the record straight forever.

Even though the Holy Spirit sent Peter to preach the Gospel to Cornelius and other Gentiles in his family, and even though the Holy Spirit sent Paul and Barnabas to open the door of faith to the Gentiles, that didn’t convince everyone in Jerusalem that what was going on was of God.

*“And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.’ Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question. ” Acts 15:1-2*

Some men from Judea traveled to Antioch and taught Gentiles in the church that unless they were circumcised according to the custom of Moses, they could not be saved. The Jews from Judea were not just talking about issues of fellowship or leadership. They were saying that the Gentiles could not be “saved” unless they were circumcised. Here you have Paul and Barnabas telling the Gentiles that Jesus was their salvation, not obedience to Mosaic Law or the “custom of Moses” — “through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.” (Acts 13:38-39)

Did Paul and Barnabas have any problems with the men from Judea teaching the Gentiles in Antioch that they had to be “circumcised according to the custom of Moses” or they couldn’t be saved? You bet they did — “Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them.” Paul and Barnabas knew God’s message to the Gentiles and they were not about to let these men from Judea preach anything different without opposing them.

That dissension and dispute led to a remarkable meeting in Jerusalem with Paul and Barnabas on one side, the men from Judea on the other side and the Jewish apostles trying to decide what to do. Here’s what happened between Antioch and Jerusalem.

*“So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, describing the conversion of the Gentiles; and they caused great joy to all the brethren. And when they had come to Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders; and they reported all things that God had done with them. But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, ‘It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.’” Acts 15:3-5*

The Christians in Antioch sent Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas told believers along the way about the “conversion of the Gentiles.” That caused great joy to all the brethren. Paul and Barnabas met with the apostles and elders in Jerusalem and “reported all things that God had done with them.”

“But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up.” It’s interesting to see that the congregation of believers in Jerusalem included members of the Pharisees. Enough years had gone by since the Holy Spirit came on disciples at Pentecost that even some members of the Pharisee sect that opposed Christ and the apostles had become followers of Christ. However, they still believed that Gentiles had to be circumcised and commanded to “keep the law of Moses.”

So, what will the apostles and elders do about this dispute? On one side are the Pharisees who believe Gentiles can be followers of Christ only by being circumcised and keeping the Mosaic Law. On the other side are Paul and Barnabas who the Holy Spirit used to open the door of faith to the Gentiles. Paul and Barnabas do not believe that Gentiles have to be circumcised or keep the Mosaic Law to become legitimate followers of Christ. What will they do?

Remember Peter? Remember his experience with the sheet and the Gentile men who came from Cornelius? Remember that Peter saw the Holy Spirit fall on the Gentiles in the same way He had fallen on Jews at Pentecost? Will Peter say anything? If he does, what will he say?

*“And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them: ‘Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they.’” Acts 15:6-11*

Barnabas to share their hearts in a calmer atmosphere. ”Then all the multitude kept silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul declaring how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles.” (Acts 15:12) When Barnabas and Paul were finished talking, James, the half-brother of Jesus, spoke to everyone, saying:

*“Men and brethren, listen to me: Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written: ‘After this I will return And will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, And I will set it up; So that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, Even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, Says the Lord who does all these things.’ Known to God from eternity are all His works. Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood. For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath.”*

Following speeches by Peter, Paul, Barnabas and James, all of the apostles and elders, “with the whole church,” decided to send a group of chosen men of their own company (Judas-Barsabas and Silas) to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They took with them a letter from

the apostles, elders and brethren in Jerusalem. Here's what they wrote in the letter:

*“To the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia: Greetings. Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, ‘You must be circumcised and keep the law’—to whom we gave no such commandment—it seemed good to us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who will also report the same things by word of mouth. For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.” Acts 15:23-29*

Paul, Barnabas, Judas and Silas traveled together to Antioch. They gathered the church members together and read the letter to them. Church members in Antioch “rejoiced over its encouragement.” Judas and Silas, who were both prophets, exhorted and strengthened the Christians in Antioch with many words. They stayed in Antioch for a time, but Judas eventually returned to Jerusalem with greetings from the believers to the apostles. Silas remained in Antioch.

What we see in this amazing exchange is more evidence that the Lord's apostles in Jerusalem accepted the apostleship and ministry of Paul. If Peter wanted to expose Paul as a fraud, he missed his opportunity to do that. Instead, Peter stood up in support for what God was doing through the ministry of Paul and Barnabas. If James wanted to expose Paul as a fraud, he also missed his opportunity to do that. Instead, James agreed that what Paul and Barnabas had done in opening the door of faith to the Gentiles was of God. In the letter James wrote to the Gentile believers in Antioch, he called Paul "beloved." James also wrote that Barnabas and Paul had "risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." That is an extremely **STRONG** endorsement by James and the Lord's apostles for the apostolic ministry of Paul and Barnabas to the Gentiles.

This face-to-face meeting between Paul and the Jewish apostles should **CRUSH** any argument that Paul was fraudulent in his claim to be an apostle. However, that has not been the case during almost 2,000 years of Church history.

## *Why Bother?*

Some Christian friends have asked me why I'm writing a series to answer questions about the legitimacy of Paul's apostleship. Almost every Christian I know personally believes that Paul was an apostle of Christ and that the Holy Spirit inspired him to write letters to 1st century churches (e.g. Romans, 1&2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians, etc). So, why bother with what appears to be a fringe group of people who call themselves Christians, but do not accept Paul's apostleship? I am concerned about three important matters.

First, I am concerned about what God is doing in our world today. God the Father sent God the Son to die "for the ungodly" (Romans 5:6). God the Son sent God the Spirit into the world to "convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment" (John 16:8). As we've seen in previous studies, God the Son personally selected Paul to be His "chosen vessel" to bear His name "before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel (Acts 9:15). God the Spirit chose Paul to open "the door of faith to the Gentiles" (Acts 14:27)." Since God chose Paul to serve Him in this way, it is important to stand on the side of God's choice.

Second, I am concerned about the integrity of the Word of God. Jesus told Satan, ‘It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). Since Jesus chose Paul as His chosen vessel to bear His Name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel and since the Holy Spirit chose Paul to open the door of faith to the Gentiles and since God spoke directly to Paul (e.g. Acts 9:4-6; 18:9; 23:11) and the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write prophetic letters to the 1st century churches (e.g. 2 Peter ; Romans 15:17-19; 1 Corinthians 2:6-8, 13, 16; 9:17-18; 15:51; 2 Corinthians 2:17; 5:19; 10:7-11; 13:1-10; Ephesians 3:1-10; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15; 1 Timothy 2:3-7; 2 Timothy 2:8-9; 3:10-11; Titus 1:3), we must stand by God’s choice of Paul to reveal God’s Word to the Gentile churches.

Third, I am concerned about people who are being misled by those who oppose God’s Work through Paul. What will happen to them because of their rejection of Paul’s apostleship? The voice of opposition grows stronger even as the enemy grows bolder in his war against God. People who reject God’s Word through the writings of Paul are losing out on knowing the complete Gospel of Jesus Christ. Does it not seem strange that if Jesus meant for His Church to abide only in the Words He spoke during His earthly Ministry, that He would select Paul as His chosen vessel to bear His Name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel? Does it not seem strange that if the

Holy Spirit meant for the Church to live only by the Words of Christ during His earthly Ministry, that He would tell the prophets at Antioch to separate Barnabas and Paul for the “work” to which He had called them? Does it not seem strange that if God meant for Christ followers to believe only what the Lord spoke during His years on earth primarily to Jews in Israel, that He would have chosen Paul to open the door of faith to the Gentiles?

The opposition to Paul’s apostolic ministry began within days of Jesus calling him on the road to Damascus. That’s not surprising because of what our Lord told Ananias: “Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake” (Acts 9:15-16). Suffering for the Name of Jesus was as much a part of Paul’s apostolic ministry as being a chosen vessel to bear the Name of Jesus. The same was true for Christ’s other apostles.

*“If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also. But all these things they will do to you for My name’s sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me. If I had not come and spoken to*

*them, they would have no sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. He who hates Me hates My Father also. If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would have no sin; but now they have seen and also hated both Me and My Father. But this happened that the word might be fulfilled which is written in their law, 'They hated Me without a cause.' John 15:18-25*

Paul, like Peter, James, John and the other apostles, would suffer greatly because of their ministry in the Name of Jesus Christ. Paul suffered from both Gentiles and Jews because that was the ministry to which Jesus had called him (“he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel”). Here are some examples of Paul’s suffering for Christ as recorded in the Book of Acts.

*“Now after many days were past, the Jews plotted to kill him.”  
Acts 9:23*

*“And he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Hellenists, but they attempted to kill him.”  
Acts 9:29*

*“Now it happened in Iconium that they went together to the synagogue of the Jews, and so spoke that a great multitude both of the Jews and of the Greeks believed. But the*

*unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brethren. Therefore they stayed there a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands. But the multitude of the city was divided: part sided with the Jews, and part with the apostles. And when a violent attempt was made by both the Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to abuse and stone them, they became aware of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding region. And they were preaching the gospel there.”*  
*Acts 14:1-7*

*“Then Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there; and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead. However, when the disciples gathered around him, he rose up and went into the city. And the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe.”* Acts 14:19-20

*“And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, ‘These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe.’ Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods. And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. Having received*

*such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.” Acts 16:20-24*

*“But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was preached by Paul at Berea, they came there also and stirred up the crowds. Then immediately the brethren sent Paul away, to go to the sea; but both Silas and Timothy remained there.” Acts 17:13-14*

*“And all the city was disturbed; and the people ran together, seized Paul, and dragged him out of the temple; and immediately the doors were shut. Now as they were seeking to kill him, news came to the commander of the garrison that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. He immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down to them. And when they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. Then the commander came near and took him, and commanded him to be bound with two chains; and he asked who he was and what he had done. And some among the multitude cried one thing and some another.” Acts 21:30-34*

*“And they listened to him until this word, and then they raised their voices and said, ‘Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he is not fit to live!’ Then, as they cried out and tore off their clothes and threw dust into the air, the commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks, and said that he*

*should be examined under scourging, so that he might know why they shouted so against him.” Acts 22:22-24*

*“Now when there arose a great dissension, the commander, fearing lest Paul might be pulled to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him by force from among them, and bring him into the barracks.” Acts 23:10*

*“And when it was day, some of the Jews banded together and bound themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. Now there were more than forty who had formed this conspiracy. They came to the chief priests and elders, and said, ‘We have bound ourselves under a great oath that we will eat nothing until we have killed Paul. Now you, therefore, together with the council, suggest to the commander that he be brought down to you tomorrow, as though you were going to make further inquiries concerning him; but we are ready to kill him before he comes near.’” Acts 23:12-15*

*“Then the soldiers, as they were commanded, took Paul and brought him by night to Antipatris. The next day they left the horsemen to go on with him, and returned to the barracks. When they came to Caesarea and had delivered the letter to the governor, they also presented Paul to him. And when the governor had read it, he asked what province he was from. And when he understood that he was from Cilicia, he*

*said, I will hear you when your accusers also have come.” And he commanded him to be kept in Herod’s Praetorium.” Acts 23:31-35*

*“But after two years Porcius Festus succeeded Felix; and Felix, wanting to do the Jews a favor, left Paul bound.” Acts 24:27*

*“And when it was decided that we should sail to Italy, they delivered Paul and some other prisoners to one named Julius, a centurion of the Augustan Regiment. So, entering a ship of Adramyttium, we put to sea, meaning to sail along the coasts of Asia. Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, was with us.” Acts 27:1-2*

*“But after long abstinence from food, then Paul stood in the midst of them and said, “Men, you should have listened to me, and not have sailed from Crete and incurred this disaster and loss. And now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. For there stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve, saying, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you.’ Therefore take heart, men, for I believe God that it will be just as it was told me. However, we must run aground on a certain island.” Acts 27:21-26*

*“When it was day, they did not recognize the land; but they observed a bay with a beach, onto which they planned to run the ship if possible. And they let go the anchors and left them in the sea, meanwhile loosing the rudder ropes; and they hoisted the mainsail to the wind and made for shore. But striking a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground; and the prow stuck fast and remained immovable, but the stern was being broken up by the violence of the waves. And the soldiers’ plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim away and escape. But the centurion, wanting to save Paul, kept them from their purpose, and commanded that those who could swim should jump overboard first and get to land, and the rest, some on boards and some on parts of the ship. And so it was that they all escaped safely to land.” Acts 27:39-44*

Paul wrote about his sufferings for the Name of Christ in some of his letters.

*“Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I. Are they ministers of Christ?—I speak as a fool—I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my*

*own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness— besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation?” 2 Corinthians 11:22-29*

Paul also suffered for the Name of Christ by the message of Jews who tried to destroy the Gospel message that Paul preached to Gentiles.

*“O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh? Have you suffered so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain?” Galatians 3:1-4*

*“You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? This persuasion does not come from Him who calls you. A little leaven leavens the whole lump. I have confidence in you, in the Lord, that you will have no other mind; but he who troubles you*

*shall bear his judgment, whoever he is. And I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why do I still suffer persecution? Then the offense of the cross has ceased. I could wish that those who trouble you would even cut themselves off!” Galatians 5:7-12*

*“See with what large letters I have written to you with my own hand! As many as desire to make a good showing in the flesh, these would compel you to be circumcised, only that they may not suffer persecution for the cross of Christ. For not even those who are circumcised keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh. But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation.” Galatians 6:11-15*

These enemies of Paul’s message not only tried to turn the Gentiles toward a Jewish version of faith in Christ, they also tried to turn the Gentiles against Paul’s apostleship.

*“Do we begin again to commend ourselves? Or do we need, as some others, epistles of commendation to you or letters of commendation from you? You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of*

*flesh, that is, of the heart.” 2 Corinthians 3:1-3*

*“Oh, that you would bear with me in a little folly—and indeed you do bear with me. For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it! For I consider that I am not at all inferior to the most eminent apostles. Even though I am untrained in speech, yet I am not in knowledge. But we have been thoroughly manifested among you in all things. Did I commit sin in humbling myself that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you free of charge? I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to minister to you. And when I was present with you, and in need, I was a burden to no one, for what I lacked the brethren who came from Macedonia supplied. And in everything I kept myself from being burdensome to you, and so I will keep myself. As the truth of Christ is in me, no one shall stop me from this boasting in the regions of Achaia. Why? Because I do not love you? God knows! But what I do, I will also continue to do, that I may cut off the opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be*

*regarded just as we are in the things of which they boast. For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works. I say again, let no one think me a fool. If otherwise, at least receive me as a fool, that I also may boast a little. What I speak, I speak not according to the Lord, but as it were, foolishly, in this confidence of boasting. Seeing that many boast according to the flesh, I also will boast. For you put up with fools gladly, since you yourselves are wise! For you put up with it if one brings you into bondage, if one devours you, if one takes from you, if one exalts himself, if one strikes you on the face. To our shame I say that we were too weak for that! But in whatever anyone is bold—I speak foolishly—I am bold also. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I. Are they ministers of Christ?—I speak as a fool—I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil,*

*in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness— besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation? If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. In Damascus the governor, under Aretas the king, was guarding the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desiring to arrest me; but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped from his hands.” 2 Corinthians 11*

*“I have become a fool in boasting; you have compelled me. For I ought to have been commended by you; for in nothing was I behind the most eminent apostles, though I am nothing. Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds. For what is it in which you were inferior to other churches, except that I myself was not burdensome to you? Forgive me this wrong!” 2 Corinthians 12:11-13*

*“In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in*

*your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it. So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ. Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God. Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations— ‘Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,’ which all concern things which perish with the using—according to the commandments and doctrines of men? These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.” Colossians 2:11-23*

Paul suffered many things for the Name of Jesus Christ. That is clear from both the Book of Acts and Paul’s letters. Paul faced opposition to his apostleship to the Gentiles (uncircumcision) during the many

years of his ministry. Even though Paul was eventually killed for preaching the Gospel, that did not end the opposition to his ministry.

## *The Opposition*

Opposition to Paul's apostleship did not end at his death. The same group of Judaizers Paul warned about in his epistles continued to oppose the freedom Paul had preached to Gentiles.

*“Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.” Galatians 5:1-4*

The Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD and the deaths of the Jewish apostles led to a decline in the numbers of Jewish followers of Christ in Israel who held to circumcision and obedience to the Mosaic Law. However, that did not mean the opposition to Paul's message to Gentiles disappeared. Even though the decision of the apostles at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) should have ended the opposition to Paul's apostleship and ministry to the Gentiles, Jewish followers of Christ continued to make trouble for Paul and the Gospel he

preached “among the Gentiles (Galatians 2:2).

The Ebionites (possibly from the Hebrew word for “poor” – *evyonim*) were known as opponents to Paul’s apostleship as early as the 2nd century AD. Irenaeus was a Christian pastor and apologist during that time and wrote about a variety of heresies the Church was facing, including the Ebionites.

*“Those who are called Ebionites agree that the world was made by God; but their opinions with respect to the Lord are similar to those of Cerinthus and Carpocrates. They use the Gospel according to Matthew only, and repudiate the Apostle Paul, maintaining that he was an apostate from the law. As to the prophetic writings, they endeavour to expound them in a somewhat singular manner: they practise circumcision, persevere in the observance of those customs which are enjoined by the law, and are so Judaic in their style of life, that they even adore Jerusalem as if it were the house of God.”*  
*Against Heresies, Book 1, Chapter 26, 180 AD*

Irenaeus also wrote against the doctrine of the Ebionites in chapters 3 and 5 of *Against Heresies*.

Many other Christian writers and apologists of the 2nd, 3rd and 4th centuries AD warned the Church about the Ebionites, including Tertullian, Hippolytus, Eusebius, Origen and Jerome. The Ebionites opposition to Paul was only one aspect of their warning and concern.

Chief among their concerns being what the Ebionites preached about the deity of Christ.

*“The Ebionaeans, however, acknowledge that the world was made by Him Who is in reality God, but they propound legends concerning the Christ similarly with Cerinthus and Carpocrates. They live conformably to the customs of the Jews, alleging that they are justified according to the law, and saying that Jesus was justified by fulfilling the law. And therefore it was, (according to the Ebionaeans,) that (the Saviour) was named (the) Christ of God and Jesus, since not one of the rest (of mankind) had observed completely the law. For if even any other had fulfilled the commandments (contained) in the law, he would have been that Christ. And the (Ebionaeans allege) that they themselves also, when in like manner they fulfil (the law), are able to become Christs; for they assert that our Lord Himself was a man in a like sense with all (the rest of the human family).”*  
*Hippolytus of Rome, Refutation of All Heresies 7.22*

One of the most prolific writers who sent up warnings about the Ebionites was Epiphanius, a 4th century Christian pastor in Salamis, Cyprus.

*“They do not say that he was born of God the Father, but that he was created as one of the archangels, that he rules both the angels and all those things created by the Almighty, and he came and gave instructions to abolish sacrifices as the gospel which they recognize contains the provision that “I came to abolish sacrifices, and unless*

*you cease sacrificing, my anger will not cease from you". These and such like them are their deceitful conceptions." Epiphanius of Salamis, Panarion 30.16.4-5*

Epiphanius also viewed the Nazarenes as an heretical sect in the 4th century AD. The Nazarenes were similar to Ebionites in that they considered themselves Jews and followed the Mosaic Law, but differed in that they believed in the Lord's Virgin Birth. The Nazarenes depended on the Aramaic *Gospel of the Hebrews* rather than the Gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The Gospel of the Hebrews is counted with the Gospel of the Nazarenes and the Gospel of the Ebionites as part of what's called the Jewish-Christian Gospels, quoted in writings of many early Christian pastors and apologists (e.g. Epiphanius, Jerome, Origen, Clement of Alexandria, Origen).

Both movements (Ebionites and Nazarenes) lost much of their following after the 5th century AD, but the Jewish-Christian theology and philosophy have seen new interest and rapid growth during the past two hundred years. Many of the Jews who converted to Christianity during the 19th and 20th centuries wanted to worship separately from Catholics and Protestants and started their own meeting services. They continued practicing some of their Jewish beliefs and liturgy while including New Testament teachings to their spiritual experience. That gave rise to the Messianic Jewish movement of the 1960s and 70s and other groups that emphasized

Jewish practices in following Jesus Christ. Some of those movements include “Nazarene Judaism,” the “Worldwide Nazarene Assembly of Elohim,” the Two-House theology of the “Messianic Israel Alliance,” the “Union of Nazarene Yisrael Congregations,” the “International Assembly of Nazarene Israelites,” “Assemblies of Yahweh,” “Messianic Jewish Alliance of America,” and the modern “Ebionite Movement.”

Some members of these groups believe there is a difference between Jewish Christianity and Pauline Christianity, going so far as to say that the modern Christian congregation of believers embrace the dogma of pagan Rome, while remaining totally ignorant of what Jesus actually taught (Ebionite/Nazirene Spiritual Restoration – ebionite.com). They go on to say that unless a person is an Ebionite they cannot be a disciple of Christ – that they are the True Spiritual Israel. They claim that the lie of Judaism is that Yeshua/Jesus was not the Messiah, that the lie of Christianity is that Yeshua/Jesus was God Incarnate, and the lie of Islam is that Yeshua/Jesus said another was yet to come.

One of the primary casualties of the Jewish Christian belief system is Paul and his writings.

*“Because Pauline theology (Paulism or Paulinism) is a Greek and Gnostic aberration of true Hebraic thought; because it seeks to unilaterally overthrow the true and original Law and Commandments of God; and because Paul utterly contradicts the witness (plural) of*

*the Prophets within the Scriptures. This is not just a modern Ebionite view; this understanding goes all the way back to the first-century Jerusalem Church and it is an understanding that predates the Roman Catholic Church's later canonization of Paul by more than a century." Ebionite.net FAQ*

Another casualty is Christ's sacrificial death on the Cross.

*"The reason the first-century followers of Yahushua (Ebionites) rejected the Pauline 'gospel' was because they knew all too well the loving and gentle Character of Yahweh God who did not at all request nor require a blood sacrifice—let alone a human sacrifice—as the means of His forgiveness. This 'blood sacrifice', especially human sacrifice, was solely the purveyance of evil in the eyes of God. Ebionite Hebrews could clearly see Paul's divergent teachings and could easily see he was a false prophet (meaning one who wasn't really sent by God)." Ebionite.net FAQ*

I will begin answering specific questions and complaints from those who believe Paul to be an apostate in the next part of our investigation into whether Paul was an apostle or a fraud. In the meantime, you may find this document interesting to read. It's called "The Ebionite Manifesto" and was published online by the Ebionite Community ([ebionite.org](http://ebionite.org)).

## ***The Ebionite Manifesto***

*The Ebionite Community is the living continuation of the Jewish religious movement of Jesus. Christianity is the religion of Paul and others, and not part of the biblical faith and revelation of the God of Israel nor is it of Jesus. (Please note that we have used “Jesus” to clarify for our Christian readers. We call him Yeshua or Yahshua, and will use Yeshua from this point on in the site.)*

*We declare the man Paul of Tarsus, the false teacher against the mark of Covenant and God’s Torah, to be outside of the Way taught by Yeshua, the anointed, son of Maria and Yoseif. The Ebionite Community is the only real “mission to the gentiles.”*

*We call upon the gentiles to repent, to abandon paganism and the perverse testament, and enter into true covenant through Torah, circumcision, and immersion in order to submit and prepare for the Reign of God as brothers exhibiting good works. (How can you talk about accepting God or His “kingdom” at some future event or time if you reject His rules clearly given now?)*

*To follow Yeshua, may he rest in peace, you must not worship him or any man, but instead be what Yeshua was, a Jew. Yeshua was a man who died and was buried, and finding his bones does not effect*

*the value of many of his recorded teachings, the core of these still buried beneath Christian additions, alterations, and falsifications. His value to us has nothing to do with fairy tales and miracles, divinity or resurrection. We already have the God of Israel so Yeshua is no replacement for Him nor can Yeshua's words nullify God's commandments.*

*Yeshua is not a god, not a sacrifice for sin, or savior. Such beliefs go against God. God's commandments have not been "done away with" or "nailed to the cross" but instead make up the single testament and Instructions for life to mankind. We ask you to honestly consider the fruit of other religions without explaining away their sins and failures to deliver a godly world; the millions of people they have murdered for "God" even other denominations of their own religion; and all the unbiblical ways in which they claim to honor their god. Deep down you know that neither God or the man Yeshua can truly be present in these religions. The God of Israel has more to give than Christianity or Islam (both of which are just altered, weakened versions of Israel's faith). Biblical faith has more to offer than any other religion.*

*Is your faith based on a god that hates you and wants to burn you? You need to keep seeking for the real God, the God of Israel, Who created you and loves you.*

*Are you a Jew who has become indistinguishable from your gentile friends and your Synagogue reminds you of a church? Have you*

*apostatized from God to Christianity? Return to God. We will help you.*

*Yahwism, the faith of the Written Torah of the Bible given by the One God, Yahweh, is a revolutionary system of life with justice that can supersede all other systems of government and ideologies. The Evyonim (Ebionites) are Yahwists above all else. It allows for One Ruler, the God of Israel alone, with none beside Him. God is not man, and no man is divine. No man can make you right with God except yourself, and only you can atone for your sins through repentance and reparation to Him and your fellow man. You will never find God, Yahweh King of the Universe, world within worlds, worlds without end, in a church or shrine, kneeling before statues, sticks, stones, or men. Tear down your church. Take the wood and stones and build houses for the poor; take the sticks for firewood; sell the treasure and idols to buy food and heal the sick; bring all men in love to bend the knee to the God of Israel.*

## *The Challenge*

We've spent the first half of our study in the Book of Acts building a case for the connection Paul had directly to Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, the 12 Apostles, and the disciples of Christ in Judea, Samaria and Syria. We've also demonstrated confirmation by the 12 Apostles of Paul's call to be an apostle to the Gentiles. Not once in the Book of Acts do any of the 12 Apostles call Paul a fraud or apostate.

We come now to the direct challenge to Paul's Apostleship. Many who believe Paul is a fraud use the "steamroller approach," asking scores of questions accompanied by Scripture to give the questions an appearance of truth. Don't be fooled by that technique. The proof is in the quality, not the quantity.

I've been contacted by multiple people about my quoting from Paul's epistles, so I'll take their questions in order of when I received them. I don't view these questions flippantly or as unimportant. They are important to the people who asked them and I pray that these answers will help them and all who question whether God chose Paul to be His apostle to the Gentiles.

*“To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, ‘These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: ‘I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars.’”*  
*Revelation 2:1-2*

The first challenger to Paul’s apostleship asked questions as they relate to Revelation 2:1-2. Below is their list of questions exactly as they sent them to me.

**Questions:**

Does Paul indeed address those at Ephesus as an “apostle” in Ephesians 1:1?

**Answer:**

Yes, Paul called himself an “apostle” in Ephesians 1:1.

**Question:**

Rev 2:2 speaks in past tense of this occurrence. Was Paul’s ministry before or after 90AD when the vision of Revelation was given?

**Answer:**

Paul's ministry was before 90AD.

*“Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.” Revelation 21:14*

**Question:**

How can Paul be a 13th apostle when Revelation 21:14 says there are only twelve?

**Answer:**

Paul is not “a 13th apostle.” He did not claim to be a 13th apostle and is not called a 13th apostle by anyone in the New Testament. Paul's name is not listed on the foundations to the walls of the New Jerusalem because he is not an apostle to the circumcised (Jews - Israel). Paul was an apostle to the uncircumcised (Gentiles – the World).

*“So Jesus said to them, “Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” Matthew 19:28*

**Question:**

If Paul is a 13th apostle, then why does Jesus tell us in Matthew 19:28 there are only twelve?

**Answer:**

Paul is not “a 13th apostle.” Jesus said there were 12 apostles to Israel and Paul was not one of them. Jesus called Paul on the road to Damascus for a different mission than the 12.

**Question:**

If Paul’s apostleship was not in dispute by believers, then why does he defend it in 1st Corinthians 9:1-3?

**Answer:**

Paul’s apostleship was in dispute by the Judaizers who attacked him at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) and other Jews who opposed his ministry to the Gentiles in many cities across many countries. As we’ve already seen, the 12 Apostles, the Lord’s half-brother James (leader of the Jerusalem assembly), and other Jewish elders and disciples in Jerusalem confirmed the apostleship of Paul and Barnabas and the Holy Spirit’s opening the door of faith to the Gentiles through them.

The Christians in Corinth were among those the Judaizers impacted by pouring “poison in the ear” to turn them from spiritual freedom to spiritual captivity. You stopped your referencing at verse 3, which cuts off Paul in mid-sentence. Here’s the context of what he wrote in defense of his apostleship in 1 Corinthians 9. It’s clear from his explanation and his humility that his sole concern was to complete the work God had given him to do among the Gentiles.

*“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? If I am not an apostle to others, yet doubtless I am to you. For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord. My defense to those who examine me is this: Do we have no right to eat and drink? Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as do also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas? Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working? Who ever goes to war at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk of the flock? Do I say these things as a mere man? Or does not the law say the same also? For it is written in the law of Moses, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain.’ Is it oxen God is concerned about? Or does He say it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written, that he who plows should plow in hope, and he who threshes in hope should be partaker of his hope. If we have sown spiritual things for you, is it a great thing*

*if we reap your material things? If others are partakers of this right over you, are we not even more? Nevertheless we have not used this right, but endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ. Do you not know that those who minister the holy things eat of the things of the temple, and those who serve at the altar partake of the offerings of the altar? Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel. But I have used none of these things, nor have I written these things that it should be done so to me; for it would be better for me to die than that anyone should make my boasting void. For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel! For if I do this willingly, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have been entrusted with a stewardship. What is my reward then? That when I preach the gospel, I may present the gospel of Christ without charge, that I may not abuse my authority in the gospel.” 1 Corinthians 9:1-18*

**Question:**

Why does he speak in 1st Corinthians 9:3 of those who “try” him unless he was “tried” as Rev 2:2 alleges?

**Answer:**

The problem Paul was facing with Judaizers attacking his apostleship is a different situation than what Jesus told the Ephesian Christians in

Revelation 2. As we've already seen in Acts, Jesus called Paul for the ministry to the Gentiles (chapter 9) and John supported Paul's ministry to the Gentiles (chapter 15). If Jesus wanted to call Paul out as a fraud by name, Revelation 2 would have been the perfect place to do it. The Holy Spirit called Paul to preach the Gospel in Ephesus and minister to the needs of the new Christians for at least two years. Since Jesus was personally addressing "the angel of the church of Ephesus" about testing "those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars," He could have easily added Paul's name as a prime example of someone who said he was an apostle, but wasn't. However, Jesus didn't mention Paul's name in that context.

*"This you know, that all those in Asia have turned away from me, among whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes." 2 Timothy 1:15*

**Question:**

If Paul was not one whom the Ephesians found to be a liar in Rev 2:2, then why does Paul say in 2nd Timothy 1:15 that "all they which are in Asia have turned away from me."?

**Answer:**

The answer to your question is in the context of Paul's letter to Timothy. Begin with verse 1 of 2 Timothy 1 and read through verse

14. What is the context? The issue is suffering and shame. Paul was in a Roman prison for preaching the Gospel (again) and he called on Timothy to not be ashamed of the testimony of Jesus or of Paul being “His prisoner.” Paul asked Timothy to share with him “in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God.” It was because of the Gospel, Paul wrote, that he was suffering, but he was not ashamed.

With Paul’s imprisonment as the context, read verse 15ff again.

*“This you know, that all those in Asia have turned away from me, among whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes. The Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain; but when he arrived in Rome, he sought me out very zealously and found me. The Lord grant to him that he may find mercy from the Lord in that Day—and you know very well how many ways he ministered to me at Ephesus.” 2 Timothy 1:15-18*

Do you see why “all those in Asia” had turned away from him, including Phygellus and Hermogenes? Do you see why Paul asked that the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus since he was not ashamed of Paul’s imprisonment and had often refreshed him in prison? Context is an important key to making the right interpretation.

**Question:**

If Paul was not called a liar about his apostleship as Rev 2:2 says, then why does he specifically say in 1st Timothy 2:7 he is not lying about his apostleship?

**Answer:**

Your answer is in the context. Paul's first letter to Timothy begins with a reminder about being truthful. In fact, Paul begins by calling Timothy "a true son in the faith." (1 Timothy 1:2)

Paul's concern was about the **truth** of the "doctrine" (teaching) about Jesus Christ.

*"As I urged you when I went into Macedonia—remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine, nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith. Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith, from which some, having strayed, have turned aside to idle talk, desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say nor the things which they affirm." 1 Timothy 1:3-7*

Paul reminded Timothy of the **true** purpose of the Mosaic Law.

*“But we know that the law is good if one uses it lawfully, knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers, and if there is any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine, according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God which was committed to my trust.” 1 Timothy 1:8-11*

Paul was under no illusion about who he was. He was the “chief” of sinners. He even shares a list of those sins (blasphemer, persecutor, insolent), but being a “liar” was not one of them. Paul told the truth about himself and showed how the Lord’s forgiveness of his sins was an example of God’s “mercy” and how Jesus showed “all longsuffering” toward him.

*“And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom*

*I am chief. However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life. Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.” 1 Timothy 1:12-17*

Paul emphasized having a good conscience before the Lord.

*“This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, having faith and a good conscience, which some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck, of whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.” 1 Timothy 1:18-20*

Paul’s original letter had no chapter divisions, so chapter two is a continuation of his thoughts from chapter one. These next verses are the closest context to the verse in question (vs. 7).

*“Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all*

*men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time, for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle—I am speaking the truth in Christ and not lying—a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.” 1 Timothy 2:1-7*

Paul is emphasizing the truthfulness and importance of all that he’s telling Timothy. We even use similar language today when emphasizing something that’s truthful and important. Our purpose is to emphasize the truth, not defend ourselves as liars.

### **Question**

If Paul’s words are “holy scriptures”, then why does 2nd Timothy 3:15 say Timothy had been reading them since he was a child? Were Paul’s letters even written when Timothy was a child?

### **Answer**

Paul’s reference to “Holy Scriptures” in 2 Timothy 3:15 and other portions of his writings pertained to the Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament of the Christian Bible. Though the Apostle Peter called Paul’s writings “Scriptures” (2 Peter 3:16), Paul did not refer to his letters as being part of the official Canon of Scripture.

## Question

If “none are righteous” as Paul universally declares in Romans 3:9-20, then why are the parents of John the Baptist declared “righteous before God” in Luke 1:6?

## Answer

The context of Romans 3 is what advantage a Jew has over a Gentile in knowing God. Paul wrote that chiefly it was because “to them were committed the oracles of God,” the oracles being the Hebrew Scriptures. Paul points to what he said earlier in his letter – “For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin” – then writes in verse 10, “as it is written: There is none righteous, no, not one.” Paul is agreeing with something that was “written.” What did he quote?

First, here’s what Paul wrote:

*“As it is written: ‘There is none righteous, no, not one; There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one.’ ‘Their throat is an open tomb; With their tongues they have practiced deceit’; ‘The poison of asps is under their lips’; ‘Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness.’ ‘Their feet are swift to*

*shed blood; Destruction and misery are in their ways; And the way of peace they have not known.’ ‘There is no fear of God before their eyes.’ Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.”*

Here are some of the Hebrew Scriptures from which Paul quoted:

*“The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God.’ They are corrupt, They have done abominable works, There is none who does good. The Lord looks down from heaven upon the children of men, To see if there are any who understand, who seek God. They have all turned aside, They have together become corrupt; There is none who does good, No, not one.”*  
*Psalm 14:1-3*

*“For there is not a just man on earth who does good And does not sin.” Ecclesiastes 7:20*

*“For there is no faithfulness in their mouth; Their inward part is destruction; Their throat is an open tomb; They flatter with their tongue.” Psalm 5:9*

*“The wicked in his proud countenance does not seek God; God is in none of his thoughts ... His mouth is full of*

*cursing and deceit and oppression; Under his tongue is trouble and iniquity.” Psalm 10:4, 7*

*“An oracle within my heart concerning the transgression of the wicked: There is no fear of God before his eyes ... The words of his mouth are wickedness and deceit.” Psalm 36:1, 3*

*“The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God.’ They are corrupt, and have done abominable iniquity; There is none who does good. God looks down from heaven upon the children of men, To see if there are any who understand, who seek God. Every one of them has turned aside; They have together become corrupt; There is none who does good, No, not one.” Psalm 53:1-3*

*“Deliver me, O Lord, from evil men; Preserve me from violent men, Who plan evil things in their hearts; They continually gather together for war. They sharpen their tongues like a serpent; The poison of asps is under their lips. ” Psalm 140:1-3*

*“Their feet run to evil, And they make haste to shed innocent blood; Their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; Wasting and destruction are in their paths.” Isaiah 59:7*

As for Luke writing that Zacharias and his wife Elizabeth “were both righteous before God,” he added that they were “walking in all the

commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.” Zacharias and Elizabeth were identified righteous before God based on the dispensation in which they lived. The Old Testament has many examples of “believers” who God counted as righteous because of their faith that led to God seeing them as “righteous” before Him. Hebrews 11 has a detailed list of many of those Old Testament believers.

Paul wrote Romans after Christ was crucified and raised from the dead, after the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles and disciples in Jerusalem, after Israel’s leaders rejected Jesus as Messiah, after Jesus personally chose Paul to preach the Gospel to Gentiles and Jews, after the Holy Spirit chose Paul to open the door of faith to the Gentiles. Paul referred to the time as “the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you” (Ephesians 3:2). Understanding the new dispensation is key to understanding how God views righteousness and unrighteousness. Also read Galatians 3 & 4 for more insight. [I realize in writing this that you may not believe Paul's letters to be inspired, but when you do realize that most of your questions will be answered within Paul's writings.]

### **Question**

Why does Paul say, “as it is written” in Romans 3:10 and then string together single sentences from no less than six places in the Bible, stringing them together as if they are one statement? Does he truly represent it “as it is written?” Are his conclusions the same as

the original?

### **Answer**

This is not an unusual technique in describing, explaining and teaching. Quoting from one source with multiple examples that are contextually accurate is a method used by people of all walks of life.

Someone asks a child to describe his experience at the zoo: “We saw the lions and we saw a clown and had ice cream and Johnny spilled his drink on Mrs. Wilson, and Donnie bit his tongue and it bled all over his shirt, and the giraffe was really tall, and I got lost, and we had a lot of fun!” Did all of those things happen in quick succession? Probably not. But they were all part of the child describing his experience at the zoo. It was accurate and in the context of the visit.

So it was with Paul’s usage of several Old Testament verses. They were all accurate and in context. Of course, Paul does not answer in the same way a small child would about his or her experiences at the zoo. Paul was a long-time student and teacher of the Old Testament and understood it better than others of his time. He had studied the Hebrew Bible in the school of Hillel under the great teacher Gamaliel and received revelations about God’s mystery directly from Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Paul was in a unique position to correctly interpret and use the Old Testament to teach New Testament theology.

## Question

Part of Paul's Romans 3:10 quote comes from Psalms 14. If there are "none righteous" including believers as Paul alleges, then why does Psalm 14:5 say, "for God is in the generation of the righteous"? Why would God speak of those who Paul says never existed?

## Answer

Paul did not allege that "believers" were not righteous. In this early part of Paul's letter to the Romans, he's presenting the case for the whole world being guilty before God. In Romans 3:10 he is just sentences away from presenting the powerful case of justification by faith in Christ alone.

Follow the context and you'll see how Paul is masterfully building the case for God. He first proved the case against the Gentile pagans, then the case against the Jews. In fact, Paul shows that the advantages the Jews had, knowing the Law, makes their condemnation even greater than the pagans.

With that context in mind, read Romans 3:21-26 again:

*"But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have*

*sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”*

The “righteousness” of believers comes “through faith in Jesus Christ.” Before we were believers? There is none righteous.

As for Psalm 14:5, look at the context to see who’s who in King David’s writing. It’s also good to compare Psalm 14 with Psalm 53 since they are so similar. The context of both is the fool saying in his heart that God does not exist. It is the great divide between atheists and theists. They are corrupt and do abominable works against God’s people, but the day is coming when the non-believer will be in great fear because God is real and He is with His people – “those who are righteous.”

*“Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge, Who eat up my people as they eat bread, And do not call on the Lord? There they are in great fear, For God is with the generation of the righteous. You shame the counsel of the poor, But*

*the Lord is his refuge. Oh, that the salvation of Israel would come out of Zion! When the Lord brings back the captivity of His people, Let Jacob rejoice and Israel be glad..” Psalms 14:4-7*

Again, because of how God’s relationship with His own covenant people changed after rejecting Jesus the Messiah, those who God counted as righteous changed. Paul dealt with the atheist, pagan and theist in Romans and showed that God found them all to be unrighteous until they experienced God’s righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 3:21-22).

The “generation of the righteous” is the Hebrew *dor saddiyq*. The word *dor* speaks of an “age, generation, race” and was understood as the “period during which people live” (*Vine’s Concise Dictionary of the Bible*, Thomas Nelson Publishing, 1997, p 152, originally published in 1940) and carries the idea of conforming to an ideal (*Wilson’s Old Testament Word Studies*, McDonald Publishing, p 184, originally published 1850). The word *saddiyq* comes from a root that indicates conformity to a moral standard, thus “righteous.” *Saddiyq* means “to be right, straight” and carries the idea of being just and lawful, having a just cause and dispensing justice. The unrighteous unbelievers, those who “do not call on the Lord,” will be in great fear because God is with the age, generation, race of His righteous people.

We see here both God's anger toward unbelievers and His great love toward believers. God manages His households and determines who is righteous and how they are made righteous.

### **Question**

Why does Paul quote the "old testament" at all if it is not authoritative?

### **Answer**

The Old Testament is authoritative and Paul quoted it as authoritative. Paul quoted more Old Testament Scripture than any other New Testament writer. Paul was an expert in the Law and revered it as God's Word.

### **Question**

If Paul acknowledges being Herodian in Romans 16:11 and Jesus tells me in Mark 8:15 to beware the leaven of Herod, then shouldn't I obey Jesus and beware the leaven (doctrine) of Paul?

## **Answer**

Paul was not a Herodian and never claimed to be a Herodian. The “Herodian” in Romans 16:11 is a person with that name. Look at the context and wording.

*“Greet Amplias, my beloved in the Lord. Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and Stachys, my beloved. Greet Apelles, approved in Christ. Greet those who are of the household of Aristobulus. Greet Herodion, my countryman. Greet those who are of the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord.”*

Herodian was one of Paul’s fellow countrymen.

## **Question**

If Paul even late in his ministry claims to be a Pharisee in Acts 23:6 and Jesus tells me in Luke 12:1 to beware the leaven of the Pharisees, then shouldn’t I obey Jesus and beware Paul?

## **Answer**

I am a former atheist and mention that when appropriate (e.g. while sharing the Gospel with atheists). I am a political independent and mention that when appropriate (e.g. when people want me to take sides with Republicans or Democrats). I am a Floridian and mention

that when appropriate (e.g. knowledge of the state's history). Paul was raised as a Pharisee and mentioned that when appropriate (e.g. when talking with Jews and their leaders).

Look at the context of Acts 21 – 23. Paul was in Jerusalem and appealing to the Jews in the crowd. He had a deep love for his fellow Jews and wanted them to know and understand that Jesus was their Messiah. Roman soldiers arrested Paul and he asked that they allow him to speak to the Jews who were angry with him (Acts 21). Paul shared with the crowd how he had been brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, taught the Law and was zealous toward God, and how he was a persecutor of followers of Jesus Christ. He told the Jews how Jesus had called him to preach the Gospel and sent him to the Gentiles (Acts 22). That angered the Jewish crowd even more and the Romans kept Paul in custody overnight. Paul spoke to the Sanhedrin the following day and that's when he said these words:

*“But when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, ‘Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee; concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged!’ And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and the assembly was divided. For Sadducees say that there is no resurrection—and no angel or spirit; but the Pharisees confess both. Then*

*there arose a loud outcry. And the scribes of the Pharisees' party arose and protested, saying, 'We find no evil in this man; but if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him, let us not fight against God.'* Acts 23:6-9

Paul brought up his being a Pharisee to demonstrate that he was preaching the resurrection of the dead. The leaven of the Pharisees Jesus addressed in Luke 12:1 was “hypocrisy.”

*“In the meantime, when an innumerable multitude of people had gathered together, so that they trampled one another, He began to say to His disciples first of all, 'Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, nor hidden that will not be known. Therefore whatever you have spoken in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have spoken in the ear in inner rooms will be proclaimed on the housetops.’”* Luke 12:1-3

Jesus spoke those words to His disciples right after speaking several “woes” toward Pharisees and lawyers. They were a bunch of hypocrites and Jesus told His disciples that their hypocrisy was the “leaven of the Pharisees.” There is no hint of hypocrisy in what Paul was saying or doing in Acts 23. He was truthful and honest is all that he said.

## Question

Paul claimed to have encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus. Jesus told me in Matthew 14:15 when someone claims to see him in the desert don't believe him. Should I take the advice of Jesus and doubt Paul's story?

## Answer

Your question does not match the words Jesus spoke. Here is Matthew 14:15 in several translations. Where do you see that Jesus said "when someone claims to see him in the desert don't believe him"?

*NKJV*

*"When it was evening, His disciples came to Him, saying, 'This is a deserted place, and the hour is already late. Send the multitudes away, that they may go into the villages and buy themselves food.'"*

*NIV*

*"As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, 'This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. Send the*

*crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food.”*

NAS

*“And when it was evening, his disciples came to him, saying, This is a desert place, and the time is now past; send the multitude away, that they may go into the villages, and buy themselves victuals.”*

HCSB

*“When evening came, the disciples approached Him and said, ‘This place is a wilderness, and it is already late. Send the crowds away so they can go into the villages and buy food for themselves.’”*

Are you thinking of some other Scripture?

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While we're talking about Scripture, here are the Books of the New Testament that are most likely fraudulent if Paul is a fraud:

Luke

Acts

Romans

1 Corinthians

2 Corinthians

Galatians

Ephesians

Philippians

Colossians

1 Thessalonians

1 Thessalonians

1 Timothy

2 Timothy

Titus

Philemon

Hebrews (possibly)

2 Peter

I hope you grasp the seriousness of this question. Much of Christian theology (“God knowledge”) is based on the prophetic and teaching ministry of Paul. If Paul was a fraud and his teachings are fraudulent, then Christianity as we know it is wrong and should be corrected. That’s what many people are challenging us to do – throw out Paul and correct our knowledge and practice to align ourselves with only a small number of New Testament Books.

That’s where some Paul-challengers differ. Some think Luke and Acts are okay, even though Luke was a student and fellow minister with Paul. Some do not think Luke or Acts are okay. Some think Luke is okay, but only the first six chapters of Acts are true. Some think Matthew is okay, but Mark, Luke and John are not. Some think 1

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Peter is good, but 2 Peter isn't. Some think John's Gospel and 1st John are okay, but that 2 and 3 John and Revelation are not. Do you see the problem here?

Now, back to the questions.

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## Question

If Paul's claim in Galatians 2:16 is true, that we are saved by faith only, then why does James refute this in James 2:14-26 calling the author of this doctrine "o vain man" in v. 20?

## Answer

This is the most asked question I receive about Paul's apostleship. How could Paul be an apostle if James taught something different?

First question that comes to mind is about James. This is not James the Apostle. King Herod killed him prior to the Jerusalem Council (Acts 12). The James who wrote the Book of James is believed to be the half brother of Jesus. This James was also a leader in the Jerusalem assembly. He is not called nor does he refer to himself as an apostle in Acts or the Book of James, but Paul does refer to James as an apostle.

*"But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother." Galatians 1:19*

In fact, it's obvious from Paul's writings and the Book of Acts that Paul had great respect for James. It also appears from Acts that James respected Paul and the special call Jesus and the Holy Spirit had for Paul.

*“Then all the multitude kept silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul declaring how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles. And after they had become silent, James answered, saying, ‘Men and brethren, listen to me: Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. And with this the words of the prophets agree ... Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, namely, Judas who was also named Barsabas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren ... it seemed good to us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Act 15:12-15, 22, 25-26*

*“And the day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present. And when he had saluted them, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry. And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord.” Acts 21:18-20*

*“But from those who seemed to be something—whatever they were, it makes no difference to me; God shows personal favoritism to no man—for those who seemed to be something*

*added nothing to me. 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 me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.” Galatians 2:6-9*

Many scholars estimate that Paul wrote Galatians early in his ministry (approx. 50 AD), so Peter, James and John would have had plenty of time before their deaths to refute Paul’s claim concerning what happened in Jerusalem and Antioch. James may have written his letter before the Jerusalem Council, but Peter and John wrote years later and could have addressed Paul’s statements if false.

If James wrote his letter prior to the Jerusalem Council, that would explain why he did not address the issue of Grace to Jews as Paul did later to Gentiles. James wrote specifically to Jews – “to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad” (James 1:1). James’ letter is entirely Jewish. Nothing is addressed about any Gentiles members in the local assemblies. Given the surprise and concern expressed by the apostles (except for Peter) and the elders in Jerusalem (Acts 15), James writing his letter prior to that would explain why.

Paul is often accused of having no place for “works” in his Gospel. That’s not true.

*“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” Ephesians 2:8-10*

Salvation is by grace through faith. It is not something we deserve or can earn. We cannot boast about “working” for our salvation. Our boasting is in Christ. Paul’s letters are abundantly clear that God provides “justification” through faith, not works – “knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified” (Galatians 2:16).

However, we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus “for” (Greek – with a view to) good works, which God prepared “beforehand” that we should walk (order our behavior) in the sphere of them. “Works” is absolutely part of Paul’s Gospel, so much so that he warned the Corinthians that God would test each one’s work, of what sort it was.

*“For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, you are God’s building. According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is. If anyone’s work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.” 1 Corinthians 3:9-15*

Paul told the Corinthians to “be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 15:58). In another letter to the Corinthians, Paul wrote, “And God *is* able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all *things*, may have an abundance for every good work” (2 Corinthians 9:8). Again, **works** is a vital part of Paul’s Gospel. It is what God has called us to do “after” we are saved. We are saved by grace through faith for the purpose of serving God. We were chosen, saved and set apart “for good works.”

## Question

If eating meat sacrificed to idols is okay as long as your “weaker brother” is not around as described in 1st Corinthians 8, then why is this practice later described as being hated by Jesus as the “doctrine of Balaam” in Revelation 2:14? Why does Rev 2:20 condemn it when Paul says it’s okay if nobody knows about it?

## Answer

Let’s look at each reference you mentioned.

*“Now concerning things offered to idols: We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies. And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know. But if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him. Therefore concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one. For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live. However, there is not in everyone that knowledge; for some, with consciousness of the idol, until now eat it as a thing*

*offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. But food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse. But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak. For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols? And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble." 1 Corinthians 8:1-13*

Paul wrote about idolatry earlier to the Corinthians and made it clear that when he said they should not keep company with idolaters he was talking about fellow believers. He also explained why.

*"I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person. For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do*

*you not judge those who are inside?” 1 Corinthians 5:9-12*

Paul also told the Corinthians that they should not take legal action against each other because they would be placing themselves into the judgment of idolaters.

*“Now therefore, it is already an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another. Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather let yourselves be cheated? No, you yourselves do wrong and cheat, and you do these things to your brethren! Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.” 1 Corinthians 6:7-11*

It's important to see Paul's position on idolatry prior to what he wrote in 1 Corinthians 8. He does not approve of it. It's not something a Christian should do. So, when he explains about "things offered to idols," we know where he stands. Paul was not an idol worshipper, did not approve of Christians being idol worshippers or taking each other to court where they would be judged by idol worshippers. He

also made it abundantly clear that idolaters would “not” inherit the Kingdom of God.

Paul said that the issue of idol worship had to do with “knowledge” attached. The fact is, Paul says, that an idol is nothing in the world. It’s just a carving, a stone, a piece of wood. There is only one God. However, there are some people who lack that knowledge. If they have knowledge that the food you’re eating was sacrificed to an idol and they see you eating it, even though you do not know that the food was sacrificed to an idol, they may think that eating food sacrificed to an idol is acceptable. When you have that knowledge concerning the food, your best choice is not to eat it – not because you are an idolater but because eating the food may cause your brother to stumble spiritually. What do you “know” and what does your brother “know” about the meat you are eating? That is the concern here, not that it’s okay for a Christian to worship idols.

Another issue is that “knowledge” often “puffs up,” while true “love edifies.” The difference is in puffing up and building up (edification). We may “know” that something is not wrong in and of itself, but loving others will cause us to not do what is not wrong for us so that we may build others up in the Christian faith.

God wants us to be concerned about edifying (*oikodomei*) others through love and be cautious about being puffed up (*phusioi* - blow up, inflate). Christians should ask themselves what’s the best thing they can do for others. In the case of eating meat offered to idols, the

best thing was to do what was best for the weaker brother. “Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.” That is a true act of love with the result of edification.

Now to your question about what Jesus told John to write to the churches in Revelation. Let’s look at your references first.

*“And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, ‘These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword: ‘I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth. ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it.’” And to*

*the angel of the church in Thyatira write, 'These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass: 'I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first. Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works.'* Revelation 2:12-23

You referenced verses 14 and 20. Verse 14 is part of the letter to the church in Pergamos. Verse 20 is part of the letter to the church in Thyatira. Let's see what each means in the context of what Jesus was saying to each church.

Pergamos (or Pergamum) was a wealthy city in Asia Minor overlooking the Caicus Valley more than a hundred miles north of Ephesus. The first temple dedicated to a Roman emperor was built in Pergamos in 29 BC. In addition to emperor worship, the people of Pergamos also worshiped the gods Zeus, Isis, Serapis, Asklepios, Persephone and Demeter. The location of "Satan's throne," as Jesus called it, may have been the large altar area in the Upper Acropolis.

Jesus also mentioned the “doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality.” Some in the church also held “the doctrine of the Nicolaitans,” which things Jesus said He hated. The Nicolaitans was a heretical group of people in the early church who taught and practiced immorality and idolatry, which included pagan feasts and orgies.

As we’ve already seen from Paul’s letter to the Corinthians, he stood in opposition to idolatry and told Christians to run from it and have nothing to do with it (“Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.” 1 Corinthians 10:14). He also warned the churches in Galatia of the dangers of idolatry (Galatians 5:19-21).

Your reference in verse 20 is addressed to the church in Thyatira – “Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.” The false prophetess may have been named Jezebel, but the name was well known to Jews and Gentile students of the Septuagint as the wicked queen married to Israel’s King Ahab. Queen Jezebel was an idolater, as was the false prophetess in Thyatira. The church in Thyatira allowed the false prophetess to teach and seduce them to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols, which Jesus would not permit. He called on the

church to repent of their sins or they would face His wrath.

What Paul wrote about in 1 Corinthians 8 and what Jesus said in Revelation 2 are not the same thing. Paul told the Corinthians not to eat food sacrificed to idols when they had knowledge of that fact for the purpose of edifying those who were weaker in their faith. Jesus warned the Thyatirans not to allow Jezebel to teach and seduce them into idolatry and immorality.

The messages of Paul and Jesus were the same concerning idolatry and immorality. That's as it should have been given the fact that Jesus called Paul to minister to the Gentiles and Paul did what Jesus and the Holy Spirit told him to do in that ministry.

### **Question**

Why did Paul tell the Corinthians idol meat was okay when the New Testament Church council at Jerusalem had specifically listed this as a forbidden practice to New Testament believers in Acts 15:29?

### **Answer**

Please read our previous answer concerning what Paul believed about idols, idol worship and meat sacrificed to idols. Here's a quick recap.

*“I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person.” 1 Corinthians 5:9-11*

*“No, you yourselves do wrong and cheat, and you do these things to your brethren! Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.” 1 Corinthians 6:8-10*

*“Now concerning things offered to idols: We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies. And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know. But if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him. Therefore concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one. For even if there are so-*

*called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live. However, there is not in everyone that knowledge; for some, with consciousness of the idol, until now eat it as a thing offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. But food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse. But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak. For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols? And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.” 1 Corinthians 8:1-13*

*“Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.” Galatians 5:19-21*

Let's look at another section in 1 Corinthians that may shed more light about what Paul believed and said about food sacrificed to idols.

*“Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. I speak as to wise men; judge for yourselves what I say. The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread. Observe Israel after the flesh: Are not those who eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar? What am I saying then? That an idol is anything, or what is offered to idols is anything? Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons. Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than He? ” 1 Corinthians 10:14-22*

It is in that context that Paul wrote this to the Christians in Corinth:

*“All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify. Let no one seek*

*his own, but each one the other's well-being. Eat whatever is sold in the meat market, asking no questions for conscience' sake; for 'the earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness.' If any of those who do not believe invites you to dinner, and you desire to go, eat whatever is set before you, asking no question for conscience' sake. But if anyone says to you, 'This was offered to idols,' do not eat it for the sake of the one who told you, and for conscience' sake; for 'the earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness.' 'Conscience,' I say, not your own, but that of the other. For why is my liberty judged by another man's conscience? But if I partake with thanks, why am I evil spoken of for the food over which I give thanks? Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God, just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved." 1 Corinthians 10:23-33*

With that as background to what Paul believed and taught, let's look at what the Jerusalem Council asked him to do.

*"Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood ... For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no*

*greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well.” Acts 15:19-20, 28-29*

The apostles and elders at the council had limited understanding of what God had revealed to Paul, but could see from what Peter said and what Paul and Barnabas shared that God was doing something different with the Gentiles. What the Hebrew believers emphasized were four things: abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. They capped it off by writing, “If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well.”

Though we do not have a record of Paul instructing Gentiles about abstaining from blood and things strangled, he was quite clear about them abstaining from things offered to idols (1 Corinthians 5; 6; 8; 10; Galatians 5; Ephesians 5) and to keep themselves from sexual immorality (Romans 1; 1 Corinthians 5; 6; ; 10; 1 Thessalonians 4).

It’s also important to realize that Paul was under no compulsion to “obey” commands from the Jewish apostles. Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit had called and sent Paul on a special ministry to open the door of faith to Gentiles without any Jewish apostles being involved in the calling or the sending. Paul’s concern was for the purity of the Gospel of Grace he had received from Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

Here's how Paul explained it:

*“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, but privately to those who were of reputation, lest by any means I might run, or had run, in vain. Yet not even Titus who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised. And this occurred because of false brethren secretly brought in (who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage), to whom we did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you. But from those who seemed to be something—whatever they were, it makes no difference to me; God shows personal favoritism to no man—for those who seemed to be something added nothing to me. 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 me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. They desired only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to*

do.” Galatians 2:1-10

## Question

Paul in Galatians 1 emphasizes his knowledge comes directly from Jesus and not from man. Jesus says in Matthew 14:5 if someone claims to see him in the secret chambers, I should not believe him. Who was telling me the truth?

## Answer

Let’s look first at your Scripture references:

*“Paul, an apostle (not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead) ... 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.” Galatians 1:1, 11-12*

*“And although he wanted to put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they counted him as a prophet.” Matthew 14:5*

You are correct that Paul claimed his knowledge came directly “through the revelation of Jesus Christ.” However, Matthew 14:5 is about King Herod and John the Baptist, so not sure where you came up with your question.

I did find the words “secret” and “chambers” in the 1599 Geneva Bible, though not as a connected phrase. Is this the reference? If so, please ask your question again from the context so I can address what you’re asking.

*“And when thou prayest, be not as the hypocrites: for they love to stand and pray in the Synagogues, and in the corners of the streets, because they would be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward. But when thou prayest, enter into thy chamber: and when thou hast shut thy door, pray unto thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly. Also when ye pray, use no vain repetitions as the Heathen: for they think to be heard for their much babbling.” Matthew 6:5-7*

## **Question**

If Paul appeared in Jerusalem in Acts 9:26 after his conversion, then why does he tell the Galatians in 1:18 that he waited three years to go? Why does he assure us in v.20 he is not lying?

## Answer

Let's look at the context of each of the verses you mentioned in your question.

*“Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God. Then all who heard were amazed, and said, ‘Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?’ But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ. Now after many days were past, the Jews plotted to kill him. But their plot became known to Saul. And they watched the gates day and night, to kill him. Then the disciples took him by night and let him down through the wall in a large basket. And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. So he was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out. And he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Hellenists, but they attempted to kill*

*him. When the brethren found out, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him out to Tarsus.” Acts 9:20-30*

Paul also references this in 2 Corinthians 11:32-33 – “In Damascus the governor, under Aretas the king, was guarding the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desiring to arrest me; but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped from his hands.”

*“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. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord’s brother. (Now concerning the things which I write to you, indeed, before God, I do not lie.) Afterward I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia.” Galatians 1:15-21*

Luke does not record Paul’s journey to Arabia in Acts 9, but Paul refers to it in Galatians because it was important to what he was trying to help the Galatians understand. As I’m sure you are aware, Luke’s omission does not mean it didn’t happen just as Paul related in his letter to the Galatians. Luke wrote, “Now after many days were past ...” The Greek reads *Os de eplerounto hemerai hikanai*. The

words *hemerai hikanai* translate literally as “days considerable (many).” The word *hikanai* means “sufficient, considerable, much.” When referring to a number, it means “abundant, great, much.” When referring to time, it means “a long time.”

Earlier in Acts 9, Luke referred to “three days” and (vs. 9) and “some days” (vs. 19), which is the Greek words *hemeras tinas* (understood as an indefinite period of time). Given the use of terms like *hemeras tinas* and *hemerai hikanai*, Luke left plenty of time for Paul to travel to Arabia and return to Damascus before going to Jerusalem.

As for your question – “Why does he assure us in v.20 he is not lying?” – it’s probably because the Judaizers who were lying to the Galatians about the Gospel were also lying about Paul and his apostleship. Paul was writing to win them back to the Truth they had left by following the lies of those who opposed the Gospel message.

## Question

If the “other gospel” Paul speaks of in Galatians 1:6 was not the very one taught by Peter, James and John, then why does Paul attack the character of these three men in Galatians 2 calling them “those who seemed to be pillars.” ?

**Answer**

Let's look at the verses you mentioned in their context.

*“I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.” Galatians 1:6-9*

*“But from those who seemed to be something—whatever they were, it makes no difference to me; God shows personal favoritism to no man—for those who seemed to be something added nothing to me. 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 me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. They desired only that we should remember the poor, the very thing*

*which I also was eager to do.” Galatians 2:6-10*

Paul marveled that the Galatians had turned so soon from “Him” who called you in the grace of Christ? Who is that “Him?” Who calls people to Christ? It’s clear from the Gospels, Acts and the letters of the apostles that the Holy Spirit is the One who calls people to salvation in Christ. The Holy Spirit is the One Who sent Paul on his missionary journeys to open the door of faith to the Gentiles (Acts 13:1-4; 14:27). The Galatians had turned away from the Spirit of God to a “different gospel.” The word “different” in the Greek is *heteron*. W.E. Vine writes this about *heteron(s)* – “*heteros* expresses a qualitative difference and denotes another of a different sort” (Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, MacDonald Publishing Company, pg. 62). The word is a correlative pronoun and means “of another kind, another, different, in another form.” Paul warned the Galatians that they had turned from the Spirit of God to a gospel that was different and of another kind from the Gospel the Holy Spirit had brought them.

It’s obvious from what Paul wrote the Galatians about Peter, James, John and the others in Jerusalem that he did not view their Gospel as “of another kind” that Jewish believers should not believe. Paul said clearly that the Gospel for the circumcised had been committed to Peter and the other Jewish apostles even as God had committed the Gospel for the uncircumcised to Paul.

As for Paul's use of the term "pillars" for "James, Cephas, and John," it was the positive sense of their leadership positions among the believers in Jerusalem and Judea. It was not an attack on their character. The Greek reads *oi dokountes stuloi einai* – "the ones seeming pillars to be." The word *stuloi* (pillars) was used for a column that supported the weight of a building. It was substantial and vital to the success of the building standing strong and true. Paul viewed James, Peter and John as being those "pillars" of the Jewish congregation in Judea that were substantial and vital to the success of the faith community. To think that Paul used the words in a negative attack on the Jewish apostles is incorrect. There is no negative meaning in the words, phrasing or intent of the author.

## Summation

We began this special series about whether Paul was an Apostle or a fraud in the summer of 2013. It was for the purpose of answering the many questions we receive anytime we refer to one of Paul's letters to address a point of Christian theology. Though we are usually asked why we defend Paul, that is not our purpose. We reference Paul's letters because we believe his writings are apostolic and inspired by the Holy Spirit. They are, as Peter wrote, **Scripture** (2 Peter 3:14-16).

Here's a reminder of what we wrote in the first part of this series.

*“For the person who does not accept Luke, Acts, 2 Peter, Hebrews and all of Paul's letters, I don't think there's anything anyone can do to help you. You've chosen to throw out every possible piece of evidence that would tell you anything about Paul. That's like a trial judge who disallows every piece of evidence that would prove the defendant not guilty just because the judge does not want the defendant found not guilty. The court is stacked against the person in that case. The same is true in the way many people handle the evidence for Paul's apostleship. If the evidence could possibly support Paul's*

*legitimacy as an apostle of Jesus Christ, they throw it out. That's not reasonable, logical, ethical or legal, so there's nothing I can do to convince you because your mind is made up and closed to the possibility of being wrong. You have come to the table of discussion with presuppositions, preconceptions and thick ear plugs. You do not want to know, so you won't know."*

The battle about Paul's apostleship and his writings is far from over, even though the evidence is overwhelming in favor of God's choice of Paul to open "the door of faith to the Gentiles" (Acts 14:27). This attack is one of Satan's devices and "we are not ignorant of his devices." (2 Corinthians 2:11)

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