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What Paul Knew and When He Knew It

By

Mark McGee

It seems like everyone wants to jump on the bandwagon of Paul hijacking Christianity and turning it into something different than what Jesus Christ intended. Another way people have presented it to me is that Paul “invented” Christianity. Others say that Paul was a “dupe” of a false Jesus.

Is that true? Did Paul hijack Christianity? Did he invent it? Was he a dupe of a false Jesus?

If you think Paul was a dupe or a fraud, please read [Paul – Apostle or Fraud](#). It should answer many of your questions about him and his position in the early Church.

If you wonder what the early Church thought of Paul’s writings, please read [Convince Me There’s A God – The New Testament Part 7](#).

As for whether Paul hijacked or invented Christianity, let’s look at **what** Paul knew and **when** he knew it.

Saul of Tarsus

Saul of Tarsus (Paul) became a follower of Jesus Christ soon after Christ's resurrection (many scholars believe within 2-4 years of the resurrection).

Saul was well known for being a chief persecutor of the early Church, a persecution which helped expand the reach of the Church beyond Jerusalem and Judea.

“As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison. Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.” Acts 8:3-4

Saul became a follower of Jesus Christ soon after the Lord confronted him as he was on his way to Damascus to arrest people for following Jesus. The Lord sent a man named Ananias to speak with Saul and baptize him as a follower of Christ.

“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.” Acts 9:17-18

Son of God

Luke’s history of the early Church includes these words about the early days of Saul as a witness for Christ –

“So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus. Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God.” Acts 9:19-20

Saul preached in the Jewish synagogues in Damascus that Jesus Christ “is the Son of God.” That’s an amazing statement in light of what Saul believed as a Pharisee. Here is how Saul (Paul) defended himself before King Agrippa –

“My manner of life from my youth, which was spent from the beginning among my own nation at Jerusalem, all the Jews know. They knew me from the first, if they were willing to testify, that according to the strictest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee. And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers. To this promise our twelve tribes, earnestly serving God night and day, hope to attain. For this hope’s sake, King Agrippa, I am accused by the Jews. Why should it be thought incredible by you that God raises the dead? Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities.” Acts 26:4-11

Paul admitted that he had done many things “contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.” He knew what the disciples of Christ claimed about Him. We know that Paul was present at the stoning of Stephen and heard what Stephen said about Jesus. Paul probably also knew what Peter, John and other apostles had preached about Jesus in Jerusalem –

“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

“Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was

not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption. This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear. 'For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself: 'The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ. Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Then Peter said to them, '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.'" Acts 2:29-39

And then there was what Stephen said –

“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.’ When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth. But he, 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 7:51-56

Saul was not surprised by what Stephen said because Stephen had been saying many of these same things in public. Saul knew that disciples of Jesus believed He was both Lord and Christ. Saul knew disciples of Jesus believed He had been murdered, but had risen from the dead. Saul knew disciples of Christ believed He had ascended to Heaven and was at the right hand of God. Saul knew disciples of Jesus believed He fulfilled Messianic

prophecy. Saul knew and was “exceedingly enraged against them.”

Notice in Paul’s defense before Agrippa that he admitted to having “compelled” the followers of Christ “to blaspheme.” Paul knew the disciples believed Jesus Christ was the Son of God, so Saul’s persecution was focused on punishing them and causing them to blaspheme by saying that Jesus was not the Son of God and that God had not raised Jesus from the dead.”

So, for Saul to preach that Jesus Christ “is the Son of God” was a huge departure from what he had believed as a Pharisee. It was a true “conversion” in that Saul made a giant turn from believing Jesus was not alive and was not the Son of God to believing Jesus was alive and was the Son of God.

What changed Saul’s mind? Jesus Christ, alive and powerful, confronted Saul on the road to Damascus. Saul’s defense continued before Agrippa –

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

Immediately?

Acts 9:19-20 states that Saul preached the Deity of Jesus Christ “immediately” after spending “some days” with the disciples at Damascus.

Does the word *immediately* mean Saul was preaching Christ’s Deity within days of his conversion? Or was it weeks, months or years? The Greek word *tinās* (some) carries the idea of a “certain” number or person or thing. The word does not indicate the specific number of days Saul spent with the disciples leading up to the word “immediately.”

The Greek word translated “immediately” is *eutheōs* and means “at once, directly.” It comes from the word *euthus* which means “straight, straightway, without detours, without delay.”

Luke recorded a number of testimonies by Paul (Saul) about his conversion, but they do not give us more insight into how quickly after his conversion Paul preached that Jesus “is the Son of God.” So, we look to Paul’s letters to see if we can learn more about that time *immediately* following his conversion.

We find more specific information in Paul's letter to the churches in Galatia:

“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. For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it. And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers. 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.” Galatians 1:11-18

Paul's timeline included the following –

- Persecuting the Church for the purpose of destroying it
- God calling Paul through His grace, to reveal His Son in him that he might preach to the Gentiles
- Paul did not immediately confer with human beings (flesh and blood) nor go up to Jerusalem to speak with the Lord's other apostles, but went to Arabia instead.
- Paul returned to Damascus
- After three years Paul went up to Jerusalem to see Peter and stayed with him for 15 days

We know from Paul's timeline revealed in Galatians that there was a period of at least three years between his conversion in Damascus and going up to Jerusalem to see Peter.

Question: Did Paul spend three years in Arabia or in Damascus after returning from Arabia?

Answer: Most likely Arabia. Jesus spent about three years with his other apostles and may have given Paul a similar period of time to reveal the Gospel that Paul would preach to the Gentiles.

It appears to have been a time of preparation for Saul for the ministry Jesus had called him to perform.

Question: What did Saul do while he was in Arabia?

Answer: Saul learned directly from Jesus Christ. “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.”

Paul did not receive the Gospel from men and he wasn't taught it. What Paul preached “came through the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

Imagine that! Saul, the formerly hostile, enraged persecutor of the followers of Jesus Christ received the Gospel directly from Jesus Christ.

That means Paul personally met with Jesus Christ in Arabia and received the Lord's revelation (*apokalupsis*) concerning the gospel (*euaggelion*).

“Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God.”

The *immediately* in Acts 9:20 very well may have been what Paul did *immediately* after his conversion or *immediately* upon returning from the Arabian desert where he received the gospel revelation from Jesus Christ. Jesus had already spoken to Paul on the road to Damascus, so Paul knew from the Lord that He was the Son of God. Whether on the road to Damascus or in Arabia, Paul knew what he knew not because human beings told him or taught him. Paul knew what he knew because Jesus revealed it to him.

When Saul preached in the synagogues of Damascus that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, Saul preached what the risen Lord had revealed to him. Saul saw and heard the truth from **The Truth.**

Fifteen Days

“Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days.”

Paul left Damascus and traveled to Jerusalem where he met with the Apostle Peter for 15 days. He did not meet with the other apostles except for James, the Lord’s brother (Galatians 1:19).

This is very important. Much has been said through the centuries about Paul, Peter and James, the Lord’s brother, being at odds with each other on Christian doctrine. The fact is Paul spent three years learning from Jesus Christ personally, then traveled to Jerusalem to meet with two of the most important leaders in the early Church. Did Jesus tell Paul to do that so Peter and James would know that the Lord had called and taught Paul even as He had called and taught Peter and the other apostles? Did Jesus want Peter and James to understand Paul’s specific calling to the Gentiles for what was going to happen to the Church in the future?

Paul and Peter/James represented two leadership teams in the early Church. Paul and those who traveled with him (e.g. Barnabas, Silas) had a divine mission to the Gentiles. Peter, James and those worked with them (e.g. John and other Jewish apostles) had a divine mission to the Jews. Jesus sent both teams into the world to build His Church.

Both Peter and James expressed their support for Paul's doctrinal position at a later time, which goes to their support that began with the initial meeting in Jerusalem –

“Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.” 2 Peter 3:14-16

“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, 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.’ 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. They wrote this

letter by them: ‘The apostles, the elders, and the brethren, 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 15:12-29

“So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus. Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God.” Acts 9:19-20

We saw in our last study that Paul began preaching in Jewish synagogues that Jesus was the Messiah and the Son of God soon after believing in Christ. What else did Paul believe and preach about Jesus early in his ministry?

Repentance and Forgiveness

Paul told King Agrippa that after his conversion he “declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and *then* to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance.” Acts 26:19-20

- Repent
- Turn
- Do

That basic Christian message lines up perfectly with what we read in the Gospels and the writings of Christ's earliest apostles.

“And when the scribes and Pharisees saw Him eating with the tax collectors and sinners, they said to His disciples, ‘How is it that He eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners?’ When Jesus heard it, He said to them, ‘Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.’” Mark 2:16-17

“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

“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 11:13-18

“But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.” 2 Peter 3:8-9

Paul told the king that he preached repentance to the Jews in Damascus and Jerusalem and throughout Judea, then also preached to the Gentiles. That’s consistent with what Peter said he did.

How was what Paul did “highjacking” of Christianity? Let’s continue.

Saving Faith

Paul taught salvation by grace through faith.

“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.” Ephesians 2:8-9

“Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.” Romans 3:27-28

What did Jesus teach about grace and faith?

“For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” John 1:17

“Then behold, they brought to Him a paralytic lying on a bed. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, ‘Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you.’” Matthew 9:2

“For she said to herself, ‘If only I may touch His garment, I shall be made well.’ But Jesus turned around, and when He saw her He said, ‘Be of good cheer, daughter; your faith has made you well.’ And the woman was made well from that hour.” Matthew 9:21-22

“And when He had come into the house, the blind men came to Him. And Jesus said to them, ‘Do you believe that I am able to do this?’ They said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord.’ Then He touched their eyes, saying, ‘According to your faith let it be to you.’ And their eyes were opened.” Matthew 9:28-30

“And behold, a woman of Canaan came from that region and cried out to Him, saying, ‘Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed.’ But He answered her not a word. And His disciples came and urged Him, saying, ‘Send her away, for she cries out after us.’ But He answered and said, ‘I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.’ Then she came and worshiped

Him, saying, 'Lord, help me!' But He answered and said, 'It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs.' And she said, 'Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.' Then Jesus answered and said to her, 'O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire.' And her daughter was healed from that very hour." Matthew 15:22-28

In these examples, we see Jesus healing Jews and Gentiles and referring to their "faith." How about the apostles? What did they say about grace and faith?

"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." Acts 11:22-24

“Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls. Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.” 1 Peter 1:8-11

“And His name, through faith in His name, has made this man strong, whom you see and know. Yes, the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.” Acts 3:16

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” 1 Peter 1:3-5

Grace and faith for healing and salvation was a primary message of Christ and His apostles, so how did Paul hijack Christianity by preaching salvation by grace through faith?

Crucified, Died, Buried, Raised, Seen

The Apostle Paul preached that Jesus was crucified, died, was buried, raised from the dead and seen alive by many witnesses.

Here are two examples: the first from one of Paul's early sermons after he and Barnabas embarked on their first missionary journey from Antioch, and the second from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians.

“Men and brethren, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to you the word of this salvation has been sent. For those who dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they did not know Him, nor even the voices of the Prophets which are read every Sabbath, have fulfilled them in condemning Him. And though they found no cause for death in Him, they asked Pilate that He should be put to death. Now when they had fulfilled all that was written

concerning Him, they took Him down from the tree and laid Him in a tomb. But God raised Him from the dead. He was seen for many days by those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are His witnesses to the people. And we declare to you glad tidings—that promise which was made to the fathers. God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus. As it is also written in the second Psalm: ‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.’ And that He raised Him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, He has spoken thus: ‘I will give you the sure mercies of David.’ Therefore He also says in another Psalm: ‘You will not allow Your Holy One to see corruption.’ ‘For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell asleep, was buried with his fathers, and saw corruption; but He whom God raised up saw no corruption. Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that 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. Beware therefore, lest what has been spoken in the prophets come upon you: ‘Behold, you despisers, Marvel and perish! For I work a work in your days, A work which you

will by no means believe, Though one were to declare it to you.” Acts 13:26-41

“Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.” 1 Corinthians 15:1-8

How would you say Paul's "gospel" differs from the "gospel" Jesus preached?

"Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.'" Mark 1:14-15

"And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed; To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.'" Luke 4:17-19

"But watch out for yourselves, for they will deliver you up to councils, and you will be beaten in the synagogues. You will be brought before rulers and kings for My sake, for a testimony to them. And the gospel must first be preached to all the nations." Mark 13:9-10

“Now it came to pass, when Jesus had finished all these sayings, that He said to His disciples, ‘You know that after two days is the Passover, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified.’” Matthew 26:1-2

“From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.” Matthew 16:21

“Then they departed from there and passed through Galilee, and He did not want anyone to know it. For He taught His disciples and said to them, ‘The Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him. And after He is killed, He will rise the third day.’ But they did not understand this saying, and were afraid to ask Him.” Mark 9:30-32

“Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said to him, ‘We have seen the Lord.’ So he said to them, ‘Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His

side, I will not believe.’ And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, ‘Peace to you!’ Then He said to Thomas, ‘Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing.’ And Thomas answered and said to Him, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus said to him, ‘Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed. And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.’ John 20:24-31

“But when the morning had now come, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Then Jesus said to them, Children, have you any food?’ They answered Him, ‘No.’ And He said to them, ‘Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.’ So they cast, and now they were not able to draw it in because of the multitude of fish. Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, ‘It is the Lord!’ Now when Simon Peter heard

that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment (for he had removed it), and plunged into the sea. But the other disciples came in the little boat (for they were not far from land, but about two hundred cubits), dragging the net with fish. Then, as soon as they had come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, ‘Bring some of the fish which you have just caught.’ Simon Peter went up and dragged the net to land, full of large fish, one hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not broken. Jesus said to them, ‘Come and eat breakfast.’ Yet none of the disciples dared ask Him, ‘Who are You?’—knowing that it was the Lord. Jesus then came and took the bread and gave it to them, and likewise the fish. This is now the third time Jesus showed Himself to His disciples after He was raised from the dead.” John 21:4-14

How about the “gospel” Christ’s disciples preached?

“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

“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

“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. And His name, through faith in His name, has made this man strong, whom you see and know.

Yes, the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.” Acts 3:13-16

“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.” Acts 4:9-11

“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.’” Acts 5:29-31

“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.” Acts 10:39-41

*“He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.”
1 Peter 1:20-21*

“For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit.” 1 Peter 3:18

“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life— the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us— that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.” 1 John 1:1-4

- The “gospel” Jesus Christ preached included His death by crucifixion, burial and resurrection from death, and being seen by many witnesses after His resurrection.
- The “gospel” Jesus Christ’s disciples preached included His death by crucifixion, burial and resurrection from death, and being seen by many witnesses after His resurrection.
- The “gospel” Paul preached included His death by crucifixion, burial and resurrection from death, and being seen by many witnesses after His resurrection.

So, where is Paul’s supposed hijacking of the Gospel message? Where’s Paul’s supposed hijacking of Christianity and Christian teaching?

It would appear that in the early teaching of Paul about repentance, forgiveness, salvation by grace through faith, the death, burial and resurrection of Christ and being seen by many witnesses after the resurrection, he was on good footing with the teachings of Jesus Christ and His disciples.

The Gentile Question

Many people who believe Paul changed Christianity point to differences between how Jesus and Paul looked at Gentiles.

“These twelve Jesus sent out and commanded them, saying: ‘Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as you go, preach, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’” Matthew 10:5-7

“Then Jesus went out from there and departed to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a woman of Canaan came from that region and cried out to Him, saying, ‘Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed.’ But He answered her not a word. And His disciples came and urged Him, saying, “Send her away, for she cries out after us.’ But He answered and said, ‘I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.’ Then she came and worshiped Him, saying, ‘Lord, help me!’ But He answered and said, ‘It is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the little dogs.’ And she said,

‘Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table.’ Then Jesus answered and said to her, ‘O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire.’ And her daughter was healed from that very hour.”

Matthew 15:21-28

We also have the story of Jesus meeting a Samaritan woman at the well.

“The woman said to Him, ‘Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.’ The woman said to Him, ‘I know that Messiah is coming’ (who is called Christ). ‘When He comes, He will tell us all things.’ Jesus said to her, ‘I who speak to you am He.” John 4:19-26

Even though Jesus demonstrated mercy toward a Gentile woman and a Samaritan woman, it appears from both His words and the actions of His disciples after Pentecost that Gentiles would be treated similarly to how they were under Mosaic Law.

People who believe Paul changed Christianity from mostly Jewish to mostly Gentile members point to the days and months following Pentecost. They say that Peter, James, John and the other preached to Jews only and they are correct –

“Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem ...” Acts 2:14

“Men of Israel, hear these word ...” Acts 2:22

“Therefore let all the house of Israel know ...” Acts 2:36

“So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.” Acts 2:46-47

“Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this?” Acts 3:12

“Rulers of the people and elders of Israel ...” Acts 4:8

“And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people. And they were all with one accord in Solomon’s Porch.” Acts 5:12

“And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.” Acts 5:42

“Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution.” Acts 6:1

[Hellenists were Greek-speaking Jews]

“And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.” Acts 7:58

Gentiles are mentioned only twice in the first seven chapters of Acts and none of them support the idea that the followers of Jesus Christ preached the Gospel to Gentiles. In fact, the two references to Gentiles present them in an unfavorable light –

“For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done.” Acts 4:27-28

“Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as He appointed, instructing Moses to make it according to the pattern that he had seen, which our fathers, having received it in turn, also brought with Joshua into the land possessed by the Gentiles, whom God drove out before the face of our fathers until the days of David, who found favor before God and asked to find a dwelling for the God of Jacob.” Acts 7:44-46

It would appear from the first several chapters about the history of the early Church that only Jews would hear the Gospel of Christ. Saul, who consented to the death of Stephen, began an all-out persecution of the followers of Jesus for the purpose of putting an end to what he and other Pharisees viewed as a rebellion against God and Judaism.

“As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison.” Acts 8:3

An amazing thing happened to Saul while he was traveling to Damascus, Syria to arrest followers of Jesus who had fled the persecution. Saul had letters from the high priest written to synagogue leaders 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). As Saul approached Damascus a bright light shone around him from heaven and he heard a voice saying, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” Saul asked, “Who are You, Lord? Then the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.’” Jesus, who was in Heaven, told Saul to go into Damascus and wait to be told what he “must do.” Saul was blinded by the light, so the men who were with him led him into

the city and Saul spent the next three days without sight, “and neither ate nor drank.”

Jesus visited one of His followers in Damascus in a vision. The disciple’s name was Ananias. Jesus told Ananias to find Saul, speak to him and lay his hand on him so Saul would see again. Jesus told Ananias that Saul was “a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel” (Acts 9:15).

The Gentile Question (Continued)

In the last part of our study we began looking at the Gentile question. Many people who believe Paul changed Christianity point to the first eight chapters of Acts to prove that the followers of Jesus preached exclusively to Jews. They say that Paul pretended to have been told by Jesus in a Heavenly vision to go to the Gentiles.

Did Paul lie? Was Paul's eventual emphasis on taking the Gospel of Christ to the Gentiles his *invention* or was it the Lord's *intention*?

Peter and the Gentiles

If Paul invented preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles, then why did Peter preach to them first in Israel? Because God told Peter to preach to a Roman centurion and his family. living in Caesarea.

“And the following day they entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them, and had called together his relatives and close friends. As Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him. But Peter lifted him up, saying, ‘Stand up; I myself am also a man.’ And as he talked with him, he went in and found many who had come together. Then he said to them, ‘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. 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 10:24-29 – 48

One of the important things to notice is Peter’s first words to the centurion –

- “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.”

Peter's initial reaction to the vision he saw in Joppa was to say he had never eaten anything common or unclean. The voice Peter heard in the vision said, "What God has cleansed you must not call common." That's why Peter told Cornelius that even though he knew it was unlawful for a Jew to keep company with a Gentile, God had shown him (Peter) that he should not call any man common or unclean.

One thing it tells us is that prior to Peter's vision and interaction with the centurion, the apostles of Christ did not believe they were called to "go to one of another nation." The word "nation" in the Greek is ἀλλοφύλω (*allophylō*). The word means "foreign, of another tribe or race." Even though Jesus told Annanias that He had chosen Saul (Paul) to go to Gentiles (ἔθνων *ethnōn*), God opened the Gentile door through Peter first.

Another thing to notice in Acts 10 is that the Jews who were with Peter ("those of the circumcision") were astonished when the Holy Spirit fell on the Gentiles. That's when Peter said, "Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" Even as the Jews with Peter were astonished, the Jewish disciples back in Jerusalem were upset when they heard what had happened.

“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

It is more evidence that what Peter had done with Cornelius was way out of line with what he and the other apostles had taught the thousands of Jews who were following Jesus Christ. Think about that for a moment. Peter and the other apostles had spent more than a month with Christ “after” His resurrection and believed they were not to relate to foreigners (Gentiles). The Holy Spirit came upon Peter and the other apostles in great power to preach the Gospel in Jerusalem and Judea and they believed they were not to relate to foreigners (Gentiles). That was part of the ‘apostles’ doctrine’ the Jewish believers followed beginning at Pentecost (Acts 2:42). It took a special vision from God for Peter to visit a Gentile family and eat with them. It took the falling of the Holy Spirit upon Cornelius and his Gentile family and friends for Peter to agree to baptize them with water.

The Jews “contended” with Peter. The Greek word is διεκρίνοντο (*diekrinonto*) and means “to judge.” How would Peter explain himself to the Jews in Jerusalem for what he had done by preaching the Gospel to Gentiles and baptizing them with water?

“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 11:15-18

Peter added information to what we read in Acts 10. He remembered the “word of the Lord, how He said, ‘John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’”

Once Peter explained what happened and how it was God's decision to save the Gentiles, the Jews became silent, glorified God, and said, "then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life." God used Peter to open the door of repentance to life to non-Jews living in Israel.

The Gentile Question (Continued)

In the last part of our study we saw how God used Peter to open the door to preaching the Gospel to Gentiles in Acts 10, even though Jesus called Paul (Saul of Tarsus) to take the Gospel to Gentiles in Acts 9. Why would Jesus give that responsibility to Paul first, but use Peter to open the Gentile door? Let's look a little further into Acts to get some answers.

Peter and Paul

Peter's experience with Cornelius in Acts 10 played an important role in a confrontation between Paul and some of the Jews in Jerusalem we find in Acts 15. That event occurred after Paul and Barnabas had finished their first missionary journey to take the Gospel to Gentiles and Jews.

A group of Jews from Judea visited the church in Antioch, Syria, and told Gentile Christians that unless they were circumcised according to the custom of Moses they couldn't be saved. That was contrary to Paul's preaching to Gentiles and upset the Gentiles in Antioch. Paul and Barnabas disagreed strongly with and stood up to those Jews. The ensuing argument led to a special council in Jerusalem with all of the apostles and elders in attendance.

The question then was similar to the question before us now. Did Paul hijack Christianity? Did Paul change the Gospel of Jesus Christ into something God never intended? If that was Paul and Barnabas' plan, the council meeting in Jerusalem would certainly call them both out for making a big mistake in preaching to the Gentiles.

First, here's how Luke described the meeting in Acts –

“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. 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.’ Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter. 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.’ 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, 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.”

Acts 15:1-21

Next, here’s how Paul described that same meeting in his letter to the Galatian Christians –

“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

Do you see in the words of Peter or James at the Jerusalem Council any hint of an accusation that Paul had tried to hijack Christianity and turn it into something God never intended?

Not even a hint.

In fact, we see that the Apostle Peter spoke up **for** Paul and Barnabas and **supported** their ministry to the Gentiles based on what God had showed him (Peter).

Luke and Paul Conspiracy?

Many of the people who have contacted me through the years about this issue believe Luke and Paul were co-conspirators in hijacking Christianity. They say we can't trust what either one wrote in the Bible. So, I ask them if they trust what Matthew wrote. Most have told me, yes, they trust Matthew. I ask them if they trust what John wrote. Most have told me, yes, they trust what John wrote. I ask them if they trust what Peter wrote. Most have told me, yes, they trust what Peter wrote. I ask them if they trust what James wrote. Most have told me, yes, they trust what James wrote.

Question: did any of these ‘trusted’ apostles and authors say anything about Paul hijacking Christianity? Did any of these men who preached the Gospel of Christ and wrote Gospels and letters that became part of the Holy Bible warn Christians to beware of the teaching of Paul? Did they sound the alarm for Christians to steer clear of anything Luke wrote (e.g. Gospel of Luke, Book of Acts)?

They did not. In fact, the Apostle Peter wrote this about Paul –

“Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.” 2 Peter 3:14-16

Does that sound like a word of warning from Peter about Paul? No, it sounds like a solid confirmation that what Paul was preaching and teaching was according to the wisdom God had given him. Peter went so far as to say that “untaught and unstable people” had twisted what Paul had written in “all his epistles” “to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.”

Whoa! Sounds like Peter is on Paul’s side – which is to say they both were in agreement and solidly on God’s side concerning the issue of preaching the Gospel to Gentiles.

What about John or James or Matthew or Jude? Anything negative about Paul or Luke in their writings? Nope. Not a word. Claiming that Paul and Luke were involved in a conspiracy to hijack Christianity is in itself a conspiracy of major proportions. The evidence supporting Paul’s ministry to the Gentiles is overwhelming in the New Testament.

Keep in mind that Paul preached and wrote over a period of about 30 years. It would seem that if Paul was hijacking Christianity from the Jewish followers of Christ that the Jewish apostles would have warned the Jewish church about Paul. Shouldn’t we find something in their letters attacking Paul and what he preached?

Another thing to consider is that Jesus had the ‘last word’ in the New Testament. He appeared to the Apostle John after all of the other apostles had died and told him to “write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this” (Revelation 1:19). Jesus told John to write to seven churches in Asia Minor. Don’t you think that if Paul was hijacking Christianity from what Jesus intended it to be that the Lord would have told John to write something bad about Paul? Don’t you think Jesus, the Builder of His Church, would have warned His churches against Paul’s preaching and teaching ‘if’ Paul was trying to hijack the Church?

Jesus didn’t say anything about Paul in the church letters He dictated to John. John never mentioned Paul in any of his letters or in the Revelation. Nothing. Why? Because Paul, who died more than 25 years before John wrote, never did, said or wrote anything that Jesus didn’t want Him to do, say or write.

Don’t you think that if Jesus had told John that Paul had tried to hijack the church, John would have written about it or said something to his disciples? Some of John’s disciples wrote letters after John’s death and never said anything negative about Paul and his teaching and preaching. Read the writings of Ignatius of

Antioch. He was a disciple of John and never said anything negative about Paul. Polycarp of Smyrna was a disciple of John and never said anything negative about Paul. The same is true for the disciples of Ignatius and Polycarp. They said nothing negative about Paul. In fact, all of them quoted from Paul's writings!

Here are some examples that help us understand how disciples of the Apostle John viewed Paul. We begin with Polycarp's Letter to the Philippians –

Polycarp 3:2

For neither am I, nor is any other like unto me, able to follow the wisdom of the blessed and glorious Paul, who when he came among you taught face to face with the men of that day the word which concerneth truth carefully and surely; who also, when he was absent, wrote a letter unto you, into the which if ye look diligently, ye shall be able to be builded up unto the faith given to you,

Polycarp 3:3

which is the mother of us all, while hope followeth after and love goeth before—love toward God and Christ and toward our neighbor. For if any man be occupied with these, he hath fulfilled the commandment of righteousness; for he that hath love is far from all sin.”

Polycarp 9:1

I exhort you all therefore to be obedient unto the word of righteousness and to practice all endurance, which also ye saw with your own eyes in the blessed Ignatius and Zosimus and Rufus, yea and in others also who came from among yourselves, as well as in Paul himself and the rest of the Apostles;

Polycarp 9:2

being persuaded that all these ran not in vain but in faith and righteousness, and that they are in their due place in the presence of the Lord, with whom also they suffered. For they

loved not the present world, but Him that died for our sakes and was raised by God for us.”

Polycarp 11:2

But he who cannot govern himself in these things, how doth he enjoin this upon another? If a man refrain not from covetousness, he shall be defiled by idolatry, and shall be judged as one of the Gentiles who know not the judgment of the Lord, Nay, know we not, that the saints shall judge the world, as Paul teacheth?

Polycarp 11:3

But I have not found any such thing in you, neither have heard thereof, among whom the blessed Paul labored, who were his letters in the beginning. For he boasteth of you in all those churches which alone at that time knew God; for we knew Him not as yet.” Translated by J.B. Lightfoot

Next, Ignatius of Antioch's Letter to the Ephesians –

CHAPTER 12

12:1 I know who I am and to whom I write. I am a convict, ye have received mercy: I am in peril, ye are established.

12:2 Ye are the high-road of those that are on their way to die unto God. Ye are associates in the mysteries with Paul, who was sanctified, who obtained a good report, who is worthy of all felicitation; in whose footsteps I would fain be found treading, when I shall attain unto God; who in every letter maketh mention of you in Christ Jesus.”

Ignatius of Antioch's Letter to the Romans –

4:3 I do not enjoin you, as Peter and Paul did. They were Apostles, I am a convict; they were free, but I am a slave to this very hour. Yet if I shall suffer, then am I a freed-man of Jesus Christ, and I shall rise free in Him. Now I am learning in my bonds to put away every desire.” Translated by J.B. Lightfoot

Polycarp, Ignatius of Antioch and other early Church leaders did not warn the Church that Paul had attempted to hijack the Church from the Jewish purposes of Jesus Christ. Quite the opposite.

Confirmation

In the last part of our study we saw that the Apostle Paul and his missionary partner Barnabas were supported in their unique calling and ministry to Gentiles by none other than the Apostle Peter. The other apostles and elders in Jerusalem agreed with what Peter, Paul and Barnabas shared about God's work in the lives of Gentiles and approved the writing of a letter to the church in Antioch.

“The apostles, the elders, and the brethren, 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

Notice that the apostles, elders and brethren of the church in Jerusalem called Paul and Barnabas ‘beloved’ and men who had “risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” That is a strong show of support for Paul’s ministry by the leaders of the Jerusalem assembly.

So, how did Paul hijack Christianity? How did Paul make Christianity into something God never intended? That thought lacks logic and common sense in light of the evidence. The men Jesus Christ selected as apostles during His earthly ministry gave verbal and written support to Paul’s ministry and message.

The apostles, elders and brethren of the Jerusalem church sent “chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, namely, Judas who was also named Barnabas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren (Acts 15:22).” When those men arrived in Antioch, they gathered the people together and

delivered the letter. The members of the Antioch church read the letter and “rejoiced over its encouragement” (Acts 15:31).

Judas (Barsabas) and Silas were both Jewish prophets and stayed in Antioch for awhile and “exhorted and strengthened the brethren with many words” (Acts 15:32). Judas eventually returned to Jerusalem to convey special greetings from the Antioch believers to the apostles. Silas remained in Antioch and would become Paul’s second missionary partner.

Let’s look at that for a moment because it is another confirmation of Paul’s ministry.

Silas was one of the “leading men among the brethren” in Jerusalem. He was a Jewish believer and leader who the apostles entrusted to deliver their letter to the Gentile believers in Antioch. Barnabas, you may remember, was also one of the leading men among the brethren in Jerusalem who had searched out Paul when he saw what God was doing in Antioch. Barnabas became Paul’s first missionary partner and Silas became Paul’s second missionary partner to the Gentile world.

Here is how the Jerusalem church's confirmation for Paul's ministry to the Gentiles is adding up –

- Barnabas
- Peter
- other apostles
- elders
- brethren
- James
- Silas

That looks like a strong contingent of Jewish believers from Jerusalem in support of Paul's ministry to the Gentiles.

Contention

Another form of **confirmation** for Paul's ministry to Gentiles was based on **contention**. Paul wrote about it in his letter to the churches in Galatia.

“Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy. But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before them all, ‘If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews? We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, 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. ‘But if,

while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is Christ therefore a minister of sin? Certainly not! For if I build again those things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.” GALATIANS 2:11-21

Paul and Peter were friends and had been for many years. Peter was well-known and respected as being a leader and spokesperson for Christ. Why would Paul oppose Peter in such a public way?

It was because of the very thing Paul and Peter had presented to the Jerusalem Council of apostles and elders. Peter’s fear of the ‘circumcision’ group from Jerusalem and subsequent withdrawal from public fellowship with Gentile believers had to be addressed publicly – and that is what Paul did.

How did Peter respond to that public rebuke? We have no biblical record of Peter's response, but we do have Peter at the end of his life writing about Paul. His comments may give us some clue about what Peter thought about Paul's ministry and message –

“Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.” 2 PETER 3:14-16

Again, strong confirmation from the Apostle Peter that the ministry and message of Paul was part of God's eternal plan.

The preaching and teaching ministry of the Apostle Paul, as seen in the Book of Acts, was supported by the original apostles of Jesus Christ along with James and the other elders at the church in Jerusalem. However, what about Paul's letters? Many critics of Paul believe his letters point to a major disagreement between Paul and the apostles?

Some scholars point to differences between Paul's letters and the letter James wrote to early Christians as evidence that Paul changed the message of Christianity. Is that true?

James' Letter

The first New Testament writing may have been James' letter. Many scholars place the date of writing at about 45 AD. That would have been prior to the Jerusalem Council where James, the apostles and other elders of the church met to discuss the question of preaching the Gospel to Gentiles. It was at that meeting where both sides of the issue were debated. When the dust cleared, James made this pronouncement –

“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.” ACTS 15:18-19

The date of the Jerusalem Council is estimated to be between 48 – 50 AD – a few years after James wrote his letter. That means what James wrote in his letter – “To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad” – was before he came to an understanding about Paul’s ministry to the Gentiles. James makes no mention in his letter of a preaching ministry to the Gentiles by Peter, Paul, Barnabas or anyone else. It was not an issue James raised with the Jewish believers who were “scattered abroad.”

Here are main points in James’ letter:

- Trials in following Christ
- Doers of the Word
- Danger of personal favoritism
- Faith without works is dead
- Danger of the tongue
- Wisdom – Heavenly or demonic
- Danger of pride
- Importance of humility

- Do not judge a brother
- Do not boast about tomorrow
- Judgment of wealthy oppressors
- Importance of patience and perseverance
- Prayers for the sick
- Turning a brother from sin

These are rather basic theological points within Christianity. However, the one about faith without works being dead has caused much debate through the centuries.

“What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,’ but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, ‘You have faith, and I have works.’ Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe —and tremble! But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father

justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.' And he was called the friend of God. You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only. Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." JAMES 2:14-26

James was writing to members of the twelve tribes of Israel who were 'scattered abroad.' Those Jews would be descendants of Jewish people taken captive by Babylon centuries earlier who did not return to Judah after the Persians granted them freedom to do so. The 'scattered tribes' would be the Jewish families living outside of Israel, many of whom would make annual pilgrimages to Jerusalem.

It may be that many of the Jews who received James' letter had become followers of Christ during Pentecost about 15 years earlier. Acts 2:5-11 details that many of the people who heard Peter's sermon in Jerusalem on Pentecost were visitors from Mesopotamia, Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, Libya, Cyrene and Rome. James was head of the Jerusalem assembly of Christ followers and wanted Jews living outside Israel to know what he was teaching believing Jews living inside Israel. James may also have addressed things he had heard about how believing Jews were living outside Israel.

Paul's Letters

Many scholars believe Paul's first letter was the one he wrote to the Galatians – probably between 49-51 AD. Other scholars believe Paul may have written to the Thessalonians before he wrote to the Galatians.

Paul mentioned a timeline in his letter to the Galatians that included three years and 14 years –

“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. And I was unknown by face to the churches of Judea which were in Christ. But they were hearing only, ‘He who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith which he once tried to destroy.’ And they glorified God in me ... 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 1:18-24; 2:1-10

Based on Jesus’ death and resurrection about 30 AD and Paul’s conversion between 32-33 AD, the 17 years Paul mentioned in Galatians would place the Jerusalem Council about 49-50 AD – a few years after James wrote his letter to the ‘twelve tribes which are scattered abroad.’”

Next Time

One reason for differences between what Paul and James wrote in their letters, if there are differences, might come from what they both 'knew' at the time of the Jerusalem Council. We'll look at that next time as our special series continues.

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