

Bible Lives  
Volume 5  
Paul & Peter  
Studies In Spiritual Achievement

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# 1 The Conversion Of Paul / Saul

## Paul: Really Our Example

Paul is set before us as "a Christ-appointed model" of the ideal believer. He himself seems to have sensed this happening when he so often invites us to follow his example (1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1; Gal. 4:12; Phil. 3:17; 4:9; 1 Thess. 1:6; 2:10; 2 Thess. 3:7,9). He does this quite self-consciously, for example: "I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many that they may be saved...let no man seek his own, but another's [profit]"(1 Cor. 10:33,24). He even says that he doesn't do things which he could legitimately allow himself, *because* he knew he was being framed as their example (2 Thess. 3:7,9). He saw in his conversion a pattern for all those who would afterwards believe (1 Tim. 1:16). Having said that he was "chief" of the tribe of sinners, Paul goes straight on to say that this "was so that in me *as chief* might Jesus Christ shew forth *all* his longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should later believe on him"(1 Tim. 1:15,16 RV). This sounds as if Paul realized that he was being set up as the chief, supreme example to us; a template for each of us, of forgiveness and zealous response to that forgiveness. Thus Paul's description of how the light of the glory of God in Christ shines in the heart of the new convert (2 Cor. 4:6) was not without reference back to his own Damascus road conversion (Acts 9:3; 22:6; 26:13). Indeed, it is even possible that the way he made Elymas blind "not seeing the sun for a season", so that he had to be led by the hand (Acts 13:11), is all so reminiscent of Paul's own experience that he was consciously seeking to replicate his own conversion in the life of another man. And this is, indeed, the very essence of preaching from a grateful heart. He saw the power that worked in Him as working in all of us (Eph. 3:7,20). Paul wishes that the Colossians would be "filled with the knowledge of his will"(Col. 1:9), just as at his conversion he had been chosen so "that thou shouldest know his will"(Acts 22:14). He wanted them to share the radical nature of conversion which he had gone through; the sense of life turned round; of new direction... The Damascus road experience surfaces time and again in Paul's writing and self-consciousness (Rom. 10:2-4; 1 Cor. 9:1,16,17; 15:8-10; 2 Cor. 3:4-4:6; 5:16; Eph. 3:1-13; Phil. 3:4-11; Col. 1:23-29).

It is no mere pointless repetition that results in Luke recording Paul's conversion three times in Acts (Acts 9,22,26). Special attention is being paid to his conversion, because he is being set up as the model of all Christian conversion.

Paul's conversion-commissioning experience on the Damascus road has many similarities with the commissioning of Ezekiel. Ezekiel saw a similar vision of glory, heard "a voice of one that spoke", fell to the ground, resisted the commission, received Divine assurance, rose up by Divine invitation and was prepared for his commission by signs and wonders. The difference was that Paul says he saw the glory of the risen Christ. Ezekiel saw the glory of Yahweh, as the Lord Jesus wasn't in physical existence and hadn't resurrected at his time. But essentially, it was the same glory- for the glory of the Father is now fully invested in the Son (Rom. 9:23; Phil. 4:19). Ezekiel saw at the head of the vision of glory "the likeness of a man". He calls this figure the *Kavod*, the glory of God (Ez. 1:29). Although Jesus was not in physical existence at Ezekiel's time, I suggest that Ezekiel saw a vision of the Lord Jesus in glory. John 12 says that Isaiah likewise saw the glory of the Lord Jesus when he saw a similar vision of glory in Isaiah 6. James 2:1 speaks of "our Lord Jesus Christ, the glory". Christ is "the Lord of glory", reflecting the glory of God (Col. 1:27; Heb. 1:3). When Paul writes of our being transformed into "the image of Christ" (Rom. 8:29; 1 Cor. 15:49) he seems to have in mind Ez. 1:28 LXX: "The appearance of the image of the glory of the Lord". "The glory" in Ezekiel is personified- it refers to a person, and I submit that person was a prophetic image of Jesus Christ. But Paul's big point is that we *each* with unveiled face have beheld the Lord's glory (2 Cor. 3:16- 4:6); just as he did on the Damascus road, and just as Ezekiel did. It follows, therefore, that not only is Paul our example, but our beholding of the Lord's glory propels us on our personal commission in the Lord's service, whatever it may be.

Galatians was one of Paul's earlier letters. In it, he speaks of his own baptism: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live" (Gal. 2:19-21). Years later he writes to the Romans about *their* baptisms, in exactly the same language: "All of us who have been baptized...our old self was crucified with him...the life he lives he lives to God" (Rom. 6:1-10). He clearly seeks to forge an identity between his readers and himself; their baptisms were [and are] as radical as his in their import. Note how in many of his letters, especially Galatians and Corinthians, he switches so easily between "you" and "we", as if to drive home the fact that there was to be no perception of distance between him the writer and us the readers.

The way Paul *begs* us to follow him (e.g. "I beseech you, be as I am", Gal. 4:12) indicates the degree of confidence he had in acceptance by his Lord, his certainty that his way to the Kingdom was valid (Surely he had been told this by some Divine revelation? ). He exhorts us to speak 'freely' in our preaching (2 Cor. 3:12), just as he himself "speak freely" in his witness to Agrippa (Acts 26:26). There are a number of aspects of Paul's life which clearly demonstrate his spiritual growth; especially if the Acts and epistles are read chronologically. Paul wrote 2 Tim. 4 when news of his imminent death had just been broken to

him (2 Tim. 4:6 Gk.). As Paul faced his death, there was a deep self-knowledge within him that he was ready, that he was “there”. As we face the imminent return of the Lord, it should be possible for us to have a similar sense: “I am now ready...”. If we don't know that we are “in the faith” and that “Christ is in you”, then we are “reprobates”(2 Cor. 13:5). All those who will be accepted *must*, therefore, *will*, therefore, have a measure of self-knowledge and appreciation of how far they've grown in Christ. Growth is a natural process, it's impossible to feel it happening. But by looking back on our lives and attitudes and comparing them with the experience of successful believers, it is possible to get some idea of our readiness for the judgment. Notice how there was no distinction between Paul's will (“*When I could endure it no longer, I also sent....*”1 Thess. 3:5), and that of his fellow workers (“*When we could endure it no longer...we sent....*”1 Thess. 3:1–2). He assigned to his brethren his own feelings and decisions.

Paul comments that he persecuted the Christian church “zealously”(Phil. 3:6). He was alluding to the way that Phinehas is described as 'zealous' for the way in which he murdered an apostate Jew together with a Gentile who was leading him to sin (Num. 25). Note that the Jews in Palestine had no power to give anyone the death sentence, as witnessed not only by the record of the trial of Jesus but Josephus too (*Antiquities* 20.202; *BJ* 2.117; 6.302). Paul was a criminal murderer; and he had justified it by saying that he was the 1st Century Phinehas. Ps.106:30 had commented upon the murder performed by Phinehas, that his zeal “was accounted to him for righteousness”. This sets the background for the converted Paul's huge emphasis upon the fact that *faith* in Jesus is what is “reckoned for righteousness”, and it is in *this* way that God “justifies the unGodly”(Rom. 4:3-5; 5:6; Gal. 3:6). Paul is inviting us to see ourselves as him- passionately obsessed with going about our justification the *wrong* way, and having to come to the *huge* realization that righteousness is *imputed* to us by our faith in the work of Jesus.

The record of Paul's dealings with Elymas appears to indicate that Paul was consciously seeking to bring forth a convert in his own image as it were. Paul struck Elymas with blindness, telling him: “Behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season”; and like Paul, Elymas sought someone to lead him by the hand. There are several points of contact with Paul's being smitten with blindness at his conversion (Acts 13:11 cp. 9:8). Paul saw his conversion as a pattern for this man, indeed, for all of us.

As we've said, Paul is set up in the New Testament as our example of spiritual growth. What we want to do is analyse his letters chronologically and in harmony with the record in Acts, and discern how he grew spiritually. And remember, as we do so, that he really is framed as our example. His conversion

and subsequent spiritual growth are recorded as they are because they are a pattern for every subsequent believer (1 Tim. 1:16)- not just for those involved in preaching and pastoral work. It's because of this, it seems to me, that we have *so much* information about the man Paul; we really are enabled to enter into his spirit and personality. His physical appearance is stressed (Gal. 4:13,14; 1 Cor. 2:3,4; 2 Cor. 10:10; 12:5,7,9; Phil. 3:21; and especially his hands: Acts 21:11; 27:19; 1 Cor. 4:12). We imagine him as having a dark complexion, seeing he was confused with an Egyptian (Acts 21:38). Time and again Paul brings before us the fact he really is our example; thus he begins his Roman epistle with a description of himself as Paul...called to be an apostle, separated...”, but soon goes on to point out that the Romans were “*also* the called of Jesus Christ”(Rom. 1:1,6). He told those Ephesian elders, beset as they already were with the evident beginnings of apostasy: “*These hands* (showing them) have ministered unto my necessities...I have shewed you all things, how that *so labouring* ye (too) ought to support the weak (implying Paul worked at tent making not only for his own needs but in order to give support to the spiritually (?) weak), *and to (also)* remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive”(Acts 20:34,35). Paul seems to be unashamedly saying that those words of Jesus had motivated his own life of service, and he had shown the Ephesians, in his own life, how they ought to be lived out; and he placed himself before them as their pattern. The Lord Jesus recognized, years later, that the Ephesians had followed Paul's example of labouring motivated by Christ as he had requested them to; but they had done so without *agape* love (Rev. 2:3,4). Paul had held up his own example of hard work for Christ to the Corinthians too: “I laboured more abundantly than they all...therefore, my beloved brethren, *be ye* (also) ...always abounding in the work of the Lord”(1 Cor. 15:10,58). His advice to Timothy in 1 Tim. 3 as to what constituted good eldership was shot through with reference to his address to the Ephesian elders, where he outlined what manner of man he had been (I am indebted to Geoff Henstock for pointing out these links):

Blameless = “pure from the blood of all men”(Acts 20:26)

Husband of one wife = Paul?

Sober = “serving the Lord with all humility of mind”(1:19)

Given to hospitality = his example was in that he was “ready to support the weak...it is more blessed to give than to receive”(35) and his whole attitude to care for the Jerusalem poor was evidence enough.

Apt to teach = “I have taught you publicly, and from house to house...I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God”(20:27)

Not covetous = “I have coveted no man's silver”(33)

One that ruleth his own house well = Paul as the father of so many

Not a novice = Paul

A good report of them without = “These things cannot be spoke against”(19:36), and witness his appeals to a good conscience before both God *and men* when on trial.

Paul wrote to Timothy at Ephesus, and his language in 2 Timothy has many allusions to his own behaviour whilst at Ephesus. He spoke at Ephesus of how he had preached the word "at all seasons"(Acts 20:18)- and he tells Timothy to do likewise (2 Tim. 4:2); Paul had taught what was profitable to others (Acts 20:20); and this was to be Timothy's pattern (2 Tim. 3:16 RV). As he spoke to the Ephesians of the time of his departure, hard times to come and the need to use God's word to build us up (Acts 20:29,32), so he told Timothy (2 Tim. 4:3). Paul in writing to Timothy was consciously holding himself up as Timothy's example in the context of Ephesus. He tells Timothy to “endure hardness” and “endure afflictions” in the Gospel’s work, and then goes on to use the same Greek word to describe how he himself ‘suffered trouble’ in the same work (2 Tim. 2:3,9; 4:5). Having exhorted Timothy to be strengthened in the Lord, Paul speaks of how the Lord has strengthened *him* in his last court appearance (2 Tim. 2:1; 4:17).

## Redemption

When Paul speaks of redemption, he alludes to the practice of manumission, whereby a slave could be redeemed by his master and given the breathtaking gift of the much coveted Roman citizenship. Paul was a Roman citizen. But he invites all of us to see ourselves as a citizen of a Heavenly state (Phil. 3:20). We learn from Acts 22:26 that Paul was a Roman citizen from birth. The question therefore arises as to how they obtained citizenship. It would not have been through army service, because they were observant Jews (Phil. 3:5) and Jews didn’t serve in the army. “The most common origin of this status for Jews outside Palestine was the manumission of Jewish slaves by masters who were themselves Roman citizens. In this case the citizenship was acquired....after one or two generations”<sup>(1)</sup>. So it seems Paul had been ‘redeemed’ by manumission. And yet he uses the very language of manumission about all who are redeemed and freed in Christ.

## Paul’s Openness

As he prepared to die for his Lord, Paul's openness increased yet more. He tried to motivate Timothy to resist apostasy in the ecclesia by reminding Timothy of how well he knew Paul's example: “But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, long-suffering, patience”(2 Tim. 3:10). The sense of *purpose* and *determination* in Paul comes over so often (e.g. Acts 19:21). The constant energy of his mind comes over in the record (e.g. Acts 28:23), and also in his letters (note the urgency of “today” in Heb. 3:7,13,15;



4:7; 2 Cor. 6:2). It makes a good exercise to read through the record of Paul in Acts and highlight words like “reasoned”, “persuaded”, “convinced”, “purposed”, “disputing”(e.g. 18:4,5,11,19; 19:8,9,21). And he really is our example, not just a historical figure to be admired.

The openness of Paul, his self-revelation of his innermost spirit, especially to his detractors at Corinth, is incredible. In such situations one tends to be cagey and reserved rather than open-hearted. But much of what we learn about Paul's innermost struggles comes from his letters to the Corinthians, who seemed ready to abuse his every word. He bluntly reminded them of his openness: “O ye Corinthians, our mouth is opened unto you, our heart is enlarged”(2 Cor. 6:11). And he asks them, as his very own children, to be that open with him: “Now for a recompense in the same (I speak as unto my children), be ye also enlarged”(2 Cor. 6:13). He can say that they surely know what “knowledge” he has, because he has been thoroughly manifested [Gk. ‘phaneroo’] to them in absolutely every way (2 Cor. 11:6 Gk.); there was nothing he knew which he hadn't shared with them. He is so open with them that he doesn't just write in a political, guarded way to them, watching every word- in that although they accused him of being indecisive (“yea and nay”), he can say “Though I made you sorry with a letter, I do not repent, though I did repent”(2 Cor. 7:8). His loving passion for them cannot be suppressed. And it was the congruity in Paul between his outward behaviour and inner belief that made him so real and credible to so many. Thus when he says that he rejoiced that he had confidence in Corinth in all things (2 Cor. 7:16), they knew that he could somehow mean this whilst at the same time be critical of them. Like the Lord, Paul's transparency was what connected him with people. He says that he needs no letter of recommendation to them, because he is written on their hearts; “by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God...we are made manifest unto God, and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences”(2 Cor. 3:3; 4:2; 5:11). There were those in Corinth who thought in terms of appearances rather than the heart; those who demanded letters of recommendation before accepting Paul (2 Cor. 5:12); but Paul's response is that because he is transparent to God, it is inevitable that he is transparent before them his brethren. They knew in their hearts / consciences, no matter how they sought to deny it, that he was sincere. And this was why Paul could be so open with the critical Corinthians about his personal life. “Be ye also enlarged” invites us to be like him in this. To be asked to have the openness of Paul is a challenge indeed. Even in our Christian experience, those brethren and sisters who have the most influence on others are those who artlessly radiate their own spirit, whose struggle with sin, devotion and example is unconcealable and uncontrived.

For Paul to be set before us so often as our pattern is fundamentally challenging. The inspired record and he himself set him up as our hero and

model. It has often been said: “The world has yet to see what God can do with a man wholly committed to Him”. In Paul we see, after the Lord Jesus, just such a man. It has truly been commented: “Paul was such a man, and the world has witnessed the effect. He possessed a firmness of commitment to his Lord, a fervency of spirit, a compassion of heart, a breadth of outlook, a keenness of perception and a constant openness to the Spirit. Such an example of a Christian life and ministry stands as both a paradigm and an inspiration to us today”<sup>(2)</sup>.

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## Notes

(1) Simon Legasse, ‘Paul’s pre-Christian career’ *in* Richard Bauckham, ed., *The Book Of Acts* Vol. 4 (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1995) p. 372.

(2) So Richard Longenecker concludes his extensive study of Paul in *The Ministry And Message Of Paul* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971)

## 2-1 Paul And His Brethren

Paul's attitude to his brethren seems to have changed markedly over the years. He begins as being somewhat detached from them; perhaps as all new converts are initially. We see the Truth for what it is, we realize we had to make the commitment we did, and we are happy to do our own bit in preaching the Truth. But often a real concern and care for our brethren takes years to develop. Paul seems to tell the Galatians that the Gospel he preached had not been given to him by men, because in the early days after his conversion he was rather indifferent towards other Christian believers; “(Paul) conferred not with flesh and blood” after his conversion, neither did he go to see the apostles in Jerusalem to discuss how to preach to Israel; instead, Paul says, he pushed off to Arabia for three years in isolation. He was unknown by face to the Judaeen ecclesias, and even after his return from Arabia, he made no special effort to meet up with the Apostles (Gal. 1). The early Paul comes over as self-motivated, a maverick, all too ready to fall out with Barnabas, all too critical of Mark for failing to rise up to Paul's level of fearless devotion (Acts 15:39). It may even be that Paul's dislike of Mark was for deeper reasons than just surface irritation. The Spirit in Acts 15:38 says that Paul considered that Mark *had not gone with them* to the work. This is quoting the Septuagint of 1 Sam. 30:22, where “all the wicked men and men of Belial, of those that went with David, said, Because they *went not with us*, we will not give them ought of the spoil”. *Why* does the Spirit make this connection? Is it not suggesting that Paul, zealous soldier of David / Jesus as he was, was in those early days in some sense a man of Belial, bent on achieving his own glory in preaching, and unwilling to share it with anyone who wasn't spiritually or physically strong enough to do it as he was (cp. the weaker followers of David)? If this is the

case, then this is a far, far cry from the Paul who wrote his letters some years later, begging Timothy to come to encourage him, and letters in which the care of all the churches weighs down his soul daily, coming upon him as he woke up each morning (2 Cor. 11:28); the Paul who repeatedly encourages the weak, treating weak and strong as all the same in many ways, until he eventually attains a level of selfless devotion to his weak brethren that is only surpassed by the Lord Himself. Paul endured one of the most traumatic lives ever lived—beaten with rods, shipwrecked, sleepless, cold, naked, betrayed, robbed, beaten, and so much of this isn't recorded (e.g. the three shipwrecks and two of the beatings with rods he speaks of in 2 Cor. 11 aren't mentioned in Acts). And yet he implies that even more than all that, he felt the pressure of care for his brethren in the churches. His heart so bled for them...

The “contention” between Paul and Barnabas is described in a word which occurs only thrice elsewhere. In Heb. 10:24, a more mature Paul speaks of how we should consider one another to “*provoke* unto love and good works”. Surely he wrote this with a sideways glance back at his earlier example of provoking unto bitterness and division. Likewise he told the Corinthians that he personally had stopped using the miraculous Spirit gifts so much, but instead concentrated on developing a character dominated by love, which was *not* easily provoked (1 Cor. 13:5). The Spirit seems to have recognized Paul's change, when Acts 17:16 records how Paul's spirit was “stirred” at the spiritual need of the masses, and thereby he was provoked to preach to them; rather, by implication, than being provoked by the irritations of weaker brethren. In Gal. 2:20, Paul wrote of “the son of God who loved me and gave himself for me”; and yet some years later he wrote in conscious allusion to this statement: “Christ loved *the church* and gave himself *for it*” (Eph. 5:25). He looked out from beyond his personal salvation to rejoice in the salvation of others. He learnt that it was God manifestation in a multitude, not individual human salvation, that was and is of the essence. And we follow a like path, from that day when we were asked ‘why do you want to be baptized’, and we replied something to the effect ‘because I want to be in the Kingdom’.

It has been pointed out by F.F. Bruce <sup>(1)</sup> that Paul's later letters reveal a marked *and progressive* fondness for Greek words compounded from *syn-*, i.e. together / with (e.g. *synergos*, co-worker; *synaichmalatos*, co-prisoner). Priscilla, Aquilla, Timothy, Titus, Marcus, Archippus, Luke, Aristarchus, Tychicus, Epaphras, Demas, Epaphroditus, Clement, Philemon, Euodias, Syntyche (the last two being weak in terms of spiritual behaviour)...all of these are described by Paul with a *syn-* compound word. It seems that as he matured, Paul *needed his brethren*, he realized he wasn't so alone and strong-willed as he had once been, he saw the Christ in his brethren. Often he speaks of his urgent desire to see the face of his brethren (Rom. 1:11; 15:24; Phil. 1:27; 1 Thess. 2:17; 3:6,10; Heb. 13:23). This is a far cry from the Paul who ran away from his

brethren soon after his baptism. He progressed from this to the maturity of being willing to give his life for his beloved brethren: "So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us"(1 Thess. 2:8). Even for aggressive, critical Corinth, he felt the same: "I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls"(2 Cor. 12:15 AVmg.). Nearly all references to Paul's "joy" are in the context of his joy at the prospect of others' spiritual development and salvation (Acts 13:52; Rom. 5:11; 15:32; 2 Cor. 2:3; 7:4,6,13; Phil. 1:14,18; 2:2,17; 4:1; 1 Thess. 2:19,20; 3:9; 2 Tim. 1:4; Philemon 7,20). He even told Corinth that he had abased himself so that *they* might be exalted (2 Cor. 11:7). This is one of Paul's many allusions to the Gospels; this time to Lk. 14:11; 18:14, which teach that he who abases himself will *himself* be exalted. But Paul was abasing himself so that Corinth could be exalted, so that they could share the exaltation he would receive on account of his humility. In all this, of course, he reflected to his brethren the very essence of the attitude of the Lord Jesus for toward us.

One of the (many) agonies of Paul's soul was that he felt that his brethren did not appreciate the depth of love which he had for them. Israel certainly didn't; and he loved them to the same extent as Moses did, willing, at least in theory, to give his *eternal salvation* so that they might be saved (Rom. 9:3). The more (Gk. 'the more-and-more-abundantly') he loved Corinth, the less they realized his love, and the more they turned away from him (2 Cor. 2:4; 12:15); and he so earnestly wished (Gk.) that the believers in Colosse and Laodicea appreciated how much he spiritually cared for them (Col. 2:1). Paul had enough self-knowledge to say that his love for Corinth was growing more and more (although this was expressed in an ever-increasing concern for their doctrinal soundness); he told the Thessalonians that his love for them was increasing and abounding (2 Cor. 12:15; 1 Thess. 3:12). And Paul could therefore exhort the Philippians and Thessalonians to also increase and abound in their love for each other, after Paul's example (Phil. 1:9; 1 Thess. 3:12). Paul's love for his brethren grew and grew, *even though they didn't notice this*. The 'you don't know just how much I love you' syndrome is surely one of the cruellest in human experience. A growth in true love, true concern, isn't always apparent to our brethren. But if our growth is after Paul's pattern (and surely it can be on no other pattern); then this will be our experience too. Consider how and why Christ offered him the choice of death; Paul declined it because he saw it was more needful to remain with the new converts (Phil. 1:21-23). This accounts for his emphasis in Philippians on how much he desired their growth; because he had chosen to stay alive in this mortal flesh *solely because* he wanted to achieve this. The tragedy was that all in Asia turned away- when he had 'risked' remaining alive, with the full knowledge he could himself fall away, having been offered certain salvation- all for their sakes.

In Phil. 2:17, Paul says that he saw his brethren as an altar, upon which he was being offered up as a sacrifice. He saw his brethren as the means by which he could serve God. And for us too, the community of believers, the ecclesia, be they strong or weak, a pain in the neck or wonderful encouragement, are simply the method God has chosen for us to offer ourselves to Him. Running around for others, caring of others, patient sensitivity with our brethren... these are but the altar provided by God, upon which we can serve Him and give ourselves to Him.

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## Notes

(1) See F.F. Bruce, *The Pauline Circle* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1985).

## 2-2 The Weakness Of Paul

*Why* wasn't Paul's great and increasing love to Corinth, Colosse and Laodicea (and probably many many others) appreciated and recognized? No doubt it was partly because true love for one's brethren is often expressed in the type of spiritual concern which they find somehow obnoxious and annoying. Yet I suggest another reason was because of the hardness of Paul's exterior, that iron in his soul which somehow always remained. He tells the Corinthians that he really does want them to respond to what he's saying, because otherwise when he comes he will appear "harsh" to them (2 Cor. 13:10 NIV). There are a number of examples of Paul's human side and possible pride flashing out:

- Consider how Paul's argument with Barnabas and Mark would have been well known, seeing that a zealous brother always has his weak side paraded. Or the way he demands the magistrates to come *personally* and release him from prison, because they have unfairly treated him (Acts 16:37);

- or Acts 22:25,28, where Paul seems to enjoy putting the wind up the soldiers by waiting until they had bound him for torture before asking, surely in a sarcastic way, whether it was lawful for them to beat a Roman citizen. The fact he asked the question when he knew full well the answer is surely indicative of his sarcasm. The chief captain commented, under his breath it would seem, that it had cost him a fortune in backhanders to get Roman citizenship. Paul picked up his words and commented, with head up, we can imagine: "But *I* was free born"- I was born a citizen, never needed to give a penny in backhanders to get it either. Surely there is an arrogance here which is unbecoming. And it was revealed at a time when he was in dire straits himself, and after already being in Christ some time. It may indicate that he was tempted to adopt a brazen, almost

fatalistic aggression towards his captors and persecutors- what Steinbeck aptly described as “the terrible, protective dignity of the powerless”. One can well imagine how such a mindset would start to develop in Paul after suffering so much at the hands of men.

- Consider too his claim that he had lived in all good conscience before God all his life (Acts 23:1). The Lord Jesus Himself informs us that Paul kicked against the pricks of his own conscience (Acts 9:5). And in any case, Paul elsewhere says that his good conscience actually means very little, because it is God's justification, not self-justification through a clear conscience, which is ultimately important (1 Cor. 4:4 RSV). It seems Paul was aware of his weak side when he comments how despite his own clear conscience, God may see him otherwise (1 Cor. 4:4 RSV); and surely this was in his mind. So how true were Paul's words in Acts 23:1? It seems that he said them in bitter self-righteousness. Soon afterwards he changes his life story to say that he had always *tried* to have a good conscience (Acts 24:16).

- To address the Sanhedrin as “brethren” has been described as “almost recklessly defiant”(1). The usual address was: “Rulers of the people and elders of Israel”. But Paul instead treated them as his equals.

- Having started on the wrong footing by this statement, it was perhaps this arrogant mood which led him to curse the High Priest as a “whited wall”(23:3-6). It seems to me that Paul realized his mistake, and wriggled out of it by saying that he hadn't seen that it was the High Priest because of his poor eyesight- even though Paul would have recognized his voice well enough. Another possibility is that “I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest” is to be read as Paul claiming that he didn't recognize this high priest, as Christ was his high priest, therefore his cursing was justified. But he thinks on his feet, and suggests that he is being persecuted only because of his belief in a resurrection- with the desired result ensuing, that there was a division between his accusers.

- Paul's appeal to Caesar seems to have been quite unnecessary, and again it seems to have been the outcome of bitter exasperation and almost pride: “I ought to be judged”, as a Roman citizen...”no man may deliver me...” “as thou very well knowest”; the response of Festus seems to be appropriate to Paul's arrogance: “Hast thou appealed unto Caesar? Unto Caesar thou shalt go”(25:10-12). The word used to describe Paul's “appeal” is that usually translated “to call on (the name of the Lord)”, perhaps suggesting that this was whom Paul should have called in, not Caesar.

- Even “Believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest”(26:27) suggests that Paul in full flow, even shackled and in prison clothes, had a fleck of arrogance and aggression in his presentation.

- Paul seems to have recognized this hard exterior which he had: “I write these things being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness” (2 Cor. 13:10).

- “I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city”(Acts 21:39) seems rather proud, especially when we learn that Tarsus was famed for being a proud city. She inscribed upon her coins: “Tarsus, the Metropolis, First, Fairest and Best” (2).

- “Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean; from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles”(Acts 18:6) seems to also be a flash of unspirituality. For later, Paul realizes that he may be condemned if he doesn't preach the Gospel; he realized that he perhaps *wasn't* free of his duty of preaching. Yet for all his “from henceforth I go unto the Gentiles”, Paul *still* preached to the Jews (Acts 18:8; 19:8); which would suggest these words were said in temper and perhaps unwisdom. He himself seems to recognize this when he wrote to Timothy at the very end of his life of how we must with meekness instruct those who oppose themselves (2 Tim. 2:25), whereas his own response to those who “opposed themselves”(Acts 18:6) had been to say, without meekness, that he was never going to ‘instruct’ Jews ever again.

- F.F. Bruce has observed: “Something of Paul's native impetuosity is apparent in his epistolary style...time and again Paul starts a sentence that never reaches a grammatical end, for before he is well launched on it a new thought strikes him and he turns aside to deal with that”(3). His style is exemplified in 2 Cor. 5:17. The Greek text here is a sentence in which there are no verbs: “If anyone in Christ- new creation”. It is as if the thrill of it leads him to just blurt it out. And observe that this was to be found in a man of extraordinary culture and intellectual ability. By perceiving this tension, the passion behind his style is thereby accentuated the more. Likewise consider how in Galatians Paul uses so many negatives, as if his passion and almost rage at the false teachers is coming out: “an apostle *not* from men...the gospel preached by me is *not* man's gospel...*nor* was I taught it...I did *not* confer with flesh and blood, I did *not* go up to Jerusalem...I do *not* lie...Titus was *not* compelled...to *false* brethren we did *not* yield...those ‘of repute’ added *nothing*”(Gal. 1:1,11,12,16,20; 2:3,4,6). The way he says “Ye have known God, or rather, are known of God”(Gal. 4:9) seems to indicate [through the “or rather...”] a very human and passionate touch in his writing, as if he was thinking out loud as he wrote (4).

- Paul was clearly told by the Spirit that he “should not go up to Jerusalem”(Acts 21:4). Yet Paul chose to go up to Jerusalem, with the Holy Spirit warning him against it in every city he passed through (Acts 20:23; 21:11). What are we to make of this? Was a spiritual man like Paul simply out of step with the Spirit on this point? Maybe- in the light of all we've seen above. It's possible to get fixated on a certain project and ignore God's clear testimony. Or it could be that Paul knew the Lord well enough to realize that although God was telling him what would happen, he could still exercise his own love for his brethren to the maximum extent. For it was for love of his brethren and his dream of unity between Jew and Gentile that he personally took the offerings of the Gentiles to the poor saints in Jerusalem.

- 2 Cor. 7:11-15, when properly translated, perhaps reflects Paul at his angriest and most abrasive: “I robbed other churches [an exaggeration!], getting money from them to be a minister to you!...as the truth of Christ is in me- I swear that this reason to be proud will not be stopped as long as I work in the area of Achaia! You ask me why do I do this? Do you think it's because I don't love you? God knows I do! It's because what I do- and I am going to go on doing it- shuts up some people who are trying to pretend they are as good as we are, those fakes! Such apostles are treacherous workmen. They deck themselves out as apostles of Christ and it's no wonder people are fooled... but they'll get what's coming to them”<sup>(5)</sup>. Even through the barrier of words, time, culture and distance, the abrasion of Paul in full-flow comes down through the centuries.

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## Notes

(1) William Barclay, *Ambassador For Christ* (Valley Forge, PA: The Judson Press, 1974) p. 132

(2) *ibid* p. 25.

(3) F.F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle Of The Free Spirit* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1980) p. 456

(4) Understanding the way Paul breaks off into another theme and then resumes is the key to understanding some of the more difficult passages in his writings:

“Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare [*his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say*] at this time his righteousness”(Rom. 3:25,26).

“For this cause I, Paul [*the prisoner of Jesus Christ...* there is a parenthesis of 13 verses, then he resumes: *For this cause*] I bow my knees”(Eph. 3:1,14).

“But if I live in the flesh [*this is the fruit of my labour...nevertheless to abide in the flesh*] (this) is more needful for you”(Phil. 1:22-24; think and read this one through!).

(5) D.L. Dungan's translation, in *The Sayings Of Jesus In The Churches Of Paul* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971) p. 37.



## 2-3 Paul: A Character Study

The fact the Philippians obeyed Paul more when he was absent than when he was present has some implications (Phil. 2:12). One of the strongest is that Paul in person was not charismatic, indeed, his physical presence was perhaps a big discouragement to be personally committed to him. Perhaps he was actually quite obnoxious in appearance. His power was therefore in his message, and not in his personality. His hearers were willing to pluck out their eyes and give them to him [a reference to his physical infirmity?] because of his *message* rather than because of any personal charisma.

Paul lived a traumatic life, lived with weakness, fear, trembling, tears, distress, dying daily, burdened beyond measure, despairing of life, having the sentence of death, sleeplessness... and all this would have had quite some effect upon him nervously. Almost certainly it would have led him to be depressive, and this may explain some of these flashes of anger. Yet these flecks of pride and anger reflect something of Paul's former self. He is described as fuming out hared against the Christians like an animal; he was driven by hate and anger. Stephen's death sentence was against Pharisaic principles; and it was a studied rejection of the more gentle, tolerant attitude taught by Gamaliel, Paul's early mentor ("though I distribute all my belonging to feed the poor..." is Paul virtually quoting Gamaliel- he clearly was aware of his stance). People like Paul who come from strict, authoritarian backgrounds can have a tendency to anger, and yet in Paul there seems also to have operated an inferiority complex, a longing for power, and a repressed inner guilt. Although Paul changed from an angry man to one dominated by love, to the extent that he could write hymns of love such as 1 Cor. 13, there were times when under provocation the old bitterness and anger flashed back. We too have these moments, and yet in the fact that Paul too experienced them even in spiritual maturity, we have some measure of comfort.

Paul's hard, indifferent exterior, his flashes of failure, fooled many of his brethren, so that they didn't perceive his love or its' abounding growth. And many a fine believer has been misunderstood by his brethren in the same way. Not only was Paul's great love for the ecclesias unrecognized by them. His love for the Law, "holy and just and good"(Rom. 7:12), his love for Israel, so high that he could allude to that pinnacle of love for them which Moses reached, saying that he would fain lay down his eternal salvation for them (Rom. 9:3- this is quite something)...the love of Paul for them was so great. He loved them with the love of Christ: he describes his hunger, thirst, nakedness and loss of all things in the very language used about Israel's condemnation (2 Cor. 11:27 alludes Dt. 28:48). In other words, he saw himself as somehow bearing their

punishment for apostasy in his own life, as if he was some kind of suffering representative for them. And yet the Jews accused him of teaching all men everywhere “*against* the people, and the law, and this place”(Acts 21:28). The tragedy of man's ingratitude and incomprehension would have driven many men inside themselves. But not Paul. Paul saw his brethren's need as his personal need. We see this by studying the apparent contradiction between Paul's comment that the Philippians sent support to him repeatedly for *his* necessities (Phil. 4:16), and the way he boasts to the Corinthians (2 Cor. 11:7) and Thessalonians (1 Thess. 2:9) that he did not receive personal financial support from others, but worked with his own hands so as to be self-supporting (see too Acts 20:33-35). Yet he wrote those things at roughly the same time as the Philippians were sending him help towards ‘my necessities’. The only conclusion seems to be that Paul viewed the necessities of his converts as *his* personal necessities- hence he can say that the Philippians sent money and support for *his* necessities, whilst at the same time truly stating that he took no *personal* support from his converts.

The go-it-alone, maverick Paul came to love and need, desperately, his brethren. The work of fathering so many others in the Faith developed in him a whole range of characteristics which made him such a wealthy soul: he felt as a father (2 Thess. 2:11), as a mother (2:7), as an orphan (2:17 Gk.). The bitterness and the hardness was surely overridden by these characteristics, although as we have seen, traces of them still surfaced sometimes, under provocation. When Paul was first imprisoned in Rome, it seems Epaphroditus was a great comfort to him; he didn't want to send him to Philippi, but he “supposed it necessary”(Phil. 2:25). Likewise, it was only when he “could no longer forbear”(1 Thess. 3:1,5) that he sent Timothy away from him when he was living at Athens, to strengthen the Thessalonians. Paul came to really need his brethren. When some members of the Rome ecclesia (who were rather weak, 2 Tim. 4:16) came to meet him at Appii, Paul took courage at the very sight of them; one gets the picture (from the Greek) of him seeing them, recognizing who they were, and feeling a thrill of courage go through his soul (Acts 28:15; note how Luke says “he” rather than “we”, as if emphasizing that Paul was more encouraged than he was by these unknown brethren showing up). Here was no self-motivated old brother, indifferent to what his younger and weaker brethren could do for him by way of encouragement. And at the bitter end, the way he begs nervous, spiritually and physically weak Timothy to try to get to him before he dies has something pathetic about it: “Do thy diligence to come...do thy diligence to come”, he repeats twice over (2 Tim. 4:9,21). The spiritual weakness of Timothy and his need for Paul's encouragement is quite a theme (1 Cor. 16:10; 1 Tim. 4:12,14; 2 Tim. 1:6-8; 4:2). Paul laments how the other brethren had disowned him because of the possible implications for themselves if they were known to associate with him; how his soul-mate Demas had left the faith, and how the multitudes he had

converted in happier days had turned away. “Only Luke is with me” says it all. Some of his last words were: “Take Mark, and bring him with you, for *he is profitable to me* for the ministry”. It seems Paul was aware of his error of years before in pushing Mark away. We have seen that he alluded to it in his letters. And now, right at the very end, the memory of his earlier pride and brashness to his brethren stayed with him. Every, every one of us has done the same thing to our brethren, countless times. Will we remember them on our deathbeds? Will our sensitivity to sin be that great? Paul in his time of dying was a man who had reached a spiritual peak (see later), the love which was the bond of spiritual completion and maturity. Yet this didn't stop him being depressed, or from so desperately wanting his brethren, or from meditating upon past mistakes.

To sum up, Paul's attitude to his brethren showed a growth in true *love*. He seems to have realized this happening within himself. The autobiographical section in 1 Cor. 13 shows him confessing that first of all, the public, dramatic work associated with possession of the miraculous Spirit gifts had taken him up; yet he likens that period to his spiritual childhood (note how he uses the same figure of childhood to describe the dispensation of miraculous gifts in Eph. 4:11-16). He seems to have chosen not to use the gifts so much, because he realized that the real maturity was faith, hope and love; and the greatest of these, Paul came to realize, was love. And a true love must be the end point of our lives, as it was for Moses, as it was for Jacob. If Peter's list of spiritual fruits in 2 Pet. 1:5-7 has any chronological reference, it is significant that the final, crowning virtue is love- a love that is somehow beyond even “brotherly kindness”. Love is above all things the bond of spiritual perfection (Col. 3:14).

### **3 The Preaching Of Paul**

There can be no doubt that Saul of Tarsus was the rising star of the Jewish world. There can be no doubt of his intellectual ability, of his personal charisma. The way Paul in Galatians could cite Old Testament passages which combine the words ‘right’ and ‘faith’ is not only due to inspiration- he would have memorized the Old Testament as many Jews did, and yet like a computer search program, was able to pull out passages combining certain words- e.g. the only one combining ‘curse’ and ‘law’ The Roman Governor Felix *trembled* at Paul's incisive logic- even in his prison uniform (Acts 24:25). Hardened Agrippa was almost persuaded by Paul, on his own public admission, to become a Christian (Acts 26:28). The Galatian converts would have pulled out their eyes from their sockets and given them to partially sighted Paul (Gal. 4:15). The aggressive crowd, baying for Paul's blood, were held in one of history's most uncanny silences by the sheer personality of that preacher. He beckoned with his hand, and “there was made a great silence...and when they

heard how (Gk.) he spake...they kept the more silence”(Acts 21:39-22:2). Pagans at Lystra were so overcome by his oratory that they were convinced he was the god Mercury come down to earth; it took Paul quite some effort to persuade them that he was an ordinary man (Acts 14:12). This was the man Paul. He had undoubted ability as a preacher. In passing, the Corinthians mocked his weak physical presence; and yet Paul had undoubted charisma and power of personality, right up to the end. Was it not that he consciously suppressed the power of his personality when he visited Corinth? This was humility and self-knowledge indeed. Indeed, his reasoning in 2 Cor. 10,11 is that he could present himself to Corinth as quite a different brother Paul than what he did.

After his conversion, we sense from the record that the preaching Paul was in his element. The record of his early preaching in Damascus and Jerusalem is recorded with the same rubric: he preached “boldly”, and on each occasion it seems he would have gone on, utterly oblivious of the fact he was heading for certain death, had not the other brethren “taken” him and quietly slipped him out of those cities (Acts 9:27). The same word translated “boldly” occurs later, years later, when Paul asks his converts to pray for him, that he would speak “boldly, as I ought to speak”(Eph. 6:20). He has already asked them this in v.19; he asks for the same thing twice. And he confessed his same problem to the Colossians (Col. 4:4). As he got older, he found it harder to be bold. First of all, in those heady days in Jerusalem and Damascus, it was the most natural thing in the world for him. But as time went by, it became harder for him to do this. Acts 18:4,5 implies that when Paul first came to Corinth, he concentrated on his tent making business, and confined his preaching to arguing with the Jews at synagogue on the Sabbath. But when Silas and Timothy came, their presence made him “pressed in the spirit” to launch an all-out campaign. No longer was he the self-motivated maverick. He needed the presence of others to stir up his mind and prod him onwards. He admitted to those he converted in Corinth as a result of this campaign that such preaching was against his will, he had had to consciously make himself do it (1 Cor. 9:17). Indeed, the Lord Jesus Himself had had to appear to Paul in a vision and encourage him not to suppress his preaching on account of his fear of persecution (Acts 18:9). Therefore he later told the Corinthians that he feared condemnation if he gave in to his temptation not to preach (1 Cor. 9:16). On the voyage to Rome, it was only after much “abstinence” that Paul openly preached to the crew and other prisoners (Acts 27:21)- as if he struggled against a shyness in public testifying.

Yet we have seen that initially, Paul was a bold, fearless preacher. By the end of his life, he had to fervently pray to have that boldness he once had. He asked at least two ecclesias to pray for him to continue to have it. He says in 2 Cor. 10:1 that now he tends to be more bold in written words, rather than in personal

presence. And he tells Philemon (v.8) that although he could be bold in his writing to him, he isn't going to be; he's going to beseech him, "for *love's sake*...being such an one as Paul the aged"(Philemon 9). Yet Paul knew himself well enough to be able to say that he was *always* bold (Phil. 1:20; as confirmed in Acts 26:26 Gk.; 28:31 RV; 19:8; 1 Thess. 2:2; Rom. 15:15). He was practising what he preached in Heb. 3:6; 10:35: the need to hold fast our initial boldness (Gk.) steadfast unto the end.

Paul could only do what he once did so effortlessly through a great spiritual effort. Moses likewise was "mighty in words" for 40 years in the court of Pharaoh. But at age 80, he complained that he was not mighty in words to go and speak to Pharaoh. Yet, eventually, he did. He did what was now against the grain for him. On a surface level, it's clear that the unbridled enthusiasm for preaching of our early months after baptism is difficult to maintain; yet maintain it we must. But there is a deeper principle here. We are being asked to pick up the cross, to do what is difficult for us, as an act of the will. If we find one aspect of service easy, it often becomes harder. If Moses had to speak to Pharaoh at age 40, it would have been easier than at age 80, after 40 lonely years in the wilderness. If Paul had to preach boldly just for his first few years, it would have been easy. And so with each of us. Entertaining brethren and sisters, going to meetings...what was once easy and natural becomes more difficult, it requires more will power and conscious motivation, as time goes by. We are being taught, by the changes in our own personality and situation, to pick up the cross, to walk out against the wind, to cut against the grain. I think we'll each perceive some element of this as we look back over the years. And as a community, we are being made, yes *made*, to face up to issues which once seemed so easy, but are now altogether more painful to cope with.

### **Paul As A Nazarited Preacher**

Paul was called to be a preacher of the Gospel, and yet he speaks of his work as a preacher as if it were a Nazarite vow- which was a totally voluntary commitment. Consider not only the reference to him shaving his head because of his vow (Acts 18:18; 21:24 cp. Num. 6:9-18), but also the many descriptions of his preaching work in terms of Nazariteship:

- Separated unto the Gospel's work (Rom. 1:1; Gal. 1:15; Acts 13:2)
- "I am not yet consecrated / perfected"(Phil. 3:12)- he'd not yet finished his 'course', i.e. his preaching commission. He speaks of it here as if it were a Nazarite vow not yet ended. Note the reference to his 'consecration' in Acts 20:24.

- His undertaking not to drink wine lest he offend others (Rom. 14:21) is framed in the very words of Num. 6:3 LXX about the Nazarite.
- Likewise his being ‘joined unto the Lord’ (1 Cor. 6:17; Rom. 14:6,8) is the language of Num. 6:6 about the Nazarite being separated unto the Lord.
- The reference to having power / authority on the head (1 Cor. 11:10) is definitely some reference back to the LXX of Num. 6:7 about the Nazarite.

What are we to make of all this? The point is perhaps that commitment to active missionary work is indeed a voluntary matter, as was the Nazarite vow. And that even although Paul was called to this, yet he responded to it by voluntarily binding himself to ‘get the job done’. And the same is in essence true for us today in our various callings in the Lord’s service.

## 4 Saul Changed To Paul

Clearly perception of sinfulness grew in Paul after his conversion. He considered himself blameless in keeping the law (Phil. 3:6); and yet chief of sinners (1 Tim. 1:16). He realized that sin is to do with attitudes rather than committed or omitted actions. I'd paraphrase Paul's personal reminiscence in Rom. 7:7-10 like this: “As a youngster, I had no real idea of sin. I did what I wanted, thought whatever I liked. But then in my early teens, the concept of God's commandments hit me. The command not to covet really came home to me. I struggled through my teens and twenties with a mad desire for women forbidden to me (AV, conveniently archaic, has “all manner of concupiscence”). And slowly I found in an ongoing sense (Gk.), I grew to see, that the laws I had to keep were killing me, they would be my death in the end”. Paul’s progressive realization of the nature of sin is reflected in Romans 7:18,21,23. He speaks there of how he came to *know* that nothing good was in him; he *found* a law of sinful tendency at work in him; he came to *see* another law apart from God’s law at work in his life. This process of knowing, finding and seeing his own sinfulness continued throughout his life. His way of escape from this moral and intellectual dilemma was through accepting the grace of the Lord Jesus at his conversion. In one of his earliest letters, Paul stresses that he felt like the least of the apostles, he honestly felt they were all better than he was (1 Cor. 15:9). However, he reminisces that in his earlier self-assurance, he had once considered himself as not inferior to “the very chiefest apostles”(2 Cor. 11:5). Some years later, he wrote to the Ephesians that he felt “less than the least of all saints”(Eph. 3:8). This was no Uriah Heep, fawning humility. He

really felt that he was the worst, the weakest, of all the thousands of believers scattered around the shores of the Mediterranean at that time. As he faced his death, he wrote to Timothy that he was “chief of sinners”(1 Tim. 1:15), the worst sinner in the world, and that Christ's grace to him should therefore serve as an inspiration to every other believer, *in that* none had sinned as grievously as he had done. It could well be that this is one of Paul's many allusions back to the Gospels- for surely he had in mid the way the publican smote upon his breast, asking God to be merciful “to me *the sinner*”(Lk. 18:13 RVmg.).

See the progression: realizing, 'finding', that he was desperately disobedient to the Law, although externally he kept it blamelessly (Phil. 3:6). Then he saw himself as the least of the apostles, although self-evidently he appeared the greatest of them; then as the least of all the believers; and finally as the worst sinner in this present evil world. Paul's increasing perception of sinfulness is shown by the way in which in his earlier letters he uses the greeting “Grace and peace”; but in Timothy and Titus, his last letters: “Grace, *mercy*, and peace...”. He saw the overriding, crucial importance of God's grace and mercy, and he wished this on all his brethren. Note in passing that he saw himself as learning the lesson of Job. Phil. 3 has several allusions back to him- like Job, Paul suffered “the loss of all things”(8), although he considered himself previously “blameless”(6). He threw away his own righteousness, that he might be justified by grace and know thereby the essence of Christ (:9), just as Job did. And relatively late in his career he could comment: “Not that I have already obtained, or am already made perfect”, alluding to the Lord's bidding to be perfect as our Father is (Mt. 5:48). Through this allusion to the Gospels, Paul is showing his own admission of failure to live up to the standard set. Would that more of our leading brethren would be as willing to show chinks in their armour.

Paul's progressive appreciation of his own sinfulness is reflected in how he describes what he did in persecuting Christians in ever more terrible terms, the older he gets. He describes his victims as “men and women” whom he ‘arrested’ (Acts 8:3; 22:4), then he admits he threatened and murdered them (Acts 9:3), then he persecuted “the way” unto death (Acts 22:4); then he speaks of them as “those who believe”(Acts 22:19) and finally, in a crescendo of shame with himself, he speaks of how he furiously persecuted, like a wild animal, unto the death, “many of the saints”, not only in Palestine but also “to foreign [Gentile] cities”(Acts 26:10,11). He came to appreciate his brethren the more, as he came to realize the more his own sinfulness. And this is surely a pattern for us all.

## Saul Changed To Paul

It can be no accident that Saul appears to have changed his name to 'Paul', "the little one", at the time of his first missionary journey. His preaching of the Gospel was thus related to his own realization of sinfulness, as reflected in his name change. And so it has ever been. Saul becomes Paul in so many lives. True self-abnegation, recognition of our moral bankruptcy, our desperation, and the extent of the grace we have received...these two paradoxical aspects, fused together within the very texture of human personality, are what will arrest the attention of others in this world and lead them to the Truth we can offer them. I have developed this theme far more in various studies in *A World Waiting To Be One*. We read in Mk. 15:40 that "Mary the mother of James the little one and of Joses" stood by the cross (RVmg.). I take this Mary to be Mary the mother of Jesus, for Mt. 13:55 records that James and Joses were brothers of Jesus and thus children of Mary. Remember that Mark is writing under inspiration a transcript of the preaching of the Gospel by the apostles, as they recounted the message of Jesus time and again. Could it not be that in the preaching of that Gospel, when it came to the cross, James asked to be surnamed "the little one", remembering his earlier rejection of Jesus his brother? Now it is not at all surprising that Saul of Tarsus too decides to call himself 'the little one', through sustained meditation upon the cross.

So, how about our perception of our own personal sinfulness? As a community, do we have a greater sense of our own moral frailty and blindness, a longer hesitancy to cast the first stone...? What changed Paul was his appreciation, both theologically and emotionally, of the importance and beauty of the doctrine of grace. You can see this, time and again, in his writing and thinking. This realization of sinfulness and appreciation of grace was what changed a man beyond all recognition. And Paul's pattern is ours too.

Our experience of life, the way God works through our failures, almost overruling even (it seems to me) the *kinds* of sins we commit and their outcome, is all intended to bring us to an increasing realization of our own sinfulness. The more God's word abides in us, the more we will know our sinfulness (1 Jn. 1:10). Thus Paul speaks as if when Corinth are more obedient, he will reveal further to them the extent of their weakness (2 Cor. 10:6). On a racial level, it could be argued that over history, God has progressively revealed the sinfulness of man to him. Thus the early records of Israel's history in Egypt and in the wilderness contain very little direct criticism of them. But the prophets reveal that they were corrupt even then, taking the idols of Egypt with them through the Red Sea (Ez. 20). But then in the New Testament, Stephen brings together several such prophetic mentions, combining them to produce a stunning description of Israel's ecclesial apostasy, which culminated in their rejection of the Son of God.



It fell to Paul's lot to have to write some hard things to some of his brethren. There were those who were going back to the legalism of Judaism, thereby falling from grace; and there were those unashamedly mixing the ways of this world with those of Christ. But like Peter, whenever Paul writes critically, he does so with ample allusion to how own failures. His own experience of grace was the basis upon which he appealed to his weaker brethren, rather than self-righteousness leading him to be critical of others. He warned the Romans that those who "have pleasure" in sinful people will be punished just as much as those who commit the sins (Rom. 1:32). But he uses the very word used for his own 'consenting' unto the death of Stephen; standing there in consent, although not throwing a stone (Acts 8:1; 22:20). He realized that only by grace had that major sin of his been forgiven; and in that spirit of humility and self-perception of himself, as a serious sinner saved by grace alone, did he appeal to his brethren to consider their ways.

All through his life and witness, Paul was aware of how he had rebelled against his Lord. He wrote that he bore in his body the marks of the Lord Jesus. He seems to be alluding to the practice of branding runaway slaves who had been caught with the letter F in their forehead, for *fugitivus*. His whole thinking was dominated by this awareness that like Jonah he had sought to run, and yet had by grace been received into his Master's service.

### **Certainty Of Salvation**

And yet as Paul's sense of his own sinfulness grew, so did his confidence of salvation. These two elements, meshed together within the very texture of human personality, are what surely give credibility and power to our witness to others. On one hand, a genuine humility, that we are sinners, that we are the last people who should be saved; and yet on the other, a definite confidence in God's saving grace and the achievement of Jesus to save sinners. Paul at the very end had a wonderful confidence in the outcome of the day of judgment. He had spoken earlier of running the race (1 Cor. 9:24-26; 1 Tim. 6:12). Now he says that he has finished it, in victory. His final words consciously allude back to what he wrote to the Philippians a few years earlier:

Philippians

2 Timothy 4

What I should like is to depart  
(1:23)

The hour for my departure [s.w.] is come  
(4:6)

If my life-blood is to crown the  
sacrifice (2:17)

Already my life blood is being poured out  
on the altar of sacrifice [s.w.] (4:6)

I have not yet reached perfection  
[finishing] but I press on (3:12)

I have run the great race, I have finished  
[s.w. perfected] the course (4:7)

I press toward the goal to win the prize (3:14) Now the prize awaits me (4:8)

Paul felt that he had attained the maturity which he had earlier aimed for. To have the self-knowledge to say that is of itself quite something. May it be our ultimate end too.

## 5 Paul's Relationship With Jesus

Right at his baptism, Paul realized that the Lord Jesus intended to make Paul fellowship the spirit of his experience on the cross (Acts 9:16). Later, Paul speaks of how he is "filling up what is lacking" in the aim Christ had set him: to fellowship the crucified Lord Jesus (Phil. 3:10). As the sufferings of Christ (i.e. his ability to relate to them) increasingly abounded in Paul (2 Cor. 1:5 Gk.), so did his comfort and certainty that he would be in the Kingdom; because he knew that if he suffered with Christ, he would share his glorious resurrection (2 Cor. 4:11,12). As we grow, therefore, our realization that we are progressively sharing the sufferings of Christ should increase; our understanding of the memorial meeting (which reminds us of this) will deepen, as we appreciate more what it means to take the cup of his pain. The need and simple beauty of the breaking of bread becomes more logical; taking those emblems becomes in a sense more difficult, yet more sobering and comforting. The point is that as we grow, the centre of our attention will increasingly be the Lord Jesus and his cross. At his conversion, Paul "increased...in strength" (Acts 9:22). But he repeatedly uses the same word, particularly in his later letters, to describe how Christ strengthened him (Phil. 4:13; 1 Tim. 1:12; 2 Tim. 2:1; 4:17).

On a series of long Russian train journeys, I read through the Gospels and epistles, noting down all the times Paul makes a direct or indirect allusion to the Gospels. I then worked out how many times in each epistle he alludes, on average, to the Gospels. I found that on average, he did it once every six verses. But when you list his epistles chronologically, the general trend suggests that in his writing, Paul *increasingly* alluded to the Gospels. And in his time of dying (in which he wrote 2 Timothy), the intensity of his allusions to the Gospels reaches an all time high. In 2 Timothy he is referring to the Gospels at least once every 3.9 verses- and almost certainly more than that, seeing that my analysis is incomplete. As he faced death in 2 Tim. 4, he more intensely modelled his words (probably unconsciously) upon those of Christ. Thus when he speaks of how he is about to *finish* his course (2 Tim. 4:7), he is combining allusions to Mt. 26:58; Lk. 12:50; 18:31; 22:37 and Jn. 13:1. He speaks of how he wished that "all the gentiles might hear" (2 Tim. 4:17) in the language of his

Lord, also facing death, in Jn. 17- where He spoke of His desire that all “the world might know”.

On average, Paul refers to Christ as “the Lord” once every 26 verses in his letters. But in 2 Timothy, he calls Christ “Lord” once every six verses; and in his very last words in 2 Tim. 4, once every 3 verses, nine times more than average! His appreciation of the *excellency* of Christ, of the height of his Lordship, grew and grew. And so did his appreciation of his own sinfulness. An appreciation of the Lord's exaltation will in itself provoke in us repentance and service (Acts 2:33-36). A vision of the exalted Lord Jesus was what gave Stephen such special inspiration in his final minutes (Acts 7:56). The Pastorals, Paul's last letters, have Paul calling God our “saviour”- our Jesus. In 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus, he calls Jesus “saviour” four times, and God “saviour” six times. He saw the extent of Yahweh's manifestation in Christ.

Growing appreciation of the excellency of the Lord Jesus was also a feature of Peter's spiritual growth; he was the first to coin the phrase “the Lord Jesus Christ”(Acts 11:17); although *never* did he call the Lord simply “Jesus”(indeed it seems that none of the disciples addressed and rarely spoke about Jesus without giving Him a title). Trace through the path of Peter's growth on appreciation of the Lord's greatness: Mt. 16:22 (*arguing* with Him!); Acts 2:36; 10:36; 11:17. When Peter realized he was looking at the risen Christ standing on the shore, he exclaimed, with evident appreciation: “It is *the Lord*”- not 'Jesus' (Jn. 21:7). And even though he had to swim to meet Him, Peter cast his fisher's coat about him to cover his bare arms and legs. He realized the greatness which attached to the Man from Nazareth on account of His resurrection. After the pattern of Peter, some of the early brethren likewise reached this appreciation of the Lord's excellence *and the importance of it* as the climax of their probations; for many were slain simply because they insisted on calling Jesus of Nazareth “Lord”, when Nero had insisted that *he* be called 'Lord' (cp. Acts 25:26). Those brethren (and sisters) died with the confession of Jesus as *Lord* on their lips- and more importantly, deep in their hearts.

Appreciation of the greatness of the Lord Jesus was a feature of the spiritual growth of Paul, Peter and many others. Consider how the healed blind man grew in his appreciation of the Lord: a man (Jn. 9:11), a prophet (:17), the leader of disciples (:27), a man sent from God (:33), and finally, one to be worshipped as God is worshipped (:38). Because we've gone up one level in our appreciation of the Lord, don't think that we're there. Progressive growth in appreciation of Him should be true of us too. This experience of a growing appreciation of the Lord is in fact a foretaste of the Kingdom; for this will feature an everlasting growth in appreciation of the Lord's excellence (Is. 9:7). For us, that process has already begun. When Christ comes, we will say in that

day “Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: *this is the Lord*; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation”(Is. 25:9). It doesn't mean we'll turn into Trinitarians. It means we will behold and marvel at the greatness of the Lord Jesus Christ, to an extent hidden from mortal eyes.

Paul's mind was increasingly *saturated* with the Gospels, and with the surpassing excellency of the *Lordship* of the risen Jesus. He uses the phrase “in Christ” twice as often in 2 Tim. as he does on average in the other letters. An ever finer realization of the supreme Lordship of Jesus is a sure indicator of spiritual maturity. The disciples followed this pattern; they generally call Jesus Rabbi / teacher / leader in the Gospels; but the book of Acts chronicles their constant proclamation of Jesus as *Lord*; 96 times Luke's account uses the word *kurios* (“Lord”) of Jesus. Perhaps because of this increasing identification with Christ and sense of Christ's utter supremacy, his *surpassing excellency and Lordship*, Paul's concern in his final letters was constantly for doctrine; he pounded away, time and again, at the danger of apostasy. As he got older, this was a bigger and bigger theme with him. He realized more clearly the apostasy of the brotherhood ; “all men seek their own” he commented (Phil. 2:21), in conscious allusion to his earlier words that such self-seeking should not be the case amongst the ecclesia (1 Cor. 10:24). His last words just before his death are full of this theme of apostasy, more than any other of his writings. 2 Timothy has more reference (relatively) to the Gospels and to the Lordship of Christ than anything else he wrote. And yet he was writing having reached spiritual maturity, with the love that is “the bond of perfectness”(Col. 3:14). Despite his increasing awareness of the danger of apostasy, his enthusiasm for preaching the word to the world and strengthening the ecclesia also increased (2 Tim. is fine proof of this). It's rare to find elderly brethren with a continued enthusiasm for preaching as well as for warning the flock. 2 Tim. 4:5 records how he encouraged Timothy to “do the work of an evangelist” *despite* all the doctrinal problems at Ephesus. Paul's absorption and appreciation of the Spirit of Christ was what fired his zeal for purity of doctrine and practice. I'd like to think, collectively and individually, that we *are* improving in these areas. Once we were almost blind to the need to honour the Son *even as* we honour the Father (Jn. 5:23); we all too often clamoured for purity of doctrine from human rather than Christ-inspired motives. Are things changing...?

Perhaps they are, amongst some. But there is another, marked move towards being less certain of ourselves doctrinally. Increasingly, other communities with a different doctrinal basis are seen as being doctrinally acceptable. Increasingly there is doubt as to whether our distinctive doctrines really are *so* important, whether we can be *so* sure that (e.g.) the devil isn't a fallen Angel, and with this goes the associated feeling that God is more interested in our good deeds than our doctrinal understanding of Him. Countless believers seem

to be going down this road, especially as they near the end of their race. But Peter, at the end of his days, could say that he believed as strongly as ever that the doctrines of the One Faith were no human fable (2 Pet. 1:16). And Paul was just the same. He often uses the phrase "the Truth" in his letters; once every 51 verses, on average. His earlier letters reflect this average (e.g. Romans once every 54 verses, Colossians once every 48). But his final letters show an increasing frequency of usage, until in 2 Timothy Paul reaches his highest every frequency of speaking about "the Truth" (Titus: once every 23 verses; 1 Tim. once every 19; 2 Tim. once every 14). He saw that the Truth was (is) the Truth; that this alone is the basis of our confidence. He tells Timothy to hold fast the example (Heb. "form") of sound doctrine which Paul knows is evident in himself. He only uses this word elsewhere in 1 Tim. 1:16, concerning how he is a "pattern" to all believers. He's clearly saying that his approach to doctrine should be ours. Moses' final speech in Deuteronomy was on the same lines; "There's nothing like the Truth, no God like your God, O Israel; please, *please*, hold on to it, live it, make it your life". And not surprisingly, seeing he consciously modelled himself on him, Moses' last speeches are often referred to by Paul (e.g. Phil. 2:15 = Dt. 32:5; Phil. 2:28 = Dt. 31:16; Phil. 2:12 = Dt. 31:8,27,29).

There are many links between Paul's time of dying (as recorded in 2 Tim. 4) and the death of the Lord Jesus. Paul felt that he had at last approximated to the fellowship of his Lord's sufferings, and therefore he looked ahead with confidence to the day of resurrection. His awareness of his cloak, as his one treasured worldly possession, was maybe fuelled by a realization that this too was the only significant worldly possession of his Lord, at the end (2 Tim. 4:13). He saw his experiences at the hands of his lion-like persecutors as being in order that "by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear" (2 Tim. 4:17); in so saying he was alluding to the Lord's experience on the cross, as described in Ps. 22:13,21. He felt forsaken by his disciples, just as Christ had been at His arrest and judgment (2 Tim. 4:16).

### **The Finished Fight**

The theme of the second coming was always strong in Paul's writings. And yet his later letters seem to reflect an increasing understanding that the essence of the Kingdom life is to be lived out here and now <sup>(1)</sup>. He desired the return of the Lord, but not just for reasons of animal self-preservation. Paul was good, and he knew he was good. He knew he was ready to be offered. In nearly all his letters, Paul asks his readers to pray for him. But not in these final letters to Timothy. "I am now ready to be offered". He knew he had finished the fight (2 Tim. 4:7). The Greek for "fight" occurs in Phil. 1:29,30 concerning the struggle we have to truly take up the cross of Christ, and also in 1 Cor. 9:25 regarding the battle we have for total self-control. Paul knew these were the aims his Lord

had hoped to achieve in him. And Paul knew that he was through, he'd finished and achieved them. He had achieved self-control. He knew his Lord, he had been made conformable to the dying Lord Jesus on the cross, he *knew* the fellowship of his sufferings. He had filled up the whole measure of Christ's sufferings (Phil. 3:10). Paul had earlier spoken of his "departure"(Phil. 1:23), how he must finish his course with joy (Acts 20:24); and he knew his time had come; he could speak of having reached "the time of my *departure*"(2 Tim. 4:6). The level of self-knowledge he had as he faced the end is remarkable. Yet it really is possible for each of us; for his glorious race to the finish is our pattern. Despite his surface sadness and depression, Paul was finishing his course *with joy*. He felt like Daniel when he said "Notwithstanding, the Lord stood with me...and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion"(2 Tim. 4:17). His mind was full of John the Baptist, Daniel, Moses and above all his Lord. All his years, his hours and minutes, of sustained meditation, of bringing the mind back from its natural wandering, were now paying their glorious reward. The picture of Paul in prison, having reached this spiritual pinnacle, fired the minds and living of "many of the brethren in the Lord"(Phil. 1:21). And for me too, the old and brave Paul in that cell is the man I fain would be. Nero is reported as having said that the time would come, when men would call their sons Nero and their dogs Paul, as veiled with all the pomp and the power and the pride of this life, he watched Paul led out to his death. And yet that Paul is the man we fain must be; and doubtless he had in his mind words he had penned years before: "...those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things...and be found in him...being made conformable unto *his* death; if by any means I might attain the resurrection of the dead...forgetting the things which are behind, and reaching forth...I press toward the mark for the prize"(Phil. 3). This is a far cry from the Paul who just a few years earlier had 'refused to die', who wanted to fight for his life (Acts 25:11). Now he felt ready to be offered, to be poured out as a drink offering upon the lives of his brethren (Phil. 2:17 Gk.); he held nothing back, but *gave* his life rather than have it forced from him by the inevitable death that must come to all men. What he had once counted gain- and the Greek suggests material, financial gain- he now counted loss. He came to despise the materialism of the world, as did Jacob in his maturity.

The power of all this is not just in its relevance to the elderly or terminally ill. We are all old men now, we are all on borrowed time. We believe the Lord's return, the end, *the ultimate end*, is imminent. If we are living expecting the imminent second coming; *are we* ready? Have we reached the completeness? To a man, we have our doubts. Serious ones. We are forced not only to resolve to grow more quickly; time, not to mention our own nature, is not on our side. We are driven, *forced*, towards a finer appreciation of the righteousness imputed to us, and the pure grace of God. "The God of peace (on account of the

Lord's sacrifice) *make you perfect* (spiritually complete)...*working in you* that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ...*the God of all grace*, who hath called us unto his eternal glory... *make you perfect* (complete), stablish, strengthen, settle you. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen"(Heb. 13:19,20; 1 Pet. 5:10,11).

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## Notes

(1) See C.H. Dodd, *New Testament Studies* (New York: Scribner's, 1954) pp. 83-128.

## 6 Paul And Christ (1)

### 14-6-1 Paul's Use Of The Gospels

The ultimate aim of our calling to the Truth is a relationship with the Father and His Son. Yet the idea of having a *relationship* with unseen beings is difficult. And yet it is utterly essential. Paul gives a fine example of how we really can develop a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Cor. 3:22 speaks of three groups in the Corinth ecclesia, following Paul, Peter and Apollos. Yet in 1 Cor. 1:12 someone says "I am of Christ". This seems to be Paul himself—so Christ-centred was he, that he wanted no part in ecclesial politics nor in the possibility of leading a faction. His Christ-centredness was a phenomenal achievement. One of the secrets of Paul's spiritual success was that he consciously modelled himself on the examples of faithful men that had gone before. These included Moses and John the Baptist. If we appreciate the extent to which Paul did this, it will be evident that he would have tried to assimilate the example of Jesus his Lord into his very being. Whenever we break bread, as we take that bread and wine, we are physically symbolizing our resolve to assimilate the personality, the spirit, of the Lord Jesus Christ, deep into our body and spirit. Israel labouring all night to eat that bitter Passover lamb are our prototype in this. The extent to which Paul succeeded in doing this becomes apparent when we analyse his writings from the perspective of how far they allude to the words of the Lord Jesus as recorded in the Gospels. To do this, I read through the Gospels, looking for connections with Paul's letters; I then read through his letters, looking for links with the Gospels.

Perhaps I need to say something about the business of 'links' between passages. It seems to me that some have gone too far in seeing such links; e.g. the last twenty sentences which you spoke will have some 'links' with the last 20

sentences which I have spoken. But this doesn't mean that you are 'alluding' to my words; because you don't know what my last 20 sentences were. Similarity of language doesn't necessarily imply a conscious connection between it. And yet we must balance this against the fact that all Scripture is ultimately recorded by the same Spirit of God. There *are* many designed connections between passages, many of which hinge around a play on words, or a connection between just one word in one passage and one word in another passage. Many of Paul's expositions in Hebrews and Romans quote the Old Testament in such a way.

### **Conscious Links With The Gospels**

I have recognized a connection between the Gospels and Paul's letters on the following criteria:

1. It is apparent that often the Bible and the Lord Jesus use words which are unusual; words which only occur two or three times in the whole Bible, and which could have been replaced by a commoner word. If, for example, the Lord Jesus uses a word which occurs in only one other place, it seems likely that there is an allusion being made to His words. Obviously one needs to look at the context to confirm whether this is the case.
2. Sometimes there is explicit allusion to the words of Christ; e.g. "the Lord (Jesus) hath ordained that they which preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel"(1 Cor. 9:14) is referring to His command of Mt. 10:10. He may make an allusion to the Lord's words without directly quoting them. Thus Paul's comment that as often as we take the bread and wine we "shew the Lord's death till he come"(1 Cor. 11:24) is surely an allusion, but not a quotation, to the Lord's comment that He would not take the cup again *until* He returns (Mk. 14:25). Likewise "I beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ" is surely a reference to the Lord's description of Himself as being, there and then, "meek and lowly of heart"(Mt. 11:29; 2 Cor. 10:1). Paul's point is that as the Lord was in His life, so He is now, in His heavenly glory.
3. There are sometimes phrases, involving up to 6 words, which are taken straight out of the Gospel records. It is putting too much down to chance to suggest that this is just an accidental similarity. Invariably the context supports the feeling that an intended allusion is being made.

However it should also be noticed that Paul sometimes consciously alludes to ideas within the Lord's teaching, and yet does so in a way that is not verbally similar. Thus Jesus only rarely speaks of 'the ecclesia'; rather does He speak of



the flock, family and vineyard of God. Yet Paul translates as it were into more theological vocabulary what Jesus had expressed in images and parables.

### Unconscious Links

However, there are other cases where a word or short phrase is used which appears to link back to the Gospels (as in 1 and 2 above), and yet the context does not seem to support the suggestion that there is an intended allusion. A few examples will make the point:

- "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" is rooted in the Lord's words that He came to call sinners and to seek and save the lost (Mt. 9:13; 18:11; 1 Tim. 1:15). Godliness having the promise of life both now and in the future is a reflection of Christ's teaching that the life of self denial would have its present as well as future rewards (1 Tim. 4:8; Mk. 10:29).

- Paul spoke of how we *must* go through tribulation to enter the Kingdom. Perhaps he was alluding to the Lord's parable of the sower, where He taught that when, and not "if" tribulation arises (Mt. 13:21). Paul knew that it *must* come because of the way the Lord had worded the interpretation of the parable.

- "The great shepherd of the sheep" is a repetition of "the good shepherd that giveth his life for the sheep"- the greatest shepherd there could have been (Heb. 13:20 cp. Jn. 10:11,17).

- "Why make ye this ado and weep?"(Mk. 5:39) is unconsciously alluded to by Paul in Acts 21:13: "What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart?". If this is a conscious allusion, it seems out of context. But as an unconscious allusion, it makes sense.

- The way Paul shook off the dust of his feet against those who rejected his preaching was surely an almost unconscious reflection of the attitude which the Lord had enjoined upon his men; but there is no evidence that Paul was given the same commission (Acts 13:51 cp. Mt. 10:14).

- "Think not that I am come to destroy ("to make void", Darby's Translation) the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil"(Mt. 5:17) has some kind of unconscious, hard to define link with Rom. 3:31:"Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law". The Greek words for "destroy" and "make void" are different; yet the similarity of phrasing and reasoning is so similar. I can't pass this off as chance, yet neither

can I say there is a conscious allusion here. There is, therefore, what I will call an 'unconscious link' here.

- "Shall not uncircumcision (i.e. the Gentiles)...judge thee (first century Israel), who...dost transgress the law?"(Rom. 2:27) is an odd way of putting it. How can believing Gentiles "judge" first century Jews who refused to believe? Surely there must be some connection with Mt. 12:41, which speaks of Gentiles such as the men of Nineveh rising "in judgment with this generation (first century Israel), and shall condemn it: because they repented...". Again, I can't say there is a conscious allusion being made here. But the similarity is too great to just shrug off.

- "I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food" (1 Cor. 3:2; Heb. 5:12-14) surely alludes to Jn. 16:12, although it doesn't verbally quote it: "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now".

- Another unconscious allusion of Paul would be when he wrote to the Corinthians: "Eat whatever is set before you" (1 Cor. 10:27 RSV), echoing the Lord's words: "Eat whatever is set before you"(Lk. 10:8 RSV). I see no semantic connection between the two passages; so I conclude this is purely an unconscious allusion to the Lord whose words were ever in Paul's mind.

Of course, it may be that there is a *conscious* connection in these places, it's just that I can't see it that clearly. But I would suggest that the mind of Paul was so saturated with the Gospel records that he was using ideas and sometimes language from them without realizing it. There are many other examples of unconscious allusion between the Bible writers. Even the Lord Jesus seems to have made 'unconscious' allusions, in the sense of making allusions without any semantic purpose. This is especially apparent in some of the links between His parables and the Proverbs. "So shall thy barns be filled with plenty" (Prov. 3:10) is alluded to by him, apparently unconsciously in the sense of being without semantic import, in the parable of the barns. Peter likewise was full of unconscious allusions to the Lord's life and words in the Gospels. Consider how he says to Cornelius: "I am he whom ye seek: what is the cause wherefore ye are come?"(Acts 10:21). He is combining allusions to Mt. 26:50 and Jn. 18:4-6, but without any apparent meaning. The similarities are too great to pass off as co-incidence. The events in the garden were so permanently imprinted in his subconscious that they just came out.

This idea of unconscious allusion shouldn't be so hard to understand with some reflection. If I'm with a North American for some time, I start to speak with an American accent. Children unconsciously come out with the phrases and expressions which they hear their parents use daily. Or take a read through the

later writings of Robert Roberts. There was a man who truly loved his Bible and knew it well. All the time he is writing in the language of the King James version of the Bible. You can read a page of his writing and jot down next to almost every sentence the verses to which he is alluding. He often does so out of context; it's just that the word was so much in his mind that it came out in whatever he wrote. Or analyse the language of elderly believers who have been reading the King James version of the Bible all their lives. They may speak about our first principle doctrines as "those things which are most surely believed among us". This is taking Lk. 1:1 a bit out of context, but that phrase is so apt that we use it to talk about basic doctrines, e.g. that the Kingdom will be on earth. Or we describe the warm handshake after a brother is baptized as "the right hand of fellowship"- using Gal. 2:9 out of context (notice it speaks there of "the right *hands* of fellowship"! ). There's no harm in doing this, as long as we are aware of the fact that we aren't always using passages strictly in context. It's surely the inevitable outcome of a Bible-centred way of thinking. Or consider the prayers of Bible-minded brethren. Often they are packed with incidental allusions to Bible verses in their favourite version. The following list shows how very often Paul was consciously alluding to the Gospels; if he made so many conscious allusions, it's only to be expected that he makes many *unconscious* ones too. And take David. When he writes in Ps. 110 of how Yahweh said unto my Lord...he is quoting the very phrase used by Abigail years before, when they weren't even married (1 Sam. 25:30). He was unconsciously alluding to the words of his wife before they were married, even years later. It is of course true that context plays a vital part in Biblical interpretation. But this can lead us to overlook the fact that many New Testament quotations of the Old Testament- many of those in the early chapters of Matthew, for example- are picking up words and phrases from one context and applying them to another. Paul himself did this when he quoted the words of the poet Aratus "We are all the offspring of Zeus" about our all being the offspring of the one true God.

The point has been made that the NT writers hardly ever directly quote the Gospels as they do, e.g., the prophets; but they *allude* to them. And the conclusion has been powerfully drawn: "To live continuously cannot be done by quoting. To match every circumstance of our daily lives with an appropriate extract from a memorized saying of Jesus is neither possible nor desirable. Our learning in his life should be such as the Apostles' was: one which sees his actions, hears his words and reads the records of his thoughts, and makes them our own. So that as time advances we walk more naturally with his steadfast tread...speak normally in tones and phrases which remind others of what Jesus said and the way He said it..."

The unconscious nature of Paul's allusions to the Lord's words provides a window into his mind, how saturated he was with his Lord. "Paul is steeped in

the mind and words of his Lord... unconsciously mingling them with the hortatory material he has derived from other sources”<sup>(1)</sup>. There is something special about the words of Jesus. When heard sensitively, His words strike a huge chord in the very soul of the person who loves Him. This is why Paul was so influenced both consciously and unconsciously by the words of Jesus. Peter was likewise. And consider the way that Jesus says: "Come and see"(Jn. 1:39)- and somehow Philip finds himself soon afterwards using those very same words when talking with his friend Nathanael: "Come and see"(Jn. 1:46). And so a study of the actual words of Jesus, a love of them, allowing them to abide in us, is a major part of what it means to be a Christian. To speak, think and reason as He did; to have His spirit in us, both developing it consciously, and being open to receiving it. This is where those red letter Bibles, which print the words of Jesus in red, are really a helpful focus for us.

### **Paul As Rabbi**

Many of Paul’s allusions, both to the words of the Lord and indeed to the Old Testament Scriptures, may appear to be merely incidental and out of context. We have suggested that this may have been a reflection of how his mind was so saturated with Scripture and the words of his Lord. But there is another additional possibility. Paul was trained as a rabbi, and would have been used to the rabbinic way of writing. The rabbis made *Midrashim*, or commentary / interpretation, on the Old Testament Scriptures. They believed that every single word of God was worthy of extended commentary. Because many of their readers virtually knew the text of Scripture by heart, they often give no more than a word or at most a few words from a Scriptural quotation, intending the reader to recite the rest of the passage silently to themselves; and then the rabbi immediately added his comment. Indeed, a case can be made that the whole New Testament is a form of *Midrash* on the Old Testament, re-interpreting it in the light of Christ. Paul so often employs the same literary devices found in the rabbinic *Midrashim* <sup>(2)</sup>:

- *al tiqra* [read not thus, but thus- Gal. 3:16 is a classic example]

- *tartei mashma* [the word has another meaning]

- *muqdan umeuhar* [noting the earlier and later]

- and the habit of re-pointing the original Hebrew text to provide a word relevant in the context of which he is writing. This explains why some of his quotations appear to be neither from the Masoretic nor Septuagint texts. It may also help explain why some of his quotations / allusions to the words of the Lord may not be strictly literal quotations from the text of the Gospels.

Paul’s frequent “What then shall we say to this?” occurs at least 5 times in Romans alone (Rom. 4:1; 6:1; 7:7; 9:14,30)- and this is the classic phrase used by Jewish teachers at the end of presenting their argument to their students. Seeing then that Paul writes in a rabbinic way, as if He is giving a stream of

*Midrash* on earlier, familiar writings [e.g. the words of Jesus or the Old Testament], we should be looking for how he may quote or allude to just a word or two from the Lord, and weave an interpretation around them. This means that many of the ‘unconscious’ allusions listed may not in fact be unconscious- it’s simply that I’ve not perceived the interpretation which Paul is giving them within the context. There’s homework enough for the enthusiast.

Paul’s almost rabbinic respect for every word of his Lord indicates how deeply he had them in his heart as the law of his life. He speaks of how “The Lord [Jesus] *commanded* that those who preach the Gospel should get their living by the Gospel”(1 Cor. 9:14 RSV). The Lord Jesus didn’t command this in so many words- but it’s the implication of His teaching in Lk. 9:1-5; 10:1-12, especially of Lk. 10:4 “The workman deserves his food / keep”(Gk.). But those words of the Lord to the disciples were understood by Paul as a *command*- so clearly did he appreciate that those men following Jesus around Galilee are really *us*, and every word of the Lord to them is in some form a command to us. Another example would be the way Paul states that the Lord ‘commanded’ that the wife is not to separate from her husband (1 Cor. 7:10). The Lord didn’t actually state that in so many words- but He implied it quite clearly. And so that for Paul was a command. He didn’t reduce the teachings of Jesus to a set of yes / no statements; rather he saw, as we should, even every *implication* of the words of Jesus as a command to us. You will notice that in both these examples from 1 Corinthians, Paul doesn’t explicitly quote the Lord Jesus in the format in which we expect a citation- e.g. ‘I’m saying this, because it is known and written that Jesus said, XYZ’. I submit that this wasn’t simply because the Gospels weren’t in wide circulation when Paul was writing<sup>(3)</sup>. Rather I think that the indirectness of Paul’s allusions and quotations from the words of Jesus reflect how his mind was *so* full of the Lord’s words that he doesn’t quote from them in a formal sense, as one usually would quote from literature or the known words of a respected person. Rather did Jesus *live* within Paul’s consciousness, His words were so widely and deeply within the texture of his thinking, that the allusions and quotations are made less self-consciously.

### **The Case Of John’s Gospel**

It’s evident to even the most casual reader that there are many connections between John’s Gospel and the Revelation. John’s later writing, just like Paul’s, was shot through with references to the Gospels. The same phrases and words are used. But the question is, What is the connection between them? One comment I have in answer to this is to observe that much of the language of the Gospel of John relating to the *present* status of the faithful is repeated in Revelation and applied to the faithful in their *future* glorification. This observation is best explained by examples:

<b>John’s Gospel</b>	<b>The Revelation</b>
God tabernacled amongst us in the	“The tabernacle of God is with men”

person of Jesus (Jn. 1:14 RVmg.)	at the second coming of Jesus (Rev. 21:3)
Rivers of water flow now in the experience of the believer (Jn. 7:38,39)	The river of water of life bursts forth once Jesus is enthroned upon earth in the future (Rev. 22:1)
The manna / bread of life is given to the believer now (Jn. 6)	Those who overcome will be given "the hidden manna" to eat at the Lord's return (Rev. 2:17)
At the crucifixion, the prophecy of Zech. 12:10 was fulfilled when the Jews looked upon the Christ whom they had pierced (Jn. 19:37)	The same Zech. 12:10 passage is quoted in Rev. 1:7 and given a future application, to the response of the Jews at the Lord's second coming.

A fair case can be made that he received the Apocalypse *early*, well before AD70, and wrote his gospel and letters *afterwards*. In this case, the similarity of wording would partly be explained by the fact that the language of his Lord rubbed off almost unconsciously [as well as consciously] upon John's style of thinking, speaking and writing. Thus "If I come, I will bring up the things he is doing"(3 Jn. 10) reflects the Lord's style: "If you do not repent, I will come to you"(Rev. 2:5). There are many other examples- finding them is good homework for the enthusiast. Now the practical point is surely that we are living the essence of the Kingdom life now; we 'have eternal life' in the sense that we are experiencing the nature and quality of the spiritual life which by grace we will eternally live. And that life is the life of the Lord Jesus; in His life on earth we see a picture of the nature of the eternal life which we hope to life for evermore. Therefore understanding Him personally is to understand the good news of the future Kingdom of God.

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### Notes

- (1) W.D. Davies, *Paul And Rabbinic Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980 ed.) p. 140.
- (2) See John Bowker, *The Targums and Rabbinic Literature: An Introduction to Jewish Interpretation of Scripture* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1969).
- (3) Although John Robinson, *Redating The New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976) gives reason to think that most of the Gospels *were* well in circulation by the time Paul was writing to the Corinthians. Likewise John W. Wenham, *Redating Matthew, Mark & Luke: A Fresh Assault on the Synoptic Problem*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton ,1991.)

## 6-2 Paul's Quotations From The Gospels: Statistics

# = 'unconscious' allusion

### Gospels

#### Matthew

#1:1  
3:3  
3:4  
3:7  
3:8  
3:9  
3:10  
3:11  
#3:17  
5:7  
5:8  
5:10  
5:12  
5:14  
  
5:16  
#5:16  
#5:17  
5:17  
5:19  
  
5:29,30  
5:39  
5:44  
5:44,45  
5:48  
6:2,3  
#6:2  
#6:2 "reward"  
6:14  
6:20  
6:19,20  
  
6:24  
6:25  
7:1  
7:15  
7:21  
7:21,22  
7:23  
  
9:13  
10:8  
10:10  
10:16  
  
10:17  
10:19

### Acts & Epistles

Acts 13:23; Rom. 1:3  
Heb. 12:13  
Heb. 11:37  
1 Thess. 1:10; 5:9  
Acts 26:20  
Gal. 3:27-29; Rom. 4:1,2  
Rom. 11:22,24  
1 Cor. 15:9; 2 Cor. 2:16; 3:5,6  
Eph. 1:6; Col. 1:13  
2 Tim. 1:16  
Heb. 12:14; 1 Cor. 13:12  
Rom. 8:17; 2 Cor. 1:7; 2 Tim. 2:12  
2 Cor. 7:4; 12:9,10; Col. 1:24; 1 Thess.  
2:15; Heb. 10:34; Rom. 5:3  
Phil. 2:15  
  
1 Cor. 14:25; 2 Cor. 9:12,13  
Phil. 1:11 (Gk.)  
Rom. 3:31  
Gal. 5:14  
Gal. 3:10  
  
Col. 3:5  
Rom. 12:17  
Rom. 12:14; 1 Cor. 4:12  
Eph. 5:1  
Eph. 4:32; 5:1; Phil. 3:15  
1 Tim. 4:8  
1 Cor. 15:52  
Phil. 4:18  
Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13  
Heb. 10:34  
1 Tim. 6:19  
  
Gal. 1:10; Rom. 6:16; Tit. 1:9  
Phil. 4:6; Heb. 13:5  
Rom. 2:1; 14:3,4,10,13; 1 Cor. 4:3,5  
Acts 20:29,30  
Rom. 2:13  
1 Cor. 13:2  
2 Tim. 2:19  
  
1 Tim. 1:9,10,15  
Rom. 3:24; 1 Cor. 9:18  
1 Cor. 9:7,14  
Rom. 16:19,20  
  
Acts 22:19  
2 Tim. 4:17

10:20	1 Cor. 15:10; 2 Cor. 13:3
10:32	Rom. 10:9,10
10:33	2 Tim. 2:12
10:40	Gal. 4:14
10:42	Heb. 6:10
#11:7	Eph. 4:14
11:25	1 Cor. 1:19; 2:8; 14:20
#11:26	Eph. 1:5
11:29	Phil. 2:5,7,8
#12:4	Heb. 10:21
#12:28	2 Cor. 10:14
12:29	Col. 2:15
12:31	Heb. 6:4-6
12:32	1 Tim. 1:13
12:36	Rom. 14:12
12:38	1 Cor. 1:22
#12:41	Rom. 2:27
12:41	Heb. 11:7
12:50	Heb. 2:11
13:11	1 Cor. 2:9,10
13:15	2 Cor. 3:14; Heb. 5:11
13:19	2 Thess. 3:3
#13:21	2 Cor. 4:18
13:22	1 Tim. 6:9; 2 Tim. 4:10
13:35	Rom. 16:15,16
#13:35	Heb. 4:3; 9:26
13:38	Acts 13:10
#13:38	Col. 1:6
#13:39	Heb. 9:26
13:41 (Gk.)	Rom. 14:13
13:45,46	Phil. 3:7,8
14:2	Phil. 2:13; 1 Cor. 12:10,11
14:30 (Gk.)	Heb. 5:7
15:2	Gal. 1:14; Col. 2:8
#15:6	Gal. 3:17
15:9	Col. 2:22; Tit. 1:14
#15:17	1 Cor. 6:13
15:24	Rom. 15:8
15:36	1 Cor. 11:24
#15:36	1 Cor. 10:30
16:6	1 Cor. 5:6,7; Gal. 5:9
16:17	Gal. 1:15,16
#16:17	1 Cor. 15:50; Heb. 2:14
16:18	Eph. 2:20
#16:19	2 Thess. 2:5
16:23	Rom. 8:5
16:27	1 Thess. 4:16
#16:27	1 Cor. 11:26
#16:28	Heb. 2:9
17:2	Rom. 12:20
#17:17	2 Cor. 11:1
17:20	1 Cor. 13:2
17:21	1 Cor. 7:5
17:25-27	Rom. 13:7
18:15	1 Cor. 9:19-22
18:16	2 Cor. 13:1
18:17	1 Cor. 5:4,5; 6:1-6



18:17 “a heathen...”	1 Cor. 5:9
19:5	1 Cor. 6:16; 7:2; Eph. 5:31
19:11	1 Cor. 7:2,7,9
19:12	1 Cor. 7:32; 9:5,15
19:18,19	Rom. 13:9
19:21	1 Tim. 6:17-19
19:23	1 Tim. 6:9,10
19:28	1 Cor. 6:2; Tit. 3:5
19:29	1 Tim. 4:8
20:12 (Gk.)	2 Cor. 11:25
20:15	Rom. 9:20-24
20:22	Rom. 8:26
20:28	Gal. 1:4; Phil. 2:7; 1 Tim. 2:6
#20:28 “many”	Heb. 2:10
21:21	Rom. 4:20
21:35	2 Cor. 11:24,25; Heb. 11:36,37
21:37	Heb. 12:9
21:38	Heb. 1:2
21:39	Heb. 13:12
21:35-38	1 Thess. 2:15
21:41	Acts 13:46
21:42	Eph. 2:20
22:8	Acts 13:46
22:21	Rom. 13:7
22:29,30	1 Cor. 6:14
22:39,40	1 Tim. 1:5
23:3	Rom. 2:19-23
23:4	Acts 15:10
23:25 (Gk.)	1 Cor. 7:5
23:27	Acts 23:3
23:32	1 Thess. 2:16
23:31,32	1 Thess. 2:15
24:4	Eph. 5:6; Col. 2:8; 2 Thess. 2:3
24:6	2 Thess. 2:2
24:8	1 Thess. 5:3
24:14	Rom. 10:18; Col. 1:6; 2 Tim. 4:17
24:24	2 Thess. 2:9-11
24:30,31	1 Thess. 4:16,17
24:36	1 Thess. 5:1 (1 Th. 5:1-6 counted as one allusion in analysis)
24:42	1 Thess. 5:6
24:43	1 Thess. 5:2,3
24:48	1 Thess. 5:3
24:49	1 Thess. 5:6
24:51	1 Thess. 5:3,9
25:1	Eph. 5:29-32
25:5	1 Thess. 5:6
25:7	1 Thess. 5:5
25:13	1 Thess. 5:6
25:15	Rom. 12:6; 1 Cor. 12:11; Eph. 4:7
25:26	Rom. 12:11
25:34	Acts 20:32; Gal. 3:29; 4:7; Eph. 1:11; Col. 1:12; 3:24; Tit. 3:7
25:34 “prepared”	1 Cor. 2:9
25:36	2 Tim. 1:16; Heb. 13:3
26:24	1 Cor. 15:3
26:26	1 Cor. 10:16

26:28	Heb. 9:20eb. 9:20HHgh
26:26-28	1 Cor. 11:23-25
26:35	Acts 21:13; Rom. 6:8; 1 Cor. 10:12; Col. 2:20
26:37	Phil. 2:26
26:37 “sorrowful”	2 Cor. 6:10
26:39	Acts 22:7; Heb. 5:7; the spirit of Phil. 2:8
#26:40	1 Cor. 6:5
26:40,41	1 Thess. 5:6,7
26:41	Eph. 6:18
26:41 “flesh ... spirit”	Rom. 7:23; Gal. 5:17
26:41 “willing”	Rom. 1:15
26:41 “weak”	Rom. 5:6
26:45 “now”(Gk.)	2 Tim. 4:7
#26:54	Rom. 4:10; 10:14
#26:58	2 Tim. 4:8
#26:67	1 Cor. 4:11
26:75	2 Cor. 7:10
27:11-14	1 Tim. 6:13
27:59	Acts 13:29
27:72	Acts 13:28
28:2	1 Tim. 3:16
28:6	Acts 13:30
28:18	Eph. 1:22
<b>Mark</b>	Gal. 4:4; Eph. 1:10; Heb. 11:37
1:6	Rom. 11:25
1:15	2 Cor. 5:13
#3:5	1 Cor. 5:12,13; Col. 4:5; 1 Thess. 4:12; 1 Tim. 3:7
3:21	1 Cor. 4:5
4:11	
4:22	
7:9 AVmg.	Gal. 2:21
#7:9	1 Thess. 4:8
#8:18	2 Thess. 2:5
8:38	Rom. 1:16; 2 Tim. 1:8,12,16; Heb. 11:16
9:39	1 Cor. 12:3
9:50	Col. 4:6; 1 Thess. 5:13
9:50 “peace”	Rom. 12:18
10:12	1 Cor. 7:13
10:24	1 Tim. 6:17
10:30	Acts 14:22; 2 Thess. 1:4,5; 2 Tim. 3:11,12
12:43	2 Cor. 8:12
#12:44	2 Cor. 8:2
#13:11	1 Cor. 2:13
14:8	2 Cor. 8:11
14:12	1 Cor. 5:7; 10:20
14:36	Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6
14:37	Rom. 7:15-25
14:38	1 Thess. 5:6
14:39	2 Cor. 12:8
14:58	2 Cor. 5:1,2
15:13	Acts 13:28
16:15	Col. 1:23

16:16	Acts 16:31
16:19	Heb. 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2
16:20	Heb. 2:3
#16:20	2 Cor. 6:1
<b>Luke</b>	Rom. 4:21
#1:1	Heb. 2:3
#1:2	Phil. 2:15; 1 Thess. 3:13
1:6	Acts 13:52; 15:3
1:14	Acts 9:17; 13:9; Gal. 1:15; Eph. 5:18
1:15	
#1:15	Rom. 14:21
1:17	Acts 15:19; 26:18,2-0; 1 Thess. 1:9
1:30	Heb. 4:16
1:47	1 Tim. 1:1; 2:3; Tit. 1:3
#1:74	Heb. 2:15
1:77	2 Cor. 2:14
#1:78	Rom. 3:17; 1 Thess. 3:11
1:79	Heb. 7:14
#1:79	1 Thess. 3:11
1:77,79	Acts 13:47; 26:18,23
2:14	Eph. 1:9; Phil. 2:13
#2:25	Acts 26:6; 28:20
#2:26	Heb. 11:5
#2:34	1 Cor. 1:23
#2:36	1 Tim. 5:9
2:37	1 Tim. 5:5; 2 Tim. 1:3
#2:38	Heb. 9:12,28
2:52	Eph. 4:13
3:5	Acts 20:9; 2 Cor. 11:7; Phil. 4:12
3:6	Acts 28:28
#3:11	Rom. 12:8
3:14	Heb. 13:5
3:18	Acts 13:15-17
#4:19	2 Cor. 6:2
#4:32	1 Cor. 2:4
#5:10	2 Tim. 2:26
7:19	Heb. 10:37
#7:30	Acts 20:27
7:33	Rom. 14:21
7:42	Rom. 8:32
8:15	Rom. 2:7; Heb. 10:35
8:23	1 Cor. 15:30
9:23	1 Cor. 15:31
9:25	1 Cor. 3:15; 2 Cor. 7:9; Phil. 3:8
#9:51	1 Tim. 3:16
9:55	2 Cor. 10:8; 13:10
9:62	Phil. 3:13
#10:8	1 Cor. 10:27
10:16	1 Thess. 4:8
#10:20	Heb. 12:23
10:41	1 Cor. 7:32

#11:28	Rom. 9:20; 10:18
11:41	Tit. 1:15
12:21	1 Tim. 6:18,19
12:48	Rom. 1:19,20
#12:50	2 Tim. 4:7
13:13	Heb. 12:12
13:24	1 Cor. 9:25; Col. 1:29; 1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim.
13:32	4:7 Heb. 2:10; 5:9; 7:28
14:11	2 Cor. 12:7
15:24	Eph. 2:1,5; 5:14; Col. 2:13
#16:2	Heb. 13:17
16:8	Eph. 5:8; 1 Thess. 5:5
17:3	Acts 20:28
#17:10	Rom. 3:12
17:30	1 Cor. 1:7; 2 Thess. 1:7
18:1	Rom. 12:12; Eph. 6:18; Col. 4:2; 1 Thess.
18:1 "not faint"	5:17
#18:2	2 Cor. 4:1,16; Gal. 6:9; Eph. 3:13; 2
18:7	Thess. 3:13 Heb. 12:9 Rom. 8:33; Col. 3:12; 2 Tim. 2:10; Tit. 1:1
#18:8	Heb. 10:37
18:11	1 Cor. 5:10,11; 6:10
18:14	2 Cor. 12:7
#18:31	2 Tim. 4:7
19:9	Rom. 4:11,12
#20:35	2 Thess. 1:5
#20:38	Gal. 2:19
21:12,13	Phil. 1:28; 2 Thess. 1:5
21:19	Rom. 5:3
21:23	1 Cor. 7:26
21:24	Rom. 11:25
#21:34	1 Cor. 6:3,4
21:36	Eph. 6:13,14
#22:25	1 Cor. 6:12
#22:37	2 Tim. 4:7
22:53	Col. 1:13
#22:69	Heb. 1:3
#23:15	Philemon 12
23:34	1 Tim. 1:13
#24:6	2 Thess. 2:5
24:27	Acts 13:27
24:46	Heb. 2:10
24:47	Acts 13:38; 17:30
24:51	Eph. 4:10

## 6-3-1 Paul's Quotations From The Gospels: Analysis And Implications

Letters (listed chronologically) <sup>(1)</sup>	Number of verses	Number of allusions to the Gospels	Average number of verses allusion /
Paul's recorded speech in Acts (from conversion in AD 37 to first imprisonment) <sup>(2)</sup>	164	37	4.4
Galatians (AD 57)	149	19	7.8
1 Corinthians (Spring AD 57)	448	71	6.3
2 Corinthians (Winter AD 57)	255	32	7.9
Romans (AD 58)	433	61	7.0
1 Thessalonians (AD 59)	89	22	4.0
2 Thessalonians (AD 59)	47	11	4.3
Colossians (AD 62)	95	21	4.5
Ephesians (AD 62)	155	27	5.7
Philemon (AD 62)	25	2	12.5
Philippians (AD 63)	104	17	6.1
Titus (AD 66)	46	7	6.6
1 Timothy (AD 67)	113	25	4.5
2 Timothy (AD 68)	83	21	3.9
Hebrews (impossible to date)	303	54	5.6

The above research was done completely independently. Only subsequently did I come across a similar study by Arnold Resch, which detected a total of 1158 allusions by Paul to the Gospels. He detected 64 allusions to the Gospels in Paul's speeches in Acts, compared to my 37 (3). The point is, Paul almost certainly made more allusions to the Gospels than I have catalogued; his mind was even more saturated with the record of the Lord's life and work than I have shown. It must be remembered that this list is only of verbal similarity. A profitable study could be made of how Paul's *actions*, not only his words, reflected his saturation with the Gospels. The way he shook off the dust of his feet against Antioch was a clear reference to Mt. 10:14; and the way he fled from city to city, still preaching the Gospel under persecution, was surely in obedience to Mt. 10:23.

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## Notes

(1) These dates are quite standard. Justification for them is well presented in W. Johnson, *The People's New Testament* (London: Bagster, 1892). However, note should be taken of the thesis of John Robinson in *Redating The New Testament* (London: SCM, 1976) p. 84. He reaches the following dates:

AD 50 1 Thessalonians  
 51 2 Thessalonians  
 55 (spring) 1 Corinthians  
 55 (autumn) 1 Timothy  
 56 (early) 2 Corinthians  
 56 (late) Galatians  
 57 (early) Romans  
 57 (late spring) Titus  
 58 (spring) Philippians  
 58 (summer) Philemon, Colossians, Ephesians  
 58 (autumn) 2 Timothy.

The data of Paul's allusions to the Gospels, and indeed my whole thesis, could be re-worked using these datings- fair homework for the enthusiast.

(2) The following are the verses which contain Paul's direct recorded speech: Acts 9:5,6; 13:10,11,17-41,46,47; 14:15-17; 16:31,37; 17:22-31; 10:1,4; 20:10, 18-35; 21:13,39; 22:1-21; 23:1,3,5,6,17; 24:10-21; 25:10; 26:2-29; 27:10,21-26,33,34; 28:17-20, 25-28.

(3) For those who wish to really develop this research, Resch's paper is 'Der Paulinismus und die Logia Jesu', in *Texte und Untersuchungen*, No. 27

(Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1904). The whole issue is also usefully discussed in D.L. Dungan, *The Sayings Of Jesus In The Churches Of Paul* (Oxford: O.U.P., 1971).

## 6-3-2 Inspiration: The Human Factor

It could be argued that because the Spirit was in Paul and also in the Gospel writers, therefore these links are explicable. However, I would suggest that in addition to this, Paul was consciously making these connections and in doing so was expressing his familiarity with the Gospels. He was intellectually conscious of what he wrote. Luke's writings bear the marks of a doctor writing; he uses exact medical terms. Luke's medical language is clearly seen in how he records the Lord's words about "passing through the eye of a needle" (Lk. 18:25). He uses the Greek medical term *belone*- a surgeon's needle. Matthew and Mark use the more domestic word *raphis* (Mt. 19:24; Mk. 10:25). And Paul likewise in *his* own way, reflects, on one level, his personal saturation with the Gospels, even though what he wrote was inspired. The fact that there are similarities of *ideas* between the books of the Bible is surely an indication that they are all written by the same Spirit. But the similarities of *phrasing* and *word usage* between Paul's letters and the Gospels suggests to me that this was not only the result of the Spirit, but it was also an outcome of Paul's phenomenal familiarity with them. Robert Roberts summed it up like this: "Two mentalities [i.e. God and the Bible writer] can co-operate in an operation which proximately appears to be the work of one...the Spirit of God could so guide men in their utterance that while the things said were the *ipsissima verba* of inspiration, they were at the same time the free utterances of the men made use of, and characterized by idiosyncrasies natural to [the writer]...the literary form of the Spirit utterance would be affected by the phrenological apparatus employed in each case...*how* the Spirit affected the mentality of the writers in the process of writing by inspiration, we need not trouble ourselves with; it is the fact of inspiration that is all-important" (R. Roberts, *Is The Bible The Work Of Inspiration?*, pp. 9,10, Dawn Book Supply edition). In other words, the Bible writers were not always just fax machines (although sometimes some of them were); what they wrote was often what they wrote, a reflection of their thinking and Biblical and human understanding, *but* superintended and overridden by God's inspiring Spirit, so that they result was the word of God, not men. Thus it has been pointed out by F.F. Bruce (1) that the New Testament writers reflect the influence of the Septuagint in their writing; they use Hebrew idioms, but express them in Greek language. This is proof enough that they were not purely fax machines conveying a message. Jeremiah's vision of the New Covenant was revealed to him in a dream as he was sleeping (Jer. 31:26), and it is shot through with allusions to Jacob. Is this because Jacob was so firmly embedded in Jeremiah's mind as he slept, that his subconscious mind

affected what he saw and later wrote down? And yet, it must be stressed a hundred times over, the end result was not just a transcript of a dream; it was the very word of God. The human element in inspiration is again discernible in the way that God used dreams to speak to people. Joseph dreamed of dominating his brothers. That dream surely reflected something of his own psychology, and the way his mother Rachel had projected onto him her jealousies and ambitions. Be that as it may, that dream was from God; just as Paul and Peter sat down to write letters to their brethren, and yet were used and inspired by God to write His words.

Many Bible students are sure Paul wrote Hebrews because of the similarity of style, reasoning and language between Hebrews and Paul's other letters. We accept that although Paul was inspired, his own personal choice of language still came through. On the same reasoning, it is evident to me that Paul was consciously referring to the Gospels as he wrote his letters. As he sat down to write or dictate them, he was not just a fax machine of the Spirit. The Spirit did not possess him and force him to write things with which he had no personal involvement. He sat down and wrote letters to his brethren from his heart, and his familiarity with the Synoptic Gospels came flowing out as he wrote. But this was not all there was to his writing. Through all this the Spirit was working, inspiring him, working through his own personal love of the word and concern for the brotherhood. Once we appreciate this, we will see that it is likely that Paul probably *understood* more of what he wrote than we might think. He himself had plumbed the depths of his Ephesian epistle; the way his reasoning in Eph. 2 is an extended commentary upon certain passages in the Septuagint version of Isaiah <sup>(2)</sup> was therefore the product of his own private study of those Isaiah passages; although it *was not only that*; in Ephesians we have the word of the Spirit, albeit working through Paul's own personal expositions.

## Notes

(1) F.F. Bruce, *The Books And The Parchments* (London: Pickering & Inglis, 1971 Ed.) p. 71.

(2)

<b>Ephesians 2</b>	<b>Isaiah (LXX)</b>
:1	57:4
:12 "no hope"	56:10



:2	57:5
:14	57:19
:5	57:10 (RV)
:19	56:1
:6	57:15
:21	56:7
:12	56:7
:19	56:6 (RV)
:22	57:15

### 6-3-3 The Enigma Of John's Gospel

Proof of this is suggested by the fact that Paul seems to make no verbal or unconscious allusions to John's Gospel. I would suggest that this was because the Synoptics were produced quite early, and were committed to memory by Paul. John's Gospel came later, perhaps in the AD60s. Therefore Paul makes no conscious reference to it in terms of verbal allusion. Significantly, Peter does allude to it- because he was writing later. There are, of course, links between Paul's letters (especially Romans and Ephesians) and John; but these are links based around similarities of ideas; they are links which result from the Spirit being the writer of both the letters and John's Gospel (1). John's Gospel is, however, heavily alluded to *verbally* in John's letters; which we would expect. John's mind was so full of the life of his Lord, as recorded in his Gospel, that when he wrote his letters, he wrote in the language of his Gospel. Doubtless he had committed his Gospel to heart, and his familiarity with it came out as he wrote.

Any serious student of John's Gospel will have come across the problem of deciding what are John's inserted comments, and what are the actual words of Jesus (e.g. 3:13-17). The problem arises because the written style of John is so similar, indeed identical, to the style of language Christ used. The conclusion from this feature is that *the mind of John was so swamped with the words and style of the Lord that his own speaking and writing became after the pattern of his Master*. And he is our pattern in this. Not only are his comments within his

Gospel exactly in harmony with the Lord's style, but also the style and phrasing of his own epistle reflects that of the Lord (e.g. compare Jn. 15:11; 16:24; 17:13 with 1 Jn. 1:4; 2 Jn. 12). Perhaps he *so* absorbed the mind of the Master that he was used to write the most spiritual account of the Lord's life. In a different way, Peter also absorbed the Lord's words to the point that they influenced his way of speaking and writing (his letters are full of conscious and unconscious allusions back to the Lord's words). He seems to have noted some of the Lord's catch phrases, and made them his own (as an Englishman may say "I guess..." after prolonged contact with an American). Thus "of a surety / truth" was one of the Lord's catch phrases (Lk. 9:27; 12:44; 21:3; Jn. 1:47; 6:55; 8:31; 17:8), repeated by Peter in Acts 12:11.

It is significant that the epistle of James is likewise full of verbal allusions to the synoptic Gospels (but not to John's Gospel, significantly); especially to Matthew 5-7<sup>(2)</sup>. James too seems to have had his familiarity with the Gospels bubbling out of him as he wrote. Peter's letters likewise have many verbal links with the Gospels, especially to the Gospel of Mark. There are two possible reasons for this:

1. There is some reason to think that Mark's Gospel is actually Peter's <sup>(3)</sup>. Because Peter was almost certainly illiterate, Mark maybe transcribed what he said (cp. 1 Pet. 5:13).
2. There is a tradition that Mark's Gospel was intended to be learnt by heart by the early Christians. Luke says that his record of the Gospel was to confirm the truth of "those things wherein thou hast been instructed" (Lk. 1:4) or 'catechized'- perhaps suggesting that Mark's Gospel was memorized by rote, and Luke's Gospel was to add more detail. If illiterate Peter had memorized Mark's Gospel as intended, it would make sense if his dictated letters were full of verbal allusion to it.

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## Notes

(1) These links are explored in Geoff & Ray Walker, *Romans In The Light Of John's Gospel* (Alsager: Bible Student Press, 1995). This book, in my opinion, runs into the problem of over-interpreting 'links' and 'connections', as mentioned at the beginning of this study. What links there are between Romans and John's Gospel are links of *ideas* rather than the more explicit verbal links between Paul's letters and the Synoptic Gospels. It is possible that the Spirit inspired John's Gospel as a kind of commentary and extension of the themes of Romans and Ephesians. This is made more attractive by the tradition that John

spent time at Ephesus, and therefore would have been familiar with the Ephesian letter.

(2) Most commentaries on James make this point and provide lists of parallels between James and the synoptic Gospels.

(3) Commentators as varied as Tertullian, F.F. Bruce (in *The Books And The Parchments*) and Harry Whittaker (in *Studies In The Gospels*) have arrived at this conclusion. See too Michael Edgewcombe, 'Mark: The Man And His Gospel', *New Life* No. 16 p. 20. Peter saw the Lord's life as beginning with "the baptism of John" and ending when he was "taken up"(Acts 1:22); which is exactly the start and finish of 'Mark's' Gospel (Mk. 1:4; 16:19). Eusebius speaks of how Papias described Mark as "Peter's interpreter"; and additionally Justin describes parts of Mark's Gospel as the "recollections of Peter". This evidence is extensively documented and discussed in Martin Hengel, *Studies In The Gospel Of Mark* (London: SCM, 1985). But there is some Biblical evidence within the text as well. Mark mentions Peter more than the other Gospels; he is the first and last disciple to be mentioned in Mark. Mark mentions his name once every 443 words; compared to 1:648 in Luke and 1:722 in Matthew. The disciples are described as 'Peter and the others' (Mk. 1:36). He comes at the head of the lists of disciples, and appears as the spokesman of the twelve. However- it is Mark which also brings out the extent of his denial of the Lord to the maximum extent; Mark who shows Peter as the embodiment of the disciples' misunderstanding and failure, and concludes with the Angels speaking of "his [Christ's] disciples and Peter"(Mk. 16:7), as if to emphasize his temporary downfall. Although Luke is a longer Gospel record, he omits the rebukes to Peter which we find in Mark's record. The conclusion I draw from all this is that it was Peter's very humanity and the way he rose above his failures which were the basis for his position of eldership in the early church. In this he sets today's church leadership and electorates a challenging example.

## 6-3-4 The Nature Of The Gospel Records

One thing is clear from all this. Those early brethren knew their Gospel records by heart; and not only that, they meditated on them to the extent that they bubbled out of them as they thought and wrote. F.F. Bruce correctly observes that Paul's thinking and reasoning was based on his appreciation of the *personality* of Jesus: "Paul's chief argument in his ethical instruction is the example of Jesus Himself. And the character of Jesus as Paul understood it is consistent with the character of Jesus as portrayed in the Gospels. When Paul speaks of "the meekness and gentleness of Christ"(2 Cor. 10:1) we recall the claim of the Matthean Jesus to be "meek and lowly in heart"(Mt. 11:29). The self-denying Jesus of the Gospels is the one of whom Paul says that "Christ did not please himself"(Rom. 15:3)...when Paul invites his Philippian friends to reproduce among themselves the...mind which was in Christ Jesus, who "took

the form of a slave”(Phil. 2:5-7), we may think of Him who said to His disciples at the Last Supper, “I am among you as the servant”(Lk. 22:27)”(1). Paul's focus on the personality of Jesus means that he was no hypocrite when he asked the believers to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ... put on the new man”(Rom. 13:14; Col. 3:10).

On average, every 6 verses Paul is making an allusion to the Gospels <sup>(2)</sup>. That's quite something. *His mind must have been saturated with those records*. And remember that almost certainly my analysis is incomplete; the real figure is probably more like once every 4 verses. It also needs to be remembered that Paul probably knew words of Jesus which we don't have, and alluded to them. He memorized Christ's words of commission to him, and they were still in his mind when he stood before Agrippa (Acts 26:18). Also in Acts 20:35 he says he is quoting “the words of the Lord Jesus”, although they are not recorded in our Gospels <sup>(3)</sup>. But our real character and thinking tends to come out more in our spoken rather than written words. When we are speaking 'off the cuff' we don't have time to consciously frame our language in Biblical terms and reference. If when we speak we are still making such allusions, it is because the word is truly in our heart. It is significant that Paul's spoken words (as recorded in Acts; see table) allude to the Gospels even more than he does in his writing (once every four verses rather than once every six verses for written words). The second table above presents the figures chronologically. The general trend suggests that in his writing, Paul *increasingly* alluded to the Gospels in the last ten years of his life. And in his time of dying (in which he wrote 2 Timothy), the intensity of his allusions to the Gospels reaches an all time high. The above table shows that in 2 Timothy he is referring to the Gospels at least once every 3.9 verses- and almost certainly more than that, seeing that my analysis is certainly incomplete. The old-time believers who raised me were likewise saturated with the word. They could quote and quote and quote; and in their last years, their ability to quote the word to themselves gave them untold comfort and strength. Yet now, as a community, such brethren and sisters are a dying breed. The word is simply not in our hearts as it should be.

So what am I suggesting? That we go off and learn the Gospels? Well, yes, although not so that we can quote them at appropriate times. Know them and live them, feel them, think them. It's my observation that those who could really quote and quote were normally not the intellectuals. Illiterate Peter almost certainly had Mark's Gospel off pat. And John was another fisherman, learning verses was not the kind of thing he'd been brought up on. But it was possible, even easy for these brethren, because they were Christ-centred. Not Bible-centred, but Christ-centred. The focus of the New Testament is without doubt upon the Lord Jesus; he is the one whose word and example should utterly *dominate* our consciousness. Sadly our Christian heritage has taught us that if we zip through our Bible readings in 15 minutes a day we're not doing so

badly; it's also taught us that "the meat of the word" is speculating over the fulfilment of Daniel and Revelation; the Lord's parables, the image of the spotless lamb of God moving around daily life in the petty minded, self-centred small towns of first century Israel...these were for Sunday School children (and the very young ones at that). And this all meant that we (as a community) never gave the Gospels of the Lord Jesus the serious attention and place they deserve. If the first century converts were seriously expected to learn the Gospel of Mark, and their elders (e.g. James, Peter, John and Paul) all set them this example (*regardless* of their intellectual background)- what of us today? "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly"(Col. 3:16) may well be an allusion to the tradition of learning the Gospel of Mark. How can it *richly* dwell in us if we do not daily meditate upon those inspired records?

It would seem that the Gospels were so clearly etched in the minds of the first century believers because the message of the Gospel was preached in the form of reciting a 'Gospel', a record of the life, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. This is why 'gospel' as in the message and 'Gospel' as in the four Gospels are the same word, although this seems to be overlooked by many. The Gospel according to Matthew is the good news about Christ which Matthew preached and then wrote down. John of all the Gospel writers makes it openly apparent that his preaching of the Gospel is based around a recital of the things which he himself saw and heard in the Lord's life (1:14; 19:35; 21:24). His Gospel is full of what have been called "the artless notes of the authentic eye-witness"(e.g. his comment that "the house was filled with the odour of the ointment").

Significantly, Matthew and Luke start their Gospels with reference to the promises to Abraham and David; as many of us would. Matthew and Mark both close with an appeal for baptism- as we would. F.F. Bruce comments: "The four Gospels, or rather the four records of the one and only Gospel...are not, as some sometimes imagine, biographies of Christ...they are rather written transcripts of the Gospel preached by the apostles"(4). Acts 10:36 speaks of "the word...which was proclaimed throughout all Judea...how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit...", as if the word of the Gospel is the Gospel story as recorded by Mark and the others. This would explain the sudden changes of tenses in the synoptics- as one would expect from an author re-telling his memories.

John's Gospel was written for the specific purpose of bringing others to faith- like most of the New Testament, it is essentially a missionary document (Jn. 20:30). Jn. 20:31 makes it clear that the purpose of John's Gospel was to bring unbelievers to faith in Christ: "This has been written in order that you may hold the faith that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and that, holding this faith, you may possess life by His name". C.H. Dodd comments: "The tense of the verbs... the aorists... would necessarily have implied that the readers did not so

far hold the Christian faith or possess eternal life”(5). “That ye might believe” implies John intended his readership to be unbelievers rather than believers in the first instance. Jn. 19:35 implies that the community for whom John was writing had John as the basic source of their knowledge about Jesus, and was highly respected as their spiritual father. 'John' is therefore his inspired write-up of the Gospel he had taught his converts, and therefore it has various specific features highly relevant to them.

Acts likewise seems to be written as a preaching document, recording the speeches of basic apologetics which were made to both Jews and Gentiles. The early preachers would have gone around telling the good news about Jesus Christ, and in so doing would have recited time and again His teaching and life story. Mark records how the Lord commanded the Gospel to be preached world-wide (Mark 16:15); but he surely intends this to be linked with his record of how the generosity of the sinful woman would be told “whosoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world”(Mk. 14:9). 'The Gospel' was therefore not just the basic doctrines; it was the whole record of the life and works of Christ. This is why each of the Gospels is somehow personalized to the writer. Matthew, for example, changes the Lord's quotation of Is. 9:9 from “the people which *walked* in darkness...” to “the people which *sat* in darkness saw great light”(Mt. 4:16), because he was *sitting* at the receipt of custom when the Lord called him (Mt. 9:9). Thus the Gospel is called “the word of Christ”(Col. 3:16; Rom. 10:7 RV), “the Gospel of Christ”(Rom. 1:16; 15:19,29; 16:25; 1 Cor. 9:12,18; 2 Cor. 2:12; 9:13; 10:14; Gal. 1:7; Phil. 1:27; 1 Thess. 3:2; 2 Thess. 1:8); “the word of the Lord (Jesus)”(Acts 8:25; 13:48,49; 15:35,36; 16:32; 19:10; 1 Thess. 1:8; 2 Thess. 3:1; 1 Pet. 1:25). The phrase “the word (*logos*) of God” is used several times with obvious personal reference to the Lord Jesus (Heb. 4:12,13; 1 Pet. 1:23 NIV), who now in His exalted glory *is* the word of God (Rev. 19:13; 20:4). It is therefore quite possible that the copious NT references to the preaching of “the word of God”(a phrase the NT uses mainly concerning the Gospel, not the whole Bible) actually refer to the preaching of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus, *the* word (*logos*) of God. The “word (*logos*) of God” is parallel with the “word (*logos*) of the cross”(1 Cor. 1:18), the “word (*logos*) of Christ”(Acts 1:1; 1 Thess. 1:8; Heb. 6:1). The Lord Jesus paralleled “my sake and the gospel's” with “me and my words”(Mk. 8:35,38). He Himself thus understood the Gospel to be His words.

This is all a tremendous emphasis; that the good news about Christ contained in the Gospel records (Mt. 1:1) was in fact the basic Gospel which was preached. When Paul talks about *his* Gospel, he surely means his account of the Lord Jesus which he gave, as, for example, Matthew gave his Gospel / account of the Lord. When Paul preached to the Galatians, he placarded forth Jesus Christ crucified in front of them: his preaching of the Gospel involved a repeated and graphic portrayal of the crucified Jesus of Nazareth as a historical event (Gal.

3:1). Thus at the day of judgment, we will admire Christ because we believed the Gospel about Him (2 Thess. 1:10). John seems to suggest that he chose which miracles to record so that “ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name”(Jn. 20:31). The implication is that he wrote his Gospel with the intention of it being used as a preaching document. Luke's Gospel was written for the purpose of preaching to Theophilus, who had already been 'catechized', taught by rote, one of the Gospels (probably Mark), but who wanted to have a more detailed and factual account (Lk. 1:3,4). Luke later describes his Gospel as his *logos*, his 'word' about all Jesus did (Acts 1:1 Gk.). The Lord seems to have foreseen this when He spoke of how “Wheresoever this Gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, which this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her”(Mt. 26:13). There is evident connection with Christ's prophecy of how the Gospel would be preached in all the world (Mt. 24:14; Mk. 16:15). He seems to have seen the 'Gospel' that would be preached as a re-telling of His life and incidents in it, such as the woman's anointing of Him. It is significant that her anointing is mentioned in all four Gospel records <sup>(6)</sup>. In Mk. 14:9 we read that wherever the gospel was to be preached, what she had done would be narrated in memory of her. So ‘preaching the Gospel’ is defined there as a narration of the events and sayings of the Lord Jesus in His ministry.

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## Notes

(1) F.F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle Of The Free Spirit* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1995), p. 96

(2) It is quite possible that Paul heard most of the speeches recorded in the Gospels, and saw many of the miracles. The reason is as follows. Every faithful Jew would have been in Jerusalem to keep the feasts three times per year. Jesus and Paul were therefore together in Jerusalem three times / year, throughout Christ's ministry. It can be demonstrated that many of the miracles and speeches of Jesus occurred around the feast times, in Jerusalem. Therefore I estimate that at least 70% of the content of the Gospels (including John) Paul actually saw and heard 'live'. Another indirect reason for believing that Paul had met and heard Jesus preaching is from the fact that Paul describes himself as having been brought up as a Pharisee, because his father had been one (Acts 23:6). Martin Hengel has shown extensive evidence to believe that the Pharisees only really operated in Palestine, centred in Jerusalem, where Paul was “brought up” at the feet of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). Hengel also shows that “brought up” refers to training from a young child. So whilst Paul was born in Tarsus, he was really a Jerusalem boy. Almost certainly he would have heard and known much about Jesus; his father may even have been amongst those

who persecuted the Lord. See Martin Hengel, *The Pre-Christian Paul* (London: SCM, 1991).

(3) There are other hints of this. Consider 1 Cor. 9:14, where Paul says that Christ ordained that preachers should be paid by the congregation. Or Mk. 14:58 records people quoting Jesus as saying that he would build another temple “made without hands”. Yet those words are not recorded in the Gospels. However, Paul seems to allude to the idea of Christ as a temple “made without hands” in Heb. 9:11,24; 2 Cor. 5:1. Perhaps he knew Christ had said those words and was alluding to them.

(4) F.F. Bruce, *The Books And The Parchments* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984) p. 107.

(5) C.H. Dodd, *The Interpretation Of The Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1960) p. 9.

(6) See the discussion of Mary Magdalene in *Gospel News*, Vol. 9 No. 5, May / June 1996.

## 6-3-5 Memorizing Scripture

To learn a Gospel *is* a possibility. I knew two English Christians who could recite all four of them. One, admittedly, was an intellectual of above average ability. The other: a school caretaker who read his Gospels in a council flat on a rough South London estate, with an unbelieving wife. After our Sunday School lesson, we'd always put Jimmy to the test. “Go on Uncle Jimmy, Luke 10”. And out it came. “John 2”. Word perfect, as we followed in our Bibles. Jimmy, beloved Sunday School teacher, I salute you, for your unfeigned love of our Lord Jesus, and for your inspiration. Between them, those two brethren answer all the excuses. Got too much in your mind already because of your job and profession? Harry did it, here and now in the twentieth century; and Paul did it in the first. Too much of a simple soul, not your kind of scene? Jimmy did it, Cockney accent and all. And so did Peter. Yet my sense is that none of them set out to do it. They ended up like that because they loved their Lord, and therefore the word of His grace. It was sweet, truly sweet, to their taste. My point is, quite simply: it *is* possible, if you want to, here and now in this life, amidst the hustle and bustle of London, Toronto, Moscow, Jo'burg, Nairobi, Manila, Hong Kong... amidst the slow, steady life of a Devon village, the petty gossip and small talk of a small town in the Baltics, or in rural Ontario, or an isolated Siberian village. It *is* possible, for every one of you. And for me too.

As a digression, there is evidence within the text of the NT, in addition to church tradition, which would suggest that memorizing Scripture was a common feature of the early believers:



- “Wot ye not what the scripture saith of Elias...?”(Rom. 11:2) suggests that Paul expected them to know this passage. “What the Scripture *saith*” rather than “what is written” might suggest that they learnt these passages by heart and spoke them out loud, probably because the majority of the early believers were either illiterate or had no access to the manuscripts.

- A passage in Ps. 118 is referred to in Lk. 20:18; Acts 4:11; Eph. 2:20; 1 Pet. 2:6-8. One wonders if this was a proof text which the early believers would have known by heart. And one wonders likewise about Psalm 2- it is referred to so often.

- The early believers remained devoted to the instruction (lit. 'doctrinizing') given by the apostles. This might suggest rote learning.

- The twelve gave themselves continually to “the ministry of the word”(Acts 6:4); using a phrase used in contemporary literature to describe how the synagogue minister made pupils memorize Scripture texts. Hence Paul reminds the Ephesians to “remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said...”; not, 'how it is written' (for the Gospels were in circulation by this time). He jogged their memory of one of the texts they ought to have memorized (Acts 20:35).

- The letters of Peter and John are likewise shot through with allusion to the Gospels, conscious and unconscious. Peter uses Scriptures like Ps. 110 and 118 in exactly the same way as he heard the Lord use them (Acts 3:34 = Mt. 22:44; Acts 4:11; 1 Pet. 2:7 = Mt. 21:42). A list could be compiled for Peter's allusions to the Lord as I have for Paul's. It may be that Peter's difficult reference to the spirits in prison (1 Pet. 3:19) is a reference to Is. 61 in the same way as Christ used it in Lk. 4:18. This point is meaningless without an appreciation of the extent to which Christ's words featured in the writing and thought of Peter.

- The Old Testament as well as New is written in such a way as to encourage memorization, although this is often masked by the translation. There are several devices commonly used to assist in this. Not least is alliteration, i.e. similarly sounding syllables: *Pantote Peri Panton* (1 Thess. 1:2); ***Polymeros kai polytropos***(Heb. 1:1); *hautee protee entolee* (Mk. 12:30); ***aphtharton amianton amaranton*** (1 Pet. 1:3,4). In 2 Tim. 3:2,3 nearly all words end in (-oi), the masculine plural case termination- when it would surely have been possible to construct the sentence in another way. “We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced (*orcheesasthe*); we have mourned unto you and ye have not lamented (*ekopsasthe*)”(Mt. 11:17) could be dynamically rendered: 'We piped for you, and you never **stept**; we dirged for you, and you never **wept**'. It has been pointed out that if some NT passages are translated into Aramaic, the common language of the day in first century Israel, there would have been ample encouragement for memorization. Thus: We preach Christ crucified

(*mishkal*), unto the Jews a stumblingblock (*mikshol*), and unto the Greeks foolishness (*sekel*), but unto them that are called...the power (*hishkeel*) of God and the wisdom (*sekel*) of God”(1 Cor. 1:23,24). The device of acrostic Psalms (9,10,25,34,37,119,145) and the use of acrostics in Lamentations and Esther would likewise enable the reciting of them. The repetition of the same word at the beginning of successive sentences is yet another such feature (Dt. 28:3-6; 2 Sam. 23:5; Jer. 1:18; Hos. 3:4; 1Cor. 13:4; 2 Cor. 2:11; Eph. 6:12). The same phrase is also sometimes repeated at the beginning and end of a sentence with the same effect (Ex. 32:16; 2 Kings 23:25; Ps. 122:7,8; Mk. 7:14-16; Lk. 12:5; Jn. 3:8 Rom. 14:8 Gk.).

Alfred Edersheim (*The Life And Times Of Jesus The Messiah*) and J.W. Wenham (*Christ And The Bible*, London: Tyndale, 1972) give examples of how even quite ordinary Jews in first century times could quote large sections of the Old Testament verbatim.

## 6-4 The Supremacy Of Christ

But where do we get the motivation from to memorize Scripture, and the Gospels (or a Gospel) in particular? I'd suggest that it comes from first of all realizing, on a theological level, the greatness of Christ. He is now Lord of Heaven and earth, all power has been given unto him, He is the “Prince of the Kings of the earth”. Those early brethren who had seen the Lord in His humanity really appreciated this. Thus “Yahweh of hosts, him shall you sanctify”(Is. 8:13 LXX) is applied by Peter to the Lord Jesus, whom we should sanctify (1 Pet. 3:15). Paul speaks about “the Lord” as if we all know who he refers to; *the* Lord, the one and only Lord, the exalted Lord Jesus. This especially comes out in his breaking of bread passage in 1 Cor. 11:23-29. Such is the supremacy of Christ that “We cannot lift Christ too high” as Robert Roberts expressed it in *Seasons of Comfort*. If we appreciate the extent and height of His Lordship and exaltation, we will see the extent to which our minds should be dominated by Him. Our very consciousness should beat with His spirit, His mind. We are told that He should *live in our hearts*; for us, He should be the alpha and omega (Rev. 1:11). The confession of faith before baptism is summarized, in its quintessence, as confessing with the mouth Jesus as Lord (Rom. 10:9 RV). Not *only* this, of course; but all the doctrines a candidate must know beforehand are summarized in this. There is ample reason to fear that as a community we have scarcely begun to realize this. We are (or were) doctrine-centred, Bible-centred perhaps, but not *purely* Christ-centred.

## Mistaken Emphasis

Don't misunderstand me. I'm not saying that we've got anything wrong as far as basic doctrine is concerned; I'm making the point that our *perspective and emphasis* has been wrong. We have, for example, emphasized the political establishment of the Kingdom at Christ's return far far more than the cross of Christ. Yet the teaching of Christ and the apostles says very little about this; reading through the New Testament with an open mind, the basic theme is clear: Christ died on the cross for our sins, according to the Old Testament scriptures. The future political Kingdom is one outcome of what has been achieved by the victory of the Lord Jesus on Calvary. We have almost shied away from the New Testament due to our over-reaction against New Testament-only 'Christianity'. An over-emphasis on the place of natural Israel and the political Kingdom of God which simply does not reflect the emphasis found in the New Testament. Consider the preaching of Paul. The Gospel he preached was concerning the death and resurrection of the Lord (Rom. 15:20,21 cp. Is. 52:15). Ananias relayed his commission to him (Acts 22:15): that he was to be a world-wide witness of the reality of the resurrection (it may well be that Paul had witnessed the crucifixion too). And all the Lord's men are to be witnesses of *Him* world-wide (Acts 1:8).

Please, please don't be worried by what I'm saying. I'm *not* saying that a basic emphasis upon the literal establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth is wrong. Far, far from it. I'm suggesting that our *emphasis* has been misplaced. Likewise the promises to Abraham and David are fundamentally concerning the Lord Jesus and His conquest of sin; the reference which they have to the political Kingdom is very much secondary to this. We benefit from those promises only insofar as we are in Christ, and therefore the blessings promised to and through Him become relevant to us. An over-emphasis on the future political Kingdom can lead us to ignore the many passages which speak of love, joy and peace in our *present* lives; we seem to prefer the Catholic idea of grim suffering now resulting in an unimaginable physical paradise in the future. The outcome of this is that we have neglected the need to emphasize personal spirituality, the need to assimilate the Lord Jesus into our own personality. And because it is impossible to realistically imagine the future political Kingdom, it is not the motivating power that it should be. What should and can motivate us is the wonder of sin forgiven and an open relationship with God here and now. In any case, what we know about the political Kingdom is at best only knowledge about the brief Millennium. The Millennium is not solely equal to our salvation and redemption. Our salvation is fundamentally about our sins being forgiven and God therefore manifesting Himself in us. The descriptions of the Millennium are to give us some physical example of the *results*, the outcome, of the fact sin has been overcome through Christ. Paul's letter to the Romans is an exposition of the Gospel. He says so straight. But he never

speaks there of the Gospel of the literal Kingdom on earth, true and valid as it is. We read in Acts 28:31 that whilst in Rome, Paul taught the things of the Kingdom and the Lord Jesus. But his letter to the Romans places the *emphasis*, and this is my point, upon the reign of grace. He speaks of how grace “reigns”, as if grace is the dominating, ruling principle in the lives of those who have now sided with the Kingdom of God rather than that of this world. Testifying the Gospel of God's grace is paralleled by Paul with testifying about the Kingdom- and he says this again in a Roman context (Acts 20:24,25). In Romans 5, Paul makes a seamless connection between the reign of God's grace now, and our future reigning in the literal Kingdom of God to be established materially upon earth at the Lord's return: Grace reigns *unto* eternal life, i.e. the result of the reign of grace now is eternal life in the future (Rom. 5:21)... and thus “the ones receiving the abundance of the grace and of the free gift of the righteousness in life *will* reign through the one, Jesus Christ”(Rom. 5:17). Elsewhere, Paul clearly understands the idea of future reigning as a reference to our ruling in the future Kingdom of God. This is a very real and wonderful hope which we have, and is indeed part of the Gospel. My point is that this is not *all* there is to the Gospel, and we appear in some quarters of our community to have gotten it rather out of balance. Such is the supremacy of Christ that this must alter that balance.

We struggle, if we are honest, with passages like Col. 1:13, which speaks of us having been already translated into the Kingdom of Christ; or the way the preaching of the Kingdom is made parallel to preaching the time of acceptance with God and forgiveness of sins *now* (Lk. 4:43 cp. 19, 2 Cor. 6:2); or Rom. 14:17, which seems to teach that the Kingdom of God is more about “peace and joy in the Holy Spirit”, both now and eternally, than physical, tangible things; or the fact that Christ's parables about the Kingdom don't speak of a political Kingdom, but rather about the relationship between God and the believer in the here and now. It is also so that “the kingdom of God” was then understood to have been the nation of Israel, and many parables of the Kingdom focus upon them (e.g. the leaven of Mt. 13:33 is “the leaven of the Pharisees” of Lk. 12:1; those who would not understand the word in Mk. 4:4 are those of Judges 2:17). Of course, present suffering is necessary; and none of us would deny we have plenty of it. But the comfort, the joy and peace, should abound along with this. This is the fruit of the Lord the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:18), the result of Christ dwelling in us, being Lord and King in our hearts, here and now. It makes an interesting study to analyze what percentage of NT references to the Kingdom and Christ's Kingship have reference to the future political Kingdom. Many of the Kingdom prophecies of healing were it seems consciously fulfilled in the Lord's healings:

- Is. 35:6 LXX the stammerer healed = Mk. 7:32-35
- Is. 35:3 = Mk. 2:3-12; 3:1-6

· Is. 35:8,10 = Mk. 11:1 Bartimaeus following on the Jerusalem road

The Kingdom prophecy of Zech. 14:21 that there will no longer be a trafficker in the Lord's house was fulfilled by the Lord's casting out the traders from the temple. This doesn't mean that these passages will not have a glorious future fulfilment. But in the person of Jesus and in the record of His life we see the "Kingdom come nigh", as He Himself said it did. We can so focus on the future fulfilment that we can forget that He was the Kingdom in the midst of men; the essence of our eternal future, of the coming political Kingdom of God, was and is to be seen in Him. Satan fell from Heaven during His ministry ((Lk. 10:18), as it will at the second coming (Rev. 12).

Note the parallel in Jn. 3:3,5: "Except a man be born again, he cannot *see* [perceive] the kingdom of God... he cannot *enter* into the kingdom of God". If we truly see / perceive the things of the Kingdom in this life, then we will enter it in the future. Israel 'saw' the land physically through the spies (Num. 13:18; 32:8), but were told that they would "not see the land"(Num. 14:23; 32:11; Dt. 1:35). Again, as in the Lord's teaching, 'seeing the land' is put for 'entering' into it. Knowing facts about the future Kingdom doesn't mean we will enter it. But really 'seeing' the things of the Gospel of the Kingdom will by its very nature change us into people who will enter it. For we will be living the essence of the Kingdom life right now. Israel through the spies went to 'see' the land (Num. 13:18), but could not *enter* it because of their unbelief (Heb. 3:19). They didn't 'see' it in the sense of perceiving what God's Kingdom was all about. They only saw the physicality of the land; and this wasn't enough to enter it. The synoptics' formula that he who believes the Gospel and is baptized will be saved is matched by John in Jn. 6:40: "every one that beholdeth the Son, and believeth on him, should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day". Believing the Gospel of the Kingdom is matched by seeing / perceiving the Son. This is the basis. "The kingdom of God's sake"(Lk. 18:29) is paralleled with the sake of the Name of Christ by the account in Mt. 19:29. The things of the Name and the things of the Kingdom were therefore not two different things, rather were they different ways of referring to the same realities.

When we read of "eternal life" being granted to us now, we are reading about "the life belonging to the age", i.e. the Kingdom of God in the future. The idea is that we can live the life which we will eternally live- right here and now. We can experience the quality of that life now. And if we don't... we don't have the guarantee of eternity in the Kingdom. For in spiritual terms, in terms of essential spiritual experience, there will be a seamless transition between the spiritual life we now enjoy, and that which we will experience in the future Kingdom. The location of that eternity will be on earth; and yes, there must be death, resurrection, judgment and immortalisation of our body. But those more

'physical' realities don't figure so deeply in the message which John is putting across in his record of 'the Gospel'. Notice how in Jn. 3:36, 'having everlasting life' is paralleled with 'seeing life'; to perceive and live what God's Kingdom life is all about, is in a sense to 'have' it.

It can be that we live as good Christians, but the reality and present Lordship of Christ is a fundamental part of our lives which we miss out on. But more than that. If we don't have the spirit of Christ, we are none of His (Rom. 8:9,10,11 cp. 5,6). The Lord Jesus is called "the life, the eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us"(1 Jn. 1:3 RV). In this lies the importance of a Christ-centred life and mind; *He is the definition of eternal life*. This is what eternity will be like, John is saying: life lived as Christ lived and lives. "This is life eternal: that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ"(Jn. 17:3). Notice that eternal life isn't defined in terms of sitting under a fig tree in a perfect climate watching the animals living happily together (although we are invited to believe that by God's grace this *will* be our experience). It is the life of Christ our Lord; and that's why one of His titles is "the life, the eternal life". He shewed us what eternal life will be about, and invites us to begin that experience, however imperfectly, even now (cp. Hos. 6:3 RV). And it is in this sense alone that "we may know that we have (now) eternal life"(1 Jn. 5:13).

Paul's relationship with and perception of the Lord Jesus is held up by the Spirit as our example. He himself asks us to copy (Gk. *mimic*) the way in which he followed the Lord Jesus (this is what 1 Cor. 11:1 implies in the Greek). We have seen that his mind was increasingly *saturated* with the Gospels, and with the surpassing excellency and supremacy of the *Lordship* of the risen Jesus. As he faced death, he more intensely modelled his words upon those of Christ. Thus when he speaks of how he is about to *finish* his course (2 Tim. 4:7), he is combining allusions to Mt. 26:58; Lk. 12:50; 18:31; 22:37; Jn. 13:1; as well as to his old hero, John the Baptist (Acts 13:25). And yet despite this, perhaps because of his increasing identification with Christ and sense of Christ's supremacy, Paul's concern was constantly for doctrine; he pounded away, time and again, at the danger of apostasy. As he got older, this was a bigger and bigger theme with him. His last words just before his death are full of this theme, more than any other of his writings. And yet that same letter has more reference (relatively) to the Gospels and to the Lordship of Christ than anything else he wrote. On average, Paul refers to Christ as "the Lord" once every 26 verses in his letters. But in 2 Timothy, he calls Christ "Lord" once every six verses; and in his very last words in 2 Tim. 4, once every 3 verses, nine times more than average! His appreciation of the *excellency* and the supremacy of Christ, of the height of His Lordship, grew and grew. And so did his appreciation of his own sinfulness (consider the chronological progression of 1 Cor. 15:9 - Eph. 3:8 - 1 Tim. 1:15). So did his enthusiasm for preaching the

word to the world, and strengthening the ecclesia (2 Tim. is fine proof of this). The picture of Paul in prison, having reached this spiritual pinnacle, fired the minds and living of “many of the brethren in the Lord”(Phil. 1:21). And for me too, the old and brave Paul in that cell is the man I fain would be. And yet as his perception of Christ and his surpassing excellency increased, so did his warnings against apostasy, and the need to hold on to true doctrine. In other words, his absorption and appreciation of the Spirit of Christ was what fired his zeal for purity of doctrine and practice. It was this which gave him the spiritual energy and power to live the life that he did, to the point that he could truly say that for him, to live was Christ; that the life he lived in the flesh, the things he did, the thoughts he thought, was all the result of Christ living in him and through him. He brought *every thought* (and this isn't figurative language) into captivity to Christ (2 Cor. 10:5). My sense is that as he was lead out to face his death, a phrase he'd coined to the Philippians years back was in his mind: “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain”(Phil. 1:21). Paul was an evident type of Christ. In the spiritual pinnacle and pathos of his time of dying, I see an image, a superb image, of the death of his Lord and ours.

## 7 Paul And Christ (2)

We saw in the previous study that Paul's mind was saturated with the Lord Jesus Christ, and that this was reflected in his familiarity with the Gospels. We saw that he alluded to them at least once every 6 verses that he wrote- and probably far more. We saw that his zeal to assimilate the mind of Christ is really our example. Paul evidently memorized passages, and was so motivated by them that his whole life decisions were planned around the implication of maybe just one passage (e.g. “It is more blessed to give than to receive”, Acts 20:35; or the idea of being a watchman seems to have fired his preaching zeal, Ez. 3:18; 18:13 cp. Acts 18:6; 20:26). Yet perhaps we have given the impression that if we go away and memorize a Gospel record, we will have achieved Paul's spirituality. Yet this isn't the case. It's not merely a matter of memorizing them as lines in a play. The principles of the words and example of the Lord Jesus really fired Paul. when one does the same analysis of the words of the Lord Jesus, we find Him alluding to Old Testament Scripture about 2 or 3 times in each sentence- and that's as far as *we* can discern! He appears to allude to some parts more than others- Deuteronomy, the Psalms and Isaiah. And very significantly, these are also the parts of the Old Testament which Paul seems to have had a preference for. This shows just how much Paul both consciously and unconsciously absorbed the mind of Christ.

So we have to ask, *how* did Paul use his knowledge of the Gospels, his 'physical' knowledge of the history and words of the Lord Jesus, to such effect? This is the issue which we want to address in this study.

## 7-1 Paul's Use Of The Gospels: Further Observations

But firstly, I'd like to make some more observations on the tables found in our previous study. It seems to me that we are dealing with a real phenomena here; that a man (Paul) could be so full of the words and spirit and history of the Lord Jesus. So extraordinary is this that I keep wondering if it really is valid. And yet the more I analyze it, the more truth I see in it. If Paul was indeed a man whose memory was packed with the Gospels and who constantly meditated upon them, the following fit into place:

- There are several indications that Paul expected his readers to understand that the majority of what he was saying was basically a reflection of the words of the Lord Jesus. He tells Corinth that "to the rest speak I, not the Lord" Jesus (1 Cor. 7:12). He hasn't earlier said: Now I'm going to remind you of the words of the Lord Jesus'. He takes it as understood that as usual, his reasoning has been a reflection of the words of Jesus (in the context, 1 Cor. 7:11 = Mt. 5:32; Mk. 10:9; "put asunder" is s.w. "depart"). But now he says that he is going to go beyond Christ's words (as in 1 Cor. 7:25). This doesn't mean he wasn't inspired; it means that he is drawing their attention to the fact that he is doing something unusual for him, i.e. to give teaching which is not an allusion or repetition of that of the Lord Jesus. My point is that the implication of this is that he expected his readers to take as read that he normally was only repeating the thinking of Christ. Likewise in 2 Cor. 11:17: "That which I speak, I speak it not after the Lord"(i.e. as I normally would). Every few verses, even according to our limited analysis, he was making a noticeable allusion to the Gospels. When he says that he is speaking to the Thessalonians "by (in) the word of the Lord" Jesus (1 Thess. 4:15), this doesn't mean that what he was about to say was more inspired than anything else. What he meant was that he was specifically repeating the teaching of Christ (which he does through a series of extended allusions to Mt. 24 and 25).

- Is it going too far to think that when Paul writes about believers being sanctified and justified, in that order (1 Cor. 6:11), he reflects his absorption of how his Lord had referred to the Father as firstly sanctified and then justified in Jn. 17:11,25?

- Paul's words of Acts 23:3 were surely said in the heat of the moment: "God shall smite thee, thou whited wall!". Yet even in hot blood, not carefully thinking through his words (for this doesn't seem the most appropriate thing to come out with!), Paul was still unconsciously referring to the Gospels (Mt. 23:27 in this case).



- There are many such unconscious allusions in Hebrews. This absolutely fits in with the evidence that Hebrews is the transcript of a breaking of bread exhortation given 'off the cuff' by Paul to the Jerusalem ecclesia <sup>(1)</sup>. We can imagine him speaking to them with the emblems before him, his mind *full* of his Lord, and the allusions, both consciously and unconsciously, would have just come bubbling out.

- "Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world" (1 Cor. 6:2) is referring back to Mt. 19:28, which promises all those who have followed Christ that they will sit on thrones of judgment. That this promise was not just to the disciples is evident from Lk. 22:30; 1:33 cp. Rev. 3:21. It's as if Paul is saying: 'Now come on, you ought to know this, it's in the Gospels'. He expected other believers to share his familiarity with the words of Christ. There's another example in Rom. 6:16: "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are...whether of sin...or of obedience?". This is alluding to Mt. 6:24 concerning not serving two masters. Paul is surely saying: 'Come on, this is Matthew 6, you can't serve two masters! That principle ought to be firmly lodged in your heart!'. Another example is 1 Cor. 10:16 = Mt. 26:26; hence Paul reasons: "The cup of blessing...*is it not* the communion of the blood of Christ?"- i.e. 'Isn't it? I mean, this is familiar to us from the Gospels isn't it'.

- The letters to Corinth must have been very difficult to write. Paul was walking an absolute minefield. Therefore he says that his attitude to Corinth was that he wanted to know nothing among them, saving Jesus Christ and Him crucified (1 Cor. 2:2); he wanted to keep his mind fixed upon the Lord Jesus and the intensity of His passion, rather than get sidetracked by personality issues and ecclesial politics. And his letters reveal this. They contain many unconscious allusions to the suffering and death of Christ. Paul refers to Christ as "Lord" throughout all his letters about once every 26 verses on average. And yet in Corinthians he does so once every 10 verses on average. The Lordship and suffering of Jesus were therefore very much in Paul's mind as he wrote. His Christ and cross-centred perspective is a real example to us, living as we do at a time when the body of Christ increasingly distracts us from the central object of our devotion: the Son of God who died for us, and was raised again for our justification.

- Paul's references to the Gospels suggests that he had carefully meditated upon the passages to which he consciously alludes. The fact and way in which he *alludes* rather than quotes verbatim reflects the fact he had thought through and absorbed the teaching of the passages rather than learning them parrot fashion. For example, in Mt. 19:18,19 the Lord Jesus combines two quotations from the Law: Ex. 20:12-16 followed by Lev. 19:18. Paul, in a different context, to prove a different point, combines those same two passages, although separating

them by a brief comment (Rom. 13:9). This surely indicates that he had meditated upon how his Lord was using the Law, and mastered it so that he could use it himself.

- The manner in which Paul alludes to the Gospels also indicates that this was the result of the Spirit using Paul's human memory and absorption of the Gospels, rather than him just being used as a Fax machine by the Spirit. Thus if you analyze the data in our previous study, it is evident that there are *groups* of allusions to the Gospels in Paul's letters. Thus there may be several allusions in one chapter, none in the next, and then another group in the next chapter. This is the sort of pattern one would expect from a human memory. Sometimes 1 verse in the Gospels is alluded to by Paul in different ways in different letters. Thus Mt. 5:16 ("let your light shine before men") is applied by him to within the ecclesia (2 Cor. 9:11,13) and to among the world (1 Cor. 14:25). This has the ring of truth about it. I often take the same verse to mean different things, or I change my view concerning it's application. This doesn't mean Paul wasn't inspired; it just indicates that his personal interpretation of the Gospels was used by God.

- Paul alludes to some parts of the Gospels more than to others. The record of John the Baptist, the sermon on the mount, the parables and the record of Christ in Gethsemane are all referred to far more than average. This surely would not be the case if the connections between Paul's writings and the Gospels were *only* the result of the Spirit irresistibly carrying Paul along. We have suggested (2) that Paul's enthusiasm for the record of John the Baptist was because he had probably first heard the Gospel from John; i.e. there was a reason personal to Paul as to why he alludes to much to that particular part of the Gospels. And so with his sustained allusions to Gethsemane, far more than we would expect statistically. Presumably the picture of the Lord Jesus struggling against His own nature, driven to the brink of eternal failure, was an image which echoed in Paul's mind. Likewise the parables were intended to be memorized and meditated upon; Paul did just this, and that's why he alludes to them more than average. This sort of pattern is just what we too experience; there are parts of Scripture which stick in our minds, often for personal reasons. And so it was with Paul. Mt. 11:25 was a verse which was perhaps very much in his mind as he wrote to Corinth; it is alluded to in 1 Cor. 1:19; 2:8; 14:20- and nowhere else. Likewise I suggest that the words of Jesus at the judgment, inviting the faithful into the Kingdom (Mt. 25:34), likewise rung in Paul's mind: Acts 20:32; Gal. 3:29; 4:7; Eph. 1:11; Col. 1:12; 3:24; Tit. 3:7. Other examples are Lk. 1:47 = 1 Tim. 1:1; 2:3; Tit. 1:3; Lk. 18:7 ("elect") = Rom. 8:33; Col. 3:12; 2 Tim. 2:10; Tit. 1:1; Lk. 13:32 ("perfected") was in his mind as he wrote to the Hebrews (2:10; 5:9; 7:28); and Mk. 10:30 = Acts 14:22; 2 Thess. 1:4,5; 2 Tim. 3:11,12; and consider how Christ's frequent use of the word "watch" is matched by Paul's usage. This is typical of human memory; one verse or phrase sticks in

our mind very intensely for a certain period. The same is true with any piece of information or phrase which is sticking in our mind. On a much lower level, I go through phases of saying "I guess..." rather than "I suppose that..." after I've been in the company of Americans.

- The fact we copy the language patterns of those we are with was true for Paul. The Gospels were so much in his heart that he can hardly speak or write without some reference, consciously or unconsciously, to the Lord Jesus. Thus in 1 Cor. 13:2 I sense that Paul as he is writing (on a human level) was looking round for a superlative to express just how useless we are without love. And the superlative expression he picks is unconsciously taken out of the Gospels (Mt. 17:20): "Though I have all faith *so that I could remove mountains* and have not charity, I am nothing".

- It is significant that Paul in Acts and the earlier letters seems to allude more heavily to the records of Christ's sufferings and resurrection than he did later (1). His trend is towards alluding to the parables more. This again is an indication that Paul's writing was in the first instance an outpouring of his own absorption of the Lord Jesus, albeit confirmed by the Spirit.

- Paul's description of Christ 'ascending up far above all heavens' (Eph. 4:10) seems to be rooted in his vivid re-living and imagining of the scene in Lk. 24:51, where the record says that Christ was "parted from them, and carried up". This would be typical of human use of the Gospels.

- Likewise one phrase of Paul's, in Acts 13:46, combines allusions to two verses in Matthew (21:41; 22:8). Those verses are close to each other. As Paul thought about 21:41, he would have gone on to 22:8, and then brought them both together in his allusion- ultimately controlled by the Spirit, of course.

- A nice insight into the intensity with which Paul meditated is provided by his comment on Mt. 27:11-14, where we read that Jesus before Pilate said just one word in Greek; translated "Thou sayest". It is stressed there that Jesus said nothing else, so that Pilate marvelled at His silent self-control. Yet Paul speaks with pride of how the Lord Jesus "before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession" (1 Tim. 6:13). You'd expect him to be alluding to some major speech of Jesus. But it seems, reading his spirit, Paul's saying: 'Lord Jesus, your self control, your strength of purpose, was great. I salute you, I hold you up to Timothy as the supreme example. Just one word. What a witness!'

An analysis of Paul's allusions to the Gospels reveals that there were some parts to which he alluded far more than others. I want now to consider how he uses these sections.

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## Notes

(1) Consider the intensity of allusion to the records of Christ's death and resurrection in Acts 13:27-38:

<b>Acts</b>	<b>Gospels</b>
13:27	Lk. 24:27
13:28	Mt. 27:72; Mk. 15:13
13:29	Mt. 27:59
13:30	Mt. 28:6
13:38	Lk. 24:47

Thus Paul's early recorded preaching was basically a commentary on the Gospel records of Christ's death and resurrection (as was Peter's).

## 7-2 Paul And The Parables

The Lord had said that parables only remained incomprehensible to “them that are without”(Mk. 4:11). That phrase seems to have stuck with Paul; he uses it five times. Perhaps he saw that a characteristic of the believers, those separated from the world of darkness, was that they understood the parables; and this would explain Paul's frequent allusion to them, stressing as he does the need to appreciate their power. At times he 'unconsciously' uses a phrase from the parables, out of context, but as an indication that they were running through his mind (e.g. “children of light” in Eph. 5:8; 1 Thess. 5:5 is quarried from Lk. 16:8).

Take Lk. 18:1: “He spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint”. There are so many allusions by Paul to this verse and the ensuing parable (see table above). This shows just how like us Paul was; he had his favourite parables, one or two that really stuck in his mind, just as we do. And he alluded to them! They were in his heart, to inspire and motivate him, just as the Lord intended. Paul picks up the idea of not fainting in 2 Thess. 3:13: “Brethren, be not weary (s.w. “not to faint”) in well doing”. What well-doing did Paul have in mind? Attending the Sunday meetings? Being patient with some difficult sister in the ecclesia? The connection with Lk. 18:1 tells us what he had in mind: keep on praying intensely. It's no co-incidence that Paul started that section of 2 Thess. 3 (in v.1) with the exhortation: “Brethren, pray for us”. And he concludes it with the same rubric: “Brethren, be not weary”(faint not), in your prayers. He knew from the parable that repeated prayer was powerful. And so he asks them to

keep at it for him, because he needed it. Perhaps Paul had the same thing in mind when he wrote to the Ephesians (3:13): “In (Christ) we have boldness and access with confidence (to God, in prayer, cp. Heb. 4:16)...*wherefore* I desire that ye faint not (s.w. Lk. 18:1) at my tribulations”; is he not implying ‘You know how powerful prayer is, so don’t faint in it, you know what struggles I’m having, *please* keep on praying for me, like that persistent widow in the parable’. This fits in with a number of other passages in which Paul unashamedly begs his brethren to pray for him. In this we see his humility, his high regard for other brethren who were almost certainly weaker than him, and also the physical desperation of his daily life.

### **Favourite Parables Of Paul**

The prodigal son was another favourite of Paul’s. At least four times (Lk. 15:24 = Eph. 2:1,5; 5:14; Col. 2:13) he makes the point that he saw the repentant son as a type of every one of us: not just those who publicly disgrace themselves and go out of ecclesial life for a time.

The sower parables were another favourite. In Acts 13:10 he calls Elymas a “son of the devil”(RV), implying he was a tare sown among the wheat (Mt. 13:38). He tells the Hebrews and Romans to have the patient, fruit-bearing characteristics of the good ground (Lk. 8:15 = Rom. 2:7; Heb. 10:36). He enthuses that the Colossians were in the good ground category: the Gospel “*bringeth forth fruit...in you, since the day ye heard*”(Col. 1:6). Paul had thought deeply about that parable. He doesn’t just half-quote it in an offhand way. For example, Mt. 13:22 says that riches choke a man’s response to the word. 1 Tim. 6:9 warns that those who *want to be rich* are choked by their *desire* for riches. Likewise Paul saw the rich man of Mt. 19:23 as actually one who *wanted* to be rich (= 1 Tim. 6:9,10). So Paul had thought through the parable. He saw that possession of riches alone wouldn’t choke a man; he saw that the Lord was using “riches” as meaning ‘the desire for riches’. And because “riches” are relative and subjective, this must be right. And therefore the Spirit was able to use Paul’s deductions. My point is that the Spirit *could* have used just anyone to write (e.g.) 1 Tim. 6:9. But it was no accident that God chose to use a man with a fine knowledge and appreciation of His Son to be His penman. In similar vein, Mt. 13:19 describes the evil one taking away the word out of our heart. However can we resist that evil one? Paul had his eye on this question in 2 Thess. 3:1,3, where he speaks of the word being *with them*, and also of the Lord keeping them from the evil one. Paul knew that the Lord (Jesus) will help us in keeping the word in our hearts, if we allow him to; he saw that the power of God is greater than our low nature.

One of the ineffable sadnesses of Paul’s life must have been to see his converts falling away. Yet he seems to have comforted himself by seeing their defection

in terms of the sower parable. Many a twentieth century missionary has been brought close to that parable for the same reason. It supplies an explanation, an answer, a comfort, as 'Friends one by one depart (some we saw as pillars to our own faith, those we thought would always be there) / Lonely and sad our heart'. Thus Paul saw Demas as a seed among thorns (Mt. 13:22 = 2 Tim. 4:10); he saw Elymas as a tare (Mt. 13:38 = Acts 13:10); and he pleads with the Romans not to slip into the tare category (Mt. 13:41 Gk. = Rom. 14:13).

Heb. 5:2 describes those in sin whom the Lord saved as "out of the way". The same idea is found in Lk. 11:6 AVmg., where the man "out of his way" comes knocking on the Lord's door. The image of the shut door is that of rejection; but here the door is opened, and the man given "as much as he needs" of forgiveness and acceptance.

When Paul speaks of the stewardship of God's grace given to him (Eph. 3:2 RVmg.), he is alluding to the parable of the talents. He saw the talents as the amount of grace shown, and for him, he knew this to amount to many talents; and he invested them, in response, through the preaching of the Gospel. And he carries on the allusion in Eph. 4:7, speaking of how unto every one of us Christ has given a gift, namely, grace.

The final parables of the Lord, found in Mt. 25, are alluded to most by Paul. The links between the parables of Mt. 24 / 25 and 1 Thessalonians have been widely tabulated by many commentators. It is as if he saw in the parables a passion and intensity of meaning that found a deep lodgement within him. He warns the Romans not to be like the lazy servant in the parable (Mt. 25:26 = Rom. 12:11); he heavily underlines the point to the Thessalonians that the parable of the drunken servant living at ease refers to the unworthy in the ecclesia in the last days (not any "peace and safety cry" out in the world, let it be noted). Paul's whole reasoning in Eph. 5:29-32 is based on the idea of Christ as the bridegroom, as propounded by the Lord in Mt. 25:1. And three times he alludes to the parable of the talents; in Rom. 12:6 he suggests that this parable has an application to each having a different gift within the ecclesia; whilst in 1 Cor. 12:11 and Eph. 4:7 he implies that he saw the talents as representing miraculous Holy Spirit gifts. This shows how Paul applied the basic principles of Christ's teaching to local situations, even though it may seem strictly to be slightly out of context. He does the same with Christ's commands concerning personal offences in Mt. 18; he applies them, strictly out of context, to dealing with doctrinal problems at Corinth. But this, presumably, is how we are to read the Gospels; understanding the basic principles, and applying them in different situations in practice.

Especially, Paul saw himself in the parables- just as we should. Paul describes himself as having been "shamefully entreated" when he brought the Gospel to

Philippi (1 Thess. 2:2)- using the Greek word used in Mt. 22:6 concerning how the messengers sent to the vineyard were “entreated spitefully”. And maybe Paul was consciously aware that the Lord Himself had spoken of how He would be “spitefully entreated” (Lk. 18:32) during His final sufferings. Hence Paul could speak of filling up the measure of Christ’s sufferings through what he suffered whilst preaching Christ’s Gospel (Col. 1:24).

## **7-3 Paul's Use Of The Sermon On The Mount (Mt. 5 - 7)**

These chapters are the most intensely alluded to part of the Gospels. Paul, James and Peter all pack their writing with conscious and unconscious allusion to them. They had more than memorized them. They were in their heart and deep consciousness; and they write as if they expect their audience to have a like familiarity with them (even though many of their readers / hearers were illiterate). Yet how many of us can recite those chapters, let alone claim to have them in our hearts? For Paul, just one phrase from these chapters echoed in his mind throughout the years; thus “Judge not, that ye be not judged”(Mt. 7:1) is at the basis of Rom. 2:1; the whole of Rom. 14, and 1 Cor. 4:3,5. And Paul's extraordinary ability to rejoice in his trials seems to have been rooted in his sustained reflection upon Mt. 5:11,12: “Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you...rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward...for so persecuted they the prophets”. These words are alluded to in at least 5 verses in his epistles. The following samples provide further insight into how Paul deeply absorbed the teaching of these passages. I have written down the implications briefly; you might like to make time to follow them up for yourself:

- Mt. 5:17 = Gal. 5:14. Christ fulfilled the Law by His supreme love of His neighbour (us) as Himself.

- Mt. 6:2,3 = 1 Tim. 4:8. The implication is that we aren't to take Mt. 6:2,3 (“they have their reward”) as implying that we have *no* reward in this life. We do (cp. Mt. 19:29).

- Mt. 6:14 = Eph. 4:32. Jesus said: “If you forgive, you'll be forgiven”. Paul subtly changes the tenses: “You've been forgiven already, so forgive”. It's as if Paul is saying: 'Think carefully about Mt. 6:14. Don't think it means 'If you do this, I'll do that for you'. No. God has forgiven you. But that forgiveness is conditional on the fact that in the future you will forgive people. If you don't, then that forgiveness you've already been given is cancelled. This is what Jesus really had in mind'. This would suggest a very very close analysis of those

simple words of Jesus, using all the logic and knowledge of Biblical principles which Paul had.

- Mt. 6:24 = Tit. 1:9. Holding to God as your master rather than mammon is achieved through holding on to His word.

- Mt. 6:25 = Phil. 4:6. How do we obey that command to “take no thought for your life”? By praying consciously for every little thing that you need in daily life, e.g. daily bread.

- Mt. 7:21 = Rom. 2:13. Paul saw the “Lord, Lord” people of the parable as the Jews of the first century who initially responded enthusiastically to the Gospel.

- Mt. 7:22 = 1 Cor. 13:2. To say “Lord, Lord” without really *knowing* Christ is living without love. Thus Paul saw an association between a lack of true love and an external show of appreciation of Christ's Lordship. Not doing what Christ says is a lack of love, in Paul's mind. If we appreciate this, we will see that those who are ignorant of Christ's words cannot show true love.

- Mt. 7:23 = 2 Tim. 2:19. Depart from sin now, or you'll depart from Christ at the judgment. This is Paul's classic way of making plays on words; again an indication of how his writings are partly a product of his own meditation upon and familiarity with the Gospels.

## 7-4 Paul's Exposition Of Gethsemane

“Gethsemane, can we forget?” we sing, as if it were so unthinkable that we should. But we do. His agony, His bloody sweat for our redemption slips out of our mind so easily. Yet for our Paul, this wasn't the case. The record of Gethsemane was firmly imprinted on his mind (see the list of allusions tabulated in our first study). He saw his own spiritual struggles as bringing him close to his Lord, as in utter prostration he battled with his deep inner nature to an intensity that none of us have reached. “Ye have not yet resisted unto blood (in your) striving against sin”(Heb. 12:4, alluding to His sweat as blood drops) is Paul's call for us to recognize this, and to have the picture of our Lord in Gethsemane as a motivation “lest we be wearied, and faint in (our) minds”. He's saying 'You've never got anywhere near that intensity. So don't get tired of the unending mental battle against your natural mind. Consider him there'. Paul's description of himself on the Damascus road falling down and seeing a Heavenly vision, surrounded by men who did not understand, is framed in exactly the language of Gethsemane (Acts 22:7 = Mt. 26:39); as if right at his conversion, Paul was brought to realize the spirit of Gethsemane. His connection with the Gethsemane spirit continued. He describes himself as



“sorrowful”(2 Cor. 6:10), just as Christ was then (Mt. 26:37). His description of how he prayed the same words three times without receiving an answer (2 Cor. 12:8) is clearly linked to Christ's experience in the garden (Mt. 26:44); and note that in that context he speaks of being “buffeted” by Satan’s servants, using the very word used of the Lord being “buffeted” straight after Gethsemane (2 Cor. 12:7 = Mt. 26:67). “We cry Abba, Father”(Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6), as our Lord did then (Mk. 14:36). We can, we really can, it is possible, to enter into our Lord's intensity then. Paul saw his beloved brother Epaphroditus as “heavy” in spirit (Phil. 2:26), using a word only used elsewhere about Christ in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:37; Mk. 14:33).

But Paul was a realist. He saw too that there were all too many similarities between him and the sleepy, weak-willed disciples in Gethsemane. He was “willing” to preach (Rom. 1:15), using a word only used elsewhere concerning the disciples then being willing in spirit but weak in operationalizing it (Mt. 26:41; Mk. 14:38); and we know that Paul often complained that he didn't preach in practice as he felt he ought to. Paul describes all of us as having been saved although we were weak, using the same word used about the disciples asleep in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:41 = Rom. 5:6). He saw the evident similarity between them and us, tragically indifferent in practice to the mental agony of our Lord, failing to share His intensity of striving- although we are so willing in spirit to do this. And yet, Paul implies, be better than them. Don't be weak and sleepy as they were when Christ wanted them awake (Mt. 26:40,41 = 1 Thess. 5:6,7). Strive for the imitation of Christ's attitude in the garden (Mt. 26:41 = Eph. 6:18). And yet in Romans 7, a depressed but realistic Paul laments that he fails in this; his description of the losing battle he experienced within him between flesh and spirit is couched in the language of Christ's rebuke to the disciples in Gethsemane.

Note that Luke and other early brethren seemed to have had the Gethsemane record in mind in their sufferings, as we can also do (Acts 21:14 = Mk. 14:36).

## **7-5 Paul And The Characters In The Gospels**

There is something about the Gospels which has universal relevance, to all times and places. It's as if in them we see every category of human character, and their response to the Gospel. Paul's mind was so saturated with the Gospel records that he seems to have seen the people in his life, both in the world and in the ecclesia, as having their counterparts in the characters presented in the Gospels. His familiarity with those records enabled him to make sense of life, it held no surprises for him, he saw all human behaviour as fitting in to the patterns and responses which are chronicled in the Gospels. By studying those same records we too can find a similar stability and framework for

understanding life as God would have us do. The following are examples of what I mean:

- Lk. 1:30 = Heb. 4:16. When you ask for forgiveness, be like Mary in her spiritual ambition in asking to be the mother of Messiah. Mary herself was an inspiration to Paul in his trial (Lk. 1:45 = Acts 27:25).
- Lk. 1:6 = Phil. 2:15; 1 Thess. 3:13. Have the serene spirituality, all down the years, of Zacharias and Elizabeth.
- Mt. 21:21 = Rom. 4:20. Paul saw Abraham as being like the man in the parable who had the faith to throw mountains into the sea.
- Often Paul sees similarities between the Pharisees' behaviour as recorded in the Gospels, and that of people he brushed against in his life (e.g. Mt. 15:2 = Gal. 1:14; Col. 2:8; Mt. 15:9 = Col. 2:22; Tit. 1:14; Mt. 16:6 = 1 Cor. 5:6,7; Gal. 5:9; Mt. 23:31,32 = 1 Thess. 2:15). And time and again Paul warns his brethren not to behave like the Pharisees did in various incidents in the Gospels (e.g. Mt. 23:4 = Acts 15:10; Mt. 23:25 Gk. = 1 Cor. 7:5, where Paul is saying 'If you lust inwardly but outwardly appear to have rejected marriage for the sake of the Gospel, you're like those condemned Pharisees). Let it be noted that the danger of Pharisaism, of spiritual hypocrisy, of adopting a hard line on issues which in essence we too fail in, was a great theme with Paul.
- Mt. 11:25 = 1 Cor. 1:19. Paul saw the simplicity of the Corinthian believers as the sort of thing Christ referred to in Mt. 11:25.
- Lk. 2:37 = 1 Tim. 5:5; 2 Tim. 1:3. Widows in the ecclesia should model themselves on Anna.
- Lk. 10:41 = 1 Cor. 7:32. Be aware that married life will tempt you to be more like Martha than Mary. And Mary was the more commendable.
- Lk. 8:23 = 1 Cor. 15:30. Paul felt that if he gave up his faith, he'd be like those faithless disciples in the storm on Galilee.
- Lk. 19:9 = Rom. 4:11,12. If you have real faith, you'll be like Zacchaeus. You'll have his determination, his unashamedness to come out in the open for Christ your Lord.
- Mk. 12:43 = 2 Cor. 8:12. Paul saw those generous ecclesias as the widow with one mite, and also as rich Mary giving what she had (Mk. 14:8 = 2 Cor. 8:11). This reveals his sensitivity; he knew some of them were poor, some rich.

Yet he saw they were all making a real effort. And he understood this in terms of characters in the Gospels.

- Mt. 5:7 = 2 Tim. 1:16. Paul saw Onesiphorus as the merciful man of Mt. 5:7; and the Jerusalem ecclesia (Heb. 10:34) as the persecuted people of Mt. 5:12.

- Mt. 20:22 = Rom. 8:26. This is an example of where appreciating the links with the Gospels opens our understanding of Paul's letters. Paul is implying that we are like the mother of Zebedee's children, in that when we pray, we know not what we ask for in the sense that we don't *appreciate* what we ask for. I know what to pray for: my redemption, and that of others. Read wrongly, Rom. 8:26 implies we haven't the foggiest what on earth to ask God for. But we *do* know what to ask for; the point is, we don't *appreciate* what we are asking for, just as that woman didn't appreciate what she was praying for when she asked that her two boys would be in the Kingdom.

- In addition to these, there are many significant allusions made by Paul to John the Baptist and Peter. These have been commented on elsewhere.

## 7-6 Paul In The Gospels

Paul didn't only see others in the Gospels. He saw himself, he saw his own life and experiences in the light of the words of the Gospels. He saw himself as having been like those Roman soldiers who nailed Christ to the tree trunk (Lk. 23:34 = 1 Tim. 1:13). He saw himself as "chief of sinners" (1 Tim. 1:15), and therefore one of those referred to by Christ in Mt. 9:13. Yet he also saw himself as the man who gives all to buy the pearl (Mt. 13:45,46 = Phil. 3:7,8; although this passage also alludes to Moses; as if he took inspiration from Moses to be like the man in the parable). He saw the excellency of the knowledge of Christ as the pearl whose beauty inspired even a rich man to give up all that he had. Paul took comfort, real comfort, from the way he found himself in situations similar to those of his Lord. Thus as he spoke and wrote to brethren who were not as spiritually mature as they ought to be for their time in Christ, he saw the similarity between himself and the Lord Jesus talking to the crowds, those crowds of very human people who at that time comprised God's ecclesia (Mt. 13:15 = Heb. 5:11). Or as he wrote to his unspiritual Corinthian brethren, he was doubtless hurt at the thought of their opposition to him; yet his mind flew to the similarities between himself and his Lord being rejected by *his* brethren (Mk. 3:21 = 2 Cor. 5:13). When Corinth reviled him (2 Cor. 7:4), he saw this as being reviled and persecuted after the pattern of Mt. 5:12. And when the world outside reviled him, he saw himself as the beaten prophets Jesus had spoken about (2 Cor. 11:24,25 = Mt. 21:35).

It's not so difficult to spot these allusions, once you are looking for them. But most of those allusions were probably the product of much conscious and unconscious meditation and churning over of those passages in his mind. Thus his decision not to take money from Corinth (1 Cor. 9:18) was due to his deep, deep meditation on the principle contained in Mt. 10:8; although there were other passages in the Gospels which he knew implied that it was Christ's will that the missionary should be paid (1 Cor. 9:14 = Mt. 10:10). This issues of payment shows how Paul based his life decisions on his understanding of the principles of the Gospels. He did far more than learn those Gospels parrot-fashion. They were in his heart, and influenced the direction of his life. Likewise he seems to have seen in Christ's prophecy that the Gospel would be fully known world-wide in the last days of the first and twentieth centuries as being a specific, personal command to him (Mt. 24:14 = 2 Tim. 4:17).

Paul was ever aware of his own proneness to failure. He saw himself as tempted to be like the man in the parable who thought he should have more, because he had laboured more abundantly than the others (Mt. 20:12 Gk. = 2 Cor. 11:25). He knew that his salvation partly depended upon not being ashamed of Christ's words before men; hence his frequent self-examination concerning whether he was witnessing as he should. Thus when he declares that he is not ashamed of the Gospel, he is expressing his certainty of salvation; he is implying that therefore Christ will not be ashamed of him at the judgment (Rom. 1:16; 2 Tim. 1:8,12,16 = Mk. 8:38). The threat of Lk. 9:23-25 rung in his mind (in 1 Cor. 3:15; 2 Cor. 7:9; Phil. 3:8): If a man gains the world for Christ but does not take up the cross, or is ashamed of Christ's words and principles in this world, he will be *cast away*. Especially does Paul allude to these words in 1 Cor. 9:27: "Lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway". Paul recognized his temptation: to think that his zeal for preaching excused him from taking up the cross. In essence, we must all see our own likely temptations: to focus on one area of spirituality, with the hope that it will excuse us from the cross.

Likewise the idea of *striving* to enter the Kingdom, the need for such agonizing effort (Lk. 13:24), meant an awful lot to Paul (1 Cor. 9:25; Col. 1:29; 1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 4:7). It's fashionable these days to focus upon the certainty of our redemption in Christ and to ignore the warnings about apostasy. In Paul we see a brother who brought these two strands together; because his mind was so Christ and Gospels-centred. He personalized those Gospels, he must have kept thinking to himself 'Now this applies to *me*...it really does...'. What a brother. What an active mind, a mind which he knew had Christ living in it. When you're good, really good, you know you're good without being proud about it. Paul knew he had the mind of Christ. He saw the power it influenced upon him. And without pride and undue self-presentation he invites us, time

and again, to follow (Gk. *mimic*) the level of mimicking Christ which he had reached.

## 7-7 Paul And John The Baptist

An analysis of the data presented above reveals that Paul alluded to some parts of the Gospels much more than others. An example of this is the way in which he alluded so extensively to the passages related to John the Baptist. I would suggest that the reason for this is that he saw John as somehow his hero, one for whom he had a deep respect. In doing so he was sharing the estimation of his Lord, who also saw John as one of the greatest believers. There are many 'unconscious' links between Paul's writings and the records of John, indicating how deeply the example and words of John were in Paul's mind (e.g. Mt. 3:7 = 1 Thess. 1:10; 5:9; Jn. 3:31 = 1 Cor. 15:47). Or consider how John said that wicked Jewry would be "hewn down"(Mt. 3:10); Paul uses the very same word to describe how the Jewish branches had now been "cut off"(Rom. 11:22,24). Paul saw himself as being like the best man, who had betrothed the believers to Christ (2 Cor. 11:2,3)- just as John had described himself as the friend of the bridegroom (Jn. 3:28). Or again, reflect how Paul's mention of John in Acts 13:24,25 apparently adds nothing to his argument; it seems out of context. But it surely indicates the degree to which John was never far below the surface in Paul's thinking.

It seems likely that Paul went to hear John the Baptist preach; "there went out to him all the land of Judea and they of Jerusalem"(Mk. 1:5), and at this time Paul was living in Jerusalem. I believe Paul heard John and was convicted by him of Christ. John preached the need to "bring forth fruits meet unto repentance"(Mt. 3:8); and Paul made those his own watchwords in his worldwide preaching (Acts 26:20). John's mission was to prepare Israel for Christ, to figuratively '*bring low*' the hills and mountains, the proud Jews of first century Israel, and raise the valleys, i.e. inspire the humble with the real possibility of salvation in Christ (Lk. 3:5). Paul uses the same Greek word for "bring low" no fewer than three times, concerning how the Gospel has humbled him (Acts 20:19; 2 Cor. 11:7; Phil. 4:12). It's as if he's saying: 'John's preaching did finally have it's effect upon me; it did finally make me humble enough for the Lord Jesus'. And as John made straight paths for men's feet that they might come unto Christ (Mt. 3:3), so did Paul (Heb. 12:13).

Paul seems to have admired the humility John the Baptist manifested in his preaching. He knew he had been chosen from the womb for his mission, as John had been (Gal. 1:15 = Lk. 1:15). He describes his preaching in language which is directly alluding to how John preached (Acts 26:20 = Mt. 3:8). As John said that he was *sent* to baptize, but especially to witness of Christ (Jn.

1:33), so Paul felt that he too was *sent to baptize*, but his emphasis was more on the preaching of Christ than physically baptizing (1 Cor. 1:17). As John preached repentance with a deep sense of his own unworthiness, so did Paul, with exactly that same sense (Acts 13:24,25 = 17:3; 20:21; 26:20). John described himself as a preacher of Christ who was not “worthy” to do so (Mt. 3:11). The same Greek word is used by Paul when he says he is “not *meet* (s.w.) to be called an apostle”(1 Cor. 15:9); and that it was God's grace alone that had made him an “*able* (s.w. “worthy”) minister of the Gospel”(2 Cor. 13:6). He knew that his “*sufficiency*”(s.w. “worthy”) to give knowledge of salvation (John language- Lk. 1:77), to be a preacher, was from God alone (2 Cor. 2:16; 3:5); and that in fact this was true of *all* preachers. But do we really feel like this in our preaching? John was a burning and shining light to the world (Jn. 5:35), just as we should be (Phil. 2:15). And therefore, if we are to witness as John did, we need to have the humility of John in our preaching. He was 'in the Truth' from a baby, he lived a spiritual, self-controlled life. And yet he had this great sense of personal sinfulness and unworthiness as a preacher. It's difficult for those raised Christian to have the sense of sinfulness which Paul had, and thereby to have his zeal for preaching. But actually his zeal was a reflection of John's; and John was a 'good boy', brought up in the Truth. Yet he had a burning sense of his spiritual inadequacy. Anglo-Saxon Christianity urgently needs to capture his spirit.

Truly Paul 'bore' Christ to the world just as John 'bore' (s.w.) Christ's Gospel (Acts 9:15 = Mt. 3:11). He was to bring others to the light just as John had (Lk. 1:77,79 = Acts 13:47; 26:18,23). Paul knew from all this that John the Baptist was his example: a man increasingly dwarfed by the utter supremacy of the Lord Jesus Christ, dogged by a sense of his own unworthiness, but deeply committed to spreading the knowledge of the glory of the Lord Jesus to others. We have shown elsewhere (*Paul and Christ*) that Paul achieved this; it is possible to trace an increasing awareness within him of the Lordship of Christ, of his own sinfulness, and of his ever increasing zeal for the preaching of the word (2 Tim. is classic proof of this). Sadly many a twentieth century disciple has lost his (or her) enthusiasm for these things once they hit their 30s. Paul felt he was “less than the least” of all saints, that he would be the least in the Kingdom (Eph. 3:8). He uses a closely related word to that used by John when he spoke of how he must “decrease”(Jn. 3:30). It was as if he felt like John at his most 'decreased', in prison at Machaerus, fearing death; and remember that Paul wrote Ephesians from prison too. But John was weak in prison; he doubted (momentarily) whether Jesus was the Messiah, “him that should come”(Lk. 7:19). Yet Paul seems to allude to this when he says that “he that shall come will come”(Heb. 10:37)- as if to say 'John, my hero, you had your weak moments too, but I've tried to learn the lesson from them'.

Paul's enthusiasm for John the Baptist was not just a passing phase; unlike our rather fleeting enthusiasm for Bible characters, as they come and go in our minds as we 'do our readings' or hear them spoken about in depth at a Bible School. As he began his first imprisonment in Rome, Paul's mind was still with John (Acts 28:28 = Lk. 3:6). And in his time of dying (at which he wrote 2 Tim.), John his hero was still in Paul's mind. Paul speaks of finishing his course (Acts 20:24; 2 Tim. 4:7), using a word only used elsewhere concerning John finishing *his* course (Acts 13:25).

Paul was keen for others to copy John the Baptist, to find in him the inspiration which he too had found. So he encourages his Ephesians not to drink wine but instead be filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18)- the very language of John (Lk. 1:15). In other words, 'Be like that Spirit-filled zealot John rather than enjoying the sloppy pleasures of this life!'. He saw John as an cameo of all the faithful (Heb. 11:37 = Mk. 1:6 and 1 Cor. 15:47 = Jn. 3:31).

God seems to have recognized with pleasure the degree to which Paul modelled his life on John, in that Paul's experiences of life were over-ruled to have connections with those of John. These connections simply could not have been engineered by Paul; e.g. the way in which they both died in prison at the behest of a crazy, woman-influenced despot. The Spirit also seems to make connections between John and Paul in the manner in which it describes them (e.g. Lk. 1:14 = Acts 15:13; 13:52; Lk. 1:15 = Acts 9:17; 13:9; Lk. 3:18 = Acts 13:15-19; Jn. 1:7,8,15 = Acts 23:11; 26:22; Jn. 3:27 = 1 Cor. 2:8-16). And the Spirit in Acts 19:18 seems to portray Paul in the language of John: "they came (to Paul) and confessed, and shewed their deeds"- just as men had to John.

## 7-8 Saul, Paul And Stephen

As well as John the Baptist, it would seem that Stephen likewise had a deep impact upon Paul. Stephen's condemnation had been because he had reminded the Jews of the fact "Heaven is my throne and earth is my footstool" and therefore the temple was not ultimately relevant (Acts 7:48,49). Yet only a few brief years later, Paul was using the very same words and logic on Mars Hill in Athens. It has been observed that Hebrews particularly has enough conscious points of contact with Stephen's words that it would seem that the author was very familiar with Stephen's words:

Acts [Stephen]	Hebrews
7:2,55	1:1-3; 2:10
7:2-5	11:8
7:2	11:1-31
7:9-36	3:16; 11:21,22

7:38	11:1-29 cf. 4:1-3
7:46	9:11,24 cp. Is. 66:1,2
7:39-43,52	3:7-12
6:14	ch. 1-6

Stephen's speech (and perhaps other, unrecorded words of Stephen) became imprinted upon Paul's mind and consciousness. In writing to the brethren he had once persecuted, both consciously and unconsciously Paul was reflecting Stephen's words. A clear example is found in the way Stephen describes Israel as "thrusting" Moses away from them (Acts 7:39); and Paul is the only other person in the New Testament to use this same Greek word- to describe how although Israel thrust God away from them, yet God did not thrust [AV "cast away"] His people from Himself (Rom. 11:1,2). The even unconscious influence of Stephen upon Paul is reflected in the way he speaks of himself as "born...brought up...educated"(Acts 22:2,3)- using the very terms Stephen uses in Acts 7 about Moses.

Paul's relationship with Stephen becomes even more acute when we reflect upon how Stephen says that Israel were taken into judgment "to Babylon"(Acts 7:43). He is quoting here from Amos 5:26, which in both the LXX and Masoretic text says that Israel were to go "to Damascus". Why does Stephen purposefully change "Damascus" to "Babylon"? Was it not because he knew there were many Christians in Damascus, and he didn't want to speak of 'going to Damascus' as a figure for condemnation? And yet *straight afterwards* we are reading that Saul 'went to *Damascus*' to persecute and kill the Christians there. It's as if Saul was so infuriated by Stephen's subtle change that he wanted to prove him wrong; he would 'go to Damascus' and not be condemned, rather he would condemn the Christians there, and make it *their* place of judgment. This suggestion may seem far fetched. But we have to remember the Pharisaic way of reasoning and thinking. Every phrase of Scripture was so valuable to them, and major life decisions would be made over one nuance of the text or interpretation of it. No wonder that in later life, Paul alludes to his dear friend Stephen so much. What a joy it will be to see them meet up in the Kingdom.

## 7-9 Following Elders

It should be evident from the above that Paul consciously modelled his life upon Moses and John: among others. David was another of Paul's heroes; to the point that David's words are quoted by him with the preface: "*I say...*" (Rom. 10:18). But above all, he modelled himself upon the Lord Jesus. There are others who exhibited this characteristic of modelling their lives around faithful Biblical characters. Saul and Jonathan modelled themselves on Gideon (1), Jeremiah upon Job (Jer. 20:14-18), Jeremiah upon Micah (Mic. 7:8 = Lam. 3:2



etc.), Jeremiah upon David (Jer. 20:10 = Ps. 31:13; 38:17; 41:9; 56:6; Jer. 20:12 = Ps. 54:7) . Jeremiah also has far more allusions than average to Isaiah and Deuteronomy; as if these books were his favourites. And David's final psalm of thanksgiving (2 Sam. 22) is shot through with allusion to so many faithful men who were obviously his heroes (just follow up the marginal references). At the end of his life, he felt so close to those who had gone before. This idea of consciously modelling, of having some characters as your heroes, your inspiration towards a closer following of God, was very much in Paul's thinking. Not only does he do it himself, but he encourages others to do it. He doesn't use the word 'modelling'; he uses the word 'mimicking', Greek 'mimicos', normally translated "follow" in the AV. This Greek word is used almost exclusively by Paul:

“Ye became *followers* of us and of the Lord....ye know how ye ought to *follow* us...an ensample unto you to *follow* us”(1 Thess. 1:6; 2 Thess. 3:7,9; the implication is that in the gap between 1 and 2 Thessalonians, they stopped following Paul as they initially did straight after his conversion of them).

“Be ye *followers* of me”(1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1)

“Whose faith *follow* (i.e. that of your ecclesial elders)”(Heb. 13:7)

Be “*followers* of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises”, e.g. Abraham (Heb. 6:12)

“Ye, brethren, became *followers* of the churches...in Judea”(1 Thess. 2:14).

So Paul encourages them to mimic him, to mimic Abraham, to mimic the persecuted ecclesias in Judea, to mimic the faithful elders in the Jerusalem ecclesia (e.g. Peter), *so that* they would be better mimickers of the Father and Son. But the idea of mimicking involves a child-likeness, an intellectual humility, a truly open mind. Why Paul used that word rather than a word which simply meant 'to copy' or 'to follow' was perhaps because he wanted to stress that this kind of conscious modelling of your life on someone else involved a real need for openness of mind to the word, resulting in an unfeigned, uncontrived, child-like mimicking. Paul is really encouraging his readers to get involved in this 'mimicking' of faithful examples, of absorbing their spirit into our own by careful, sustained meditation. Will we rise up to it? Or are we still on the level of whizzing through our Bible reading in 10 minutes / day, giving little thought to what we've read throughout the next 24 hours?

## 7-10 Connections Between The Gospels And Epistles: Observations

### Ecclesial Perspective

The majority of the pressures in Paul's life came from within the ecclesia. His life was based amongst the ecclesias; thus to him "all men" were the believers, not the world as a whole (Mk. 9:50 = Rom. 12:18). There is good reason to think that much of his persecution was the result of a group of Jewish infiltrators within the ecclesias, false brethren who organized a network of sabotage of Paul's work throughout the Roman world <sup>(1)</sup>. And on top of these more physical problems, Paul identified his biggest pressure as "the care of all the churches" which he said 'came upon (Gk. to throng / mob) (him) daily' (2 Cor. 11:28)- as if he woke up each morning and had these anxieties thronging his mind. As ever, Paul found comfort in all this in the Gospels. It is evident that he read many passages as applicable to ecclesial situations, whereas we would tend to apply them to the world. Consider the following examples:

- Christ's words about winning men Paul applied to winning ecclesial members round to a more spiritual and committed way of life (Mt. 18:15 = 1 Cor. 9:19-22).
- The rich fool was not read by Paul as referring to some Hollywood millionaire; he saw that character as being in the ecclesia (Mt. 19:21 = 1 Tim. 6:17-19).
- He read the prophecy of deceivers arising in the last days as referring to deceivers arising within the ecclesia, i.e. people who were already baptized, consciously deceiving the majority of the ecclesia. He repeats this conviction at least three times (Mt. 24:4 = Eph. 5:6; Col. 2:8; 2 Thess. 2:3). All I can say is that if we are truly in the last days, this is or will be the case amongst us now- no matter how hard we (quite rightly) attempt to stop the rot.
- The parable of the boozy house-keeper doesn't apply to this world, lost as it is in a comfortable alcoholic numbness to reality. According to Paul's use of it throughout 1 Thess. 5, it's a prophecy (not just a possible warning) of the state of the eldership of the latter day ecclesia.
- The idea of not resisting evil and offering the other cheek (Mt. 5:39) we normally apply to suffering loss from the world without fighting for our rights. Yet Paul took this as referring to the need to not retaliate to the harmful things done to us by members of the ecclesia (Rom. 12:16,17; 1 Cor. 6:7; 1 Thess.

5:15). Likewise the command to forgive our debtors when we pray (Mt. 6:14) is applied by Paul to the need to forgive those who sin against us in the ecclesia (Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13). Paul evidently expected believers to have a pretty rough ecclesial life. Perhaps we ought to warn new converts about this; for all too many have joined us with high expectations, only to become bitterly disillusioned after a few years by the behaviour within the ecclesia.

- Paul sees one application of serving mammon as acting in a hypocritical way in order to please some in the ecclesia (Mt. 6:24 = Gal. 1:10).

- Being ashamed of Christ's words doesn't just apply to not speaking up for the Truth when someone invites us to a topless bar after work. It's equally true, and the punishment for it just the same, in the context of not speaking out Christ's word in the ecclesia, to our very own brethren (Mk. 8:38 = 2 Tim. 1:8).

- Giving a cup of cold water to the little ones had nothing to do, as far as Paul was concerned, with sticking £20 in a collection for Oxfam. He took it as referring to our love for Christ's little ones, within the ecclesia (Mt. 10:42 = Heb. 6:10). And the context in the Gospels says the same.

### **Unexpected Interpretations**

For me, many of the above allusions revealed unexpected interpretations. Paul read the Gospels in a rather different way to how I do- doubtless because he was far more familiar with them, in every sense. Likewise some of his Old Testament interpretations I don't think I would ever have come to. What he sees implied in the few Old Testament references to Melchizedek, or the five different interpretations he gives Psalm 2 and Psalm 110, all make sense to me when I read them in his letters. But I doubt I would ever have come across them just reading the Old Testament once a year with the *Bible Companion*. The Biblical activity within Paul's mind was just phenomenal. He not only read. He must have almost constantly meditated as he made his tents, and as he walked, rode and sailed those endless miles. He was spiritually minded in the extreme. And thus he attained the mind of Christ.

I'd like to conclude with a few more examples of unexpected insights which the connections between Gospels and epistles give us to both passages in the Gospels and also his own writings:

- "Take heed to yourselves; if thy brother trespass...forgive him"(Lk. 17:3) is alluded to in Acts 20:28, where Paul says we should *take heed* of the likelihood of false teachers. Surely what he's saying is 'Yes, take heed to forgive your

brother personal offences, take heed because you'll be tempted *not* to forgive him; but have the same level of watchfulness for false teaching'.

- The "times of the Gentiles"(Lk. 21:24) appears to refer to the time of Gentile opportunity to learn the Gospel, according to how Paul alludes to it in Rom. 11:25.

- Christ "shall baptize *you*" plural (Mt. 3:11) was deeply meditated upon by Paul, until he came to see in the fact that we *plural* are baptized the strong implication that therefore we should be one body, without unnecessary divisions (= 1 Cor. 12:13).

- Paul saw Mt. 5:29, 30 in a sexual context (= Col. 3:5); which fits the context of Mt. 5:28.

- We are "perfect" in the sense of Mt. 5:48 if we truly, seriously forgive each other (= Eph. 4:32; 5:1).

- The command to have salt and therefore peace with each other (Mk. 9:50) is fulfilled, Paul saw, by watching our words (= Col. 4:6).

- The connection between Rom. 14:12 and Mt. 12:36 suggests that Paul recognized that we all speak idle words which we will have to give account of at judgment. Therefore, because of our rampant tongue, we will stand in deep need of grace. So therefore, Paul says, you'd better be soft on your brother now, in this life.

- The Lord had warned His followers to "despise not" the 'little ones' (Mt. 18:10). Paul picks up this phrase in 1 Tim. 6:2 in warning servants not to despise their masters who were brethren; the implication that they were to treat those wealthy but perhaps not very spiritually mature masters as 'little ones', with all the patience this would require.

- The things which God has prepared for those who love Him, things which the natural eye has not seen but which are revealed unto us by the Spirit, relate to our redemption in Christ, rather than the wonders of the future political Kingdom (because Mt. 13:11; 16:17 = 1 Cor. 2:9,10). The context of 1 Cor. 2 and the allusions to Isaiah there demand the same interpretation.

- Confessing Christ before men applies to baptism, not just bucking up the courage to give someone a leaflet at work (Mt. 10:32 = Rom. 10:9,10).

- The binding of the strong man in the parable was done by the death of Christ. One of the spoils we have taken from his house is the fact we don't need to keep the Mosaic Law (Mt. 12:29 = Col. 2:15).

- The very fact Christ calls us brethren in Mt. 12:50 Paul saw as proof of Christ's humanity (= Heb. 2:11). Paul really did meditate on every word of his Lord. Thus he says he was *persuaded* by the Lord Jesus that all foods were clean- this is how he took the Lord's teaching in Mk. 7. Those words *lived* to Paul, they were as the personal persuasion of his Lord.

- Christ's transfiguration was a cameo of the change that should be apparent deep within us (Rom. 12:20 = Mt. 17:2 Gk.).

- Give yourselves to prayer and fasting with the passion and intensity required to perform a miracle (Mt. 17:21 = 1 Cor. 7:5).

- Trinitarians please note that Phil. 2 was written by Paul with his mind on the death not birth of Christ, as their false theology requires (Phil. 2:7 = Mt. 10:28; and note the connections with Is. 53).

- The principles of Mt. 18:16,17 concerning dealing with personal offences are applied by Paul to dealing with moral and doctrinal problems at Corinth (= 2 Cor. 13:1; 1 Cor. 5:4,5,9; 6:1-6).

- The idea of the materialistic steward of the house smiting the fellow servant (Mt. 24:49) is referred to by Paul (in the Greek text) in 1 Cor. 8:12, concerning *wounding* the conscience of weak brethren. Paul's vision of the latter day ecclesia was therefore that materialistic elders would act with no thought as to their effect on the consciences of the flock, and thereby many would stumble.

- Paul saw the breaking of bread prefigured in Christ's feeding of the 4000 (Mt. 15:36 = 1 Cor. 11:24).

- At the breaking of bread, it's as if Christ is sprinkling us with His blood, it's as if we are Israel assembled together, re-entering the covenant each time we break bread. No wonder we are asked to assemble ourselves together (as far as possible) to remember Christ (Mt. 26:28 = Heb. 9:20). We have elsewhere made the point that Hebrews is full of appropriate material for a breaking of bread exhortation, which we believe it to have originally been.

## God's Confirmation

One final point. There can be no doubt that Paul struggled with all his might to take on the mind of Christ, to let Christ live within him. God seems to have shown His recognition of the extent to which Paul achieved this by over-ruling Paul's life so that it had so many parallels with the life of Christ <sup>(2)</sup>, parallels which Paul could never have engineered himself. He did the same with Paul and John the Baptist and with Paul and Peter. And the way in which God has recorded Paul's life in Acts is done in such a way as to show the similarities between him and Christ; thus the Spirit records that men "laid hands on" Paul (Acts 21:27), just as it does concerning the Lord Jesus (Mt. 26:50). Note too that the record of Paul's shipwreck is described in language which clearly reflects the LXX description of Jonah's sea voyage (e.g. Acts 27:18 = Jonah 1:5); to suggest that like Jonah, Paul was also fellowshipping the cross. My point is quite simply this: Paul made a supreme effort to fellowship the Lord Jesus, to absorb the spirit of Christ deeply into his own mind. God confirmed him in his efforts, by working in his life to give him circumstances which recalled the experiences of Christ, and which thereby encouraged him to do this even more successfully. And our God will do just the same for us, in our efforts to absorb our Lord, to eat that Passover lamb completely. What we now do, as this bread and wine become part of us, is to physically symbolize our commitment to making this effort, and therefore looking forward to God's help. For I am convinced that this is the thing God would most wish us to do: to vow, to really strive, to assimilate the spirit of His beloved Son.

## Appendix

Paul wasn't unique in this. Peter, James and John (the other New Testament authors) show a similar saturation with the Lord's words and work and person. Take a few examples from James<sup>(3)</sup>:

(JESUS) Matt 7.7,11: **Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you.** 8 "For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it shall be opened. 9 "Or what man is there among you, when his son shall ask him for a loaf, will give him a stone? 10 "Or if he shall ask for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? 11 "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven **give what is good** to those who ask Him!

(JAMES) Jas 1.5,17: "But if any of you lacks wisdom, **let him ask of God**, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him...Every **good thing** bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights"

(JESUS) Matt 21.21: “*And Jesus answered and said to them, “Truly I say to you, **if you have faith, and do not doubt**, you shall not only do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and cast into the sea,’ it shall happen. 22 “And all things you **ask in prayer, believing**, you shall receive.”*”

(JAMES) Jas 1.6: “*But let him ask in **faith without any doubting**, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. 7 For let not that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord*”

(JESUS) Matt 7.21f: “*Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven; **but he who does** the will of My Father who is in heaven. 22 “Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ 23 “And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.’*”

(JAMES) Jas 1.22-23: “*But prove yourselves **doers of the word, and not merely hearers** who delude themselves. 23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror;*”

(JESUS) Matt 7.1: “***Do not judge lest you be judged.** 2 “For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.*”

(JAMES) Jas 4.12: “*There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but **who are you who judge your neighbour?***”

(JESUS) Matt 5.34-37: “*But I say to you, **make no oath at all, either by heaven**, for it is the throne of God, 35 **or by the earth**, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. 36 “Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. 37 “But let your statement be, ‘Yes, yes’ or ‘No, no’; and anything beyond these is of evil.*”

(JAMES) Jas 5.12: “*But above all, my brethren, **do not swear, either by heaven or by earth** or with any other oath; but let your yes be yes, and your no, no; so that you may not fall under judgment.*”

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## Notes

(1) See H.A. Whittaker, 'The Jewish Plot', in *Studies In The Acts Of The Apostles* and my 'The Jewish Satan' in *The Real Devil*.

(2) These are listed in a number of commentaries on Paul. The most extensive list I know is in H.A. Whittaker, *Studies In The Acts Of The Apostles* (Cannock: Biblia, 1996).

(3) Parallels taken from Bruce Chilton and Craig Evans, eds, *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research* (Leiden: Brill: 1994), p. 177. I'd observe though that James is more vague in his allusions; Paul is very precise and tends to be more verbatim- as we'd expect of a Rabbinically trained mind.

## 8 Paul's Heroes

### 8-1 Paul And Moses

If Moses is the central, inspirational figure of the Old Testament scriptures and the Old Covenant, Christ is of the New Testament and New Covenant. And yet Christ was especially manifested in his matchless servant Paul. Paul seems to have consciously modelled his life upon that of Moses; he evidently saw Moses as his hero. For example, he speaks of how he has been used to bring about God's glory through "signs and wonder" (Rom. 15:18,19), in the very language of Moses bringing "signs and wonders" upon Egypt (Ex. 7:3,9; 11:9,10; Dt. 4:34; 6:22). The way Paul writes that he wishes they would all prophesy and that he 'forbids not' to use the Spirit gifts (1 Cor. 14:5,39) is all rooted in the language of Moses in Num. 11:28,29. And this is but the tip of an iceberg of such material. The evidence for this is quite compelling:

#### Paul

"His letters, say they (Paul's detractors in the new Israel) are weighty and powerful; but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible...though I be rude in speech...Christ sent me...to preach the Gospel: not with wisdom of words (mg. speech)" (2 Cor. 10:10; 11:6; 1 Cor.

#### Moses

"I am not eloquent (mg. a man of words)...I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue" (Ex. 4:10); this is how Moses felt he would be perceived, although actually he was formally quite fluent when in the court of Pharaoh (Acts



1:17).

Paul says he was “*taught* according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers” by Gamaliel, receiving the highest wisdom possible in the Jewish world; but he uses the same word as Stephen in Acts 7:22, describing how Moses was “*learned*” in all the wisdom of Egypt.

Paul earnestly asked three times for his “thorn in the flesh” to be removed (2 Cor. 12:9- the wonder is that he only asked three times. He knew it was for his spiritual good, and he believed this).

7:22). Paul would have remembered Stephen saying how Moses was formerly full of worldly *wisdom* and “mighty in words”. Paul felt that he too had been through Moses' experience- once mighty in words as the rising star of the Jewish world, but now like Moses he had left all that behind in order to try to save a new Israel from Judaism and paganism. As Moses *consciously* rejected the opportunity for leading the 'world' of Egypt, so Paul probably turned down the chance to be High Priest. God maybe confirmed both him and Moses in their desire for humility by giving them a speech impediment (the “thorn in the flesh” which Paul was “given”, 2 Cor. 12:7). Moses asked at least twice (maybe three times?) for him to be allowed to enter the land (Dt. 3:25; Ps. 90); but the answer was basically the same as to Paul: “My grace is sufficient for thee”. The fact Moses had been forgiven and was at one with his God was so great that his physical entering the land was irrelevant. And for Paul likewise, temporal blessings in this life are nothing compared

to the grace of forgiveness which we have received (Ex. 34:9).

“Therefore let us keep the feast (the breaking of bread, the new Passover), not with old leaven...of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth”(1 Cor.5:8). Paul's selfless relationship with Corinth was inspired by that of Moses with Israel.

This is echoing Moses' command to keep the Passover feast without leaven (Ex. 12:15; Dt. 16:3). Paul saw himself as Moses in trying to save a generally unresponsive and ungrateful Israel.

Thus Paul warns Corinth not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers (2 Cor. 6:14), or else he would come to them and not spare. In similar style, Paul warns the Hebrews to “serve God acceptably with reverence” because “our God is a consuming fire”(Heb. 12:29).

He is quoting the LXX of Num. 25:3 concerning how Israel joined themselves to Baal-peor, resulting in Moses commanding the murder of all those guilty-just as Paul later did to Corinth. He is quoting the very words of Moses in Dt. 4:24.

Paul saw visions of God which were impossible for him to explain (2 Cor. 12:1-5).

Moses saw the greatest visions of God of any man in the Old Testament; visions which he could not repeat; he only repeated the words of command which he was given. He did not tell Israel what he saw in Ex. 34.

Paul several times calls himself “a servant of God”(e.g. Tit. 1:1).

Paul is surely alluding to the frequent descriptions of Moses as God's servant.

The Lord Jesus seems to have encouraged Paul to see Moses as his hero. Thus he asked him to go and live in Arabia before beginning his ministry, just as Moses did (Gal. 1:17). When he

Moses was promised that he would be protected from Pharaoh so that he could bring out God's people from the darkness

appeared to Paul on the Damascus road, he spoke in terms reminiscent of the Angel's commission to Moses at the burning bush: "I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of those things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the (Jewish) people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, to...turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance...Whereupon...I (Paul) was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision"(Acts 26:16-19).

of Egyptian slavery ("the power of Satan"); going from darkness to light is used by Peter as an idiom to describe Israel's deliverance from Egypt, which the new Israel should emulate (1 Pet. 2:9). Moses led Israel out of Egypt so that they might be reconciled to God, and be led by him to the promised inheritance of Canaan. As Moses was eventually obedient to that heavenly vision, so was Paul- although perhaps he too went through (unrecorded) struggles to be obedient to it, after the pattern of Moses being so reluctant.

Paul "*counted*"(Phil. 3:8) the riches of this world as dung, that he might have the honour of sharing the sufferings of Christ. He was motivated in this by the example of Moses in rejecting the rulership and riches of Egypt in order to share "the reproach of Christ".

The same word is used in Heb. 11:26 concerning how Moses "*esteemed*" the reproach of Christ greater riches than those of Egypt. Paul looked at Moses' example and was truly inspired to utterly despise worldly advantage, and to appreciate the sheer *honour* of sharing the sufferings of Christ. The height of this calling should make our wealth or poverty in this world utterly irrelevant. And we too should be inspired by Moses as Paul was. For Moses is specifically intended as our example.

He describes Epaphroditus as one of those “that ministered to my wants”(Phil. 2:25).

Paul warned the new Israel that after his death (“after my departing”, Acts 20:29) there would be serious apostasy. This is the spirit of his very last words, in 2 Tim. 4.

“Take heed therefore unto yourselves”(Acts 20:28) To help them combat this apostasy, and to set them an example in faithfulness to the word, Paul pointed out that “I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God”(Acts 20:27).

“Serving the Lord with all humility of mind”(Acts 20:19). “I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publicly” (Acts 20:20). “Of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things”(Acts 20:30).

“Now, brethren I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance”(Acts 20:32).

“I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel”(Acts 20:33)

The Greek for “ministered” is used in the LXX concerning the priests (and Joshua) ministering to Moses in practical things.

This is exactly the spirit of Moses' farewell speech throughout the book of Deuteronomy, and throughout his final song (Dt. 32). “After my death ye will utterly corrupt yourselves”(Dt. 31:29). “Take heed unto yourselves” is repeated so many times in Deuteronomy (e.g . Dt. 2:4; 4:9,15,23; 11:16; 12:13,19,30; 24:8; 27:9). Exactly as Moses completely revealed all God's counsel to Israel (Acts 7:33; Dt. 33:3).

“The man Moses was very meek”(Num. 12:3). The humility of Moses really fired Paul. As Moses shewed God to Israel and publicly taught them. As Moses likewise warned in his farewell speech that false prophets would *arise* - and should be shunned and dealt with (Dt. 13:1).

This is the spirit of the whole of Deuteronomy, Moses' farewell warning: love the word, be obedient to it, because this will lead

you to inherit the promised land for ever. He pleaded with them to “take heed to thyself” that they kept God's word and taught it to their children, so that they would enter the land (Dt. 4:1,9). These words are alluded to by Paul in 1 Tim.4:16, where he says that attention to the doctrine of the new covenant will likewise save us and those who hear us.

This is the spirit of Moses in Num. 16:15: “I have not taken one ass from them”. Paul maybe had these words in mind again in 2 Cor. 7:2: “We have wronged no man...we have defrauded no man”.

“Neither count I my life dear unto myself”(Acts 20:24). “I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ (i.e. condemned- s.w. Gal. 1:8,9) for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh”(Rom. 9:3). Paul is here rising up to imitate Moses at perhaps his finest hour- willing, at least in principle, to give up his eternal life for the sake of Israel's salvation. The extent of Paul's love for natural Israel does not come out that strongly in the Acts and epistles; but this allusion to Moses says it all. Yet Paul knew that if he gave his body to be burned in Gehenna, i.e. allowed himself to be condemned for others but without *true* love, it would *still* mean nothing (1 Cor. 13:3 cp. Jn.

This was the spirit of Moses, in being willing to give his own physical and eternal life for the salvation of Israel (Ex. 32:30-32).

Who else prayed like this for Israel's salvation? Only Moses. He tried to match the intensity of Moses' prayers for Israel on Sinai.

15:6). The RVmg. renders Rom. 9:3: “I could pray...”, more clearly alluding to Moses’ prayer that the people might enter and he be rejected. Yet Paul perceived that God would not accept a substitute offering like that; and hence he says he *could* pray like this. In essence, he had risen to the same level. Likewise he wrote in 1 Thess. 2:8 RV that he was “well pleased [i.e. theoretically willing] to impart unto, you not the gospel of God only, but our own souls, because ye were dear unto us”. He perceived the difference between mere imparting of the Gospel in preaching, and being willing to give ones’ soul, ones salvation, because of a heart that bleeds for others. No wonder Paul was such a convincing preacher, with such love behind his words.

“My heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved”(Rom. 10:1).

Throughout 2 Cor. 3:15-4:6, Paul comments on how Moses' face shone with God's glory, and yet he spoke to Israel through a veil, with the result that Israel did not appreciate God's glory.

He speaks of him and all preachers of the true Christian Gospel as “able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life” (2 Cor. 3:6)- clear allusion to Moses as the minister of the old, inferior covenant.

Paul uses this to explain why Israel did not respond to his preaching; “if *our* preaching be hid, it is hid to them that are lost” (2 Cor. 4:3). Paul therefore saw himself and his fellow preachers as like Moses, radiating forth the glory of God in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, to an Israel which had the veil upon their heart. This allusion must have so angered the Jews- to suggest that Christian preachers were like Moses!

“...but then face to face”(1 Cor. 13)

Moses is the one who saw

God face to face (Num. 12:8). Surely Paul saw the depth of fellowship which Moses achieved in this life as indicative of the richness of felicity with the Father which we will all ultimately achieve.

## 8-2 Paul And King Saul: An anti-hero

Various expositors have noticed the links between Saul and Paul. "Is Saul also among the prophets?" was directly matched by 'Is Saul of Tarsus also among the Christians?'. The way Paul was let down through a window to escape persecution was surely to remind him of what King Saul had done to David (1 Sam. 19:12). They were both Benjamites, and perhaps his parents saw him as following in Saul's footsteps. And it seems Paul was aware of this. The implication is that Paul consciously changed his name from Saul to Paul ('the little one'). It is difficult to avoid seeing the link with 1 Sam. 15:17: "When thou wast little (Heb. 'the littlest one') in thine own sight", God anointed Saul and made him the *rosh*, the chief, over Israel. Maybe Paul's parents intended him to be the *rosh* over Israel; and it seems he would have made it had he not been converted. I suggest that 1 Sam. 15:17 rung in Paul's mind. He saw how he had persecuted Christ, as Saul had David. He saw the self-will within him as it was in Saul. Yet he went on to see the tragedy, the utter tragedy, of that man. He saw how pride had destroyed a man who could have achieved so much for God. And he determined that he would learn the lesson from Saul's failure (as he determined to learn the lessons from those of John the Baptist and Peter). So he changed his name to Paul, the little one. What influence his sustained meditation on one Old Testament verse had upon him! It affected some basic decisions in his life; e.g. the decision to change his name. There was a time, according to the Hebrew text of 1 Sam. 15:17, when Saul felt he was 'the littlest one' (as demonstrated in 1 Sam. 9:21; 10:22). This was so, so pleasing to God. Saul at that moment, captured as it were in a snapshot, as the obvious, anointed King of Israel hid among the baggage, knowing in his heart he was no way suited to be the leader of God's Israel, was Paul's hero. And Paul alludes to it when he says he is less than the *least* of all saints, *least* of the apostles, chief of sinners (1 Cor. 15:9; Eph. 3:8; 1 Tim. 1:15- note the progressive realisation of his sinfulness over time). He earnestly resolved to be like Saul was at the beginning. When he describes himself as "anointed" (2 Cor. 1:21) he surely had his eye on 1 Sam. 15:17 again; when Saul was little in his own eyes, he was anointed. Paul tried to learn the lessons from Saul, and re-apply Saul's

characteristics in a righteous context. Thus Saul was jealous (1 Sam. 18:8; 19:1), and Paul perhaps had his eye on this when he describes himself as jealous for the purity of the Corinthians (2 Cor. 11:2). “I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision”(Acts 26:19) is surely a reference back to Saul's *disobedience* (1 Sam. 15:22).

## 9 Paul and Corinth

In the letters to Corinth we really come to learn something of the mind of Paul; and he asked us to follow him, so that we might follow our Lord the more closely. So we want to analyze the relationship between Paul and Corinth in some detail; for we are all in desperate need of learning how to relate to each other better.

Firstly, let's firmly place in our minds the supreme spirituality of Paul. He saw visions which were unlawful to be uttered, he could look back on a string of ecclesias worldwide which were a result of his work, his writings show that he reached higher into the mysteries of God than most other man have ever gone. Naturally speaking, it must have been so difficult for him to relate to immature or unspiritual brethren and sisters! And yet his sense of identity with his spiritual children comes through all the time. Note how he purposefully mixes his pronouns: “*We* know in part...*I* know in part...*we* see in a mirror...*I* spoke as a child”(1 Cor. 13).

Now consider Corinth. Getting drunk at the breaking of bread, some members openly committing incest and other sexual perversions; and being justified by much of the ecclesia. Some had not the knowledge of God (1 Cor.15:34). The basic truth of Christ's resurrection and the second coming were denied, and Paul was slandered unbelievably. There is fair emphasis on Corinth's willing belief of the vicious denigration of Paul's character, made by some of their elders (1 Cor.2:16; 3:10; 4:11-14; 9:20-27; 14:18). The depths to which that ecclesia sunk are hard to plumb. And yet Paul believed that they abounded in love for him; he asks them to abound in their generosity to others as they abounded in their love for him (2 Cor. 12:7). Truly Paul reflected his own experience of having righteousness imputed to him.

So the relationship between Paul and Corinth is fascinating, but above all it's instructive of not only how we should relate to each other, but how Christ relates to us. There is a strange paradox throughout the letters to Corinth. Paul uses the most exalted and positive language about them, enthusing about the certainty of their salvation, and yet he also accuses them of the most incredible spiritual weaknesses. There's a clear example in the chapter we've just read. In 1 Cor.1:8,9, we read of Paul enthusiastically saying that God would “confirm



*you* (note that) unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus". But then in v.12 he accuses every one of them of being guilty of factionism and division: "*Every one of you* (the same 'you' of v.8,9) saith, I am of Paul...(etc.)". Paul really believed what he says in v.4: "I thank my God always on your behalf (implying: 'You ought to be thanking Him, but I'm doing it for you?'), for the grace of God which is given you...". This was the secret of how Paul managed to relate to them so positively; He deeply believed that they were in receipt of God's grace on account of their being in Christ.

## The Love Of Paul

So let's just review the positive way in which Paul felt towards his Corinthian brethren. His love for them was "in (his) heart, known and read of all men"(2 Cor.3:2). He boasted to others of their "zeal" to give money to the poor, even though it seems they had just made empty promises (2 Cor. 9:2). And in 2 Cor. 9:13 he goes even further; he speaks as if they had already distributed money to other churches. He saw them as righteous, even though they hadn't performed the acts they vaguely spoke of. Paul was surely reflecting the spirit of the Father and Son here. It may even be that Paul mentioned his devotion to Corinth in his 'front-line' presentation of the Gospel to others: "We preach...Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake"(2 Cor.4:5). His great wish was their "perfection"(2 Cor. 13:9). Paul's deep-seated love for Corinth was absolutely evident to all who knew them; it was not an act of the will, which occurred just within Paul's mind. So often our 'love' for difficult members of the ecclesia is no more than a grimly made act of the will. Even in the midst of rebuking them, Paul uses the language of real endearment: "Wherefore, *my dearly beloved* , flee from idolatry"(1 Cor.10:14). The word "brethren" occurs as a refrain throughout the letters; it appears 19 times in the first letter alone, compared with 9 times in the letter to the Romans (a longer epistle). This is similar to the way in which Jeremiah repeatedly describes the Israel who rejected and betrayed him as "my people"(e.g. Jer. 8:11,19,21,22). Despite all the cruel allegations made by them against Paul, he did not deal with them in the cagey, 'political' manner so common in our circles: "*O ye Corinthians* , our mouth is open unto you, our heart is enlarged"(2 Cor. 6:11). It is noteworthy that Paul is here alluding to Ps. 119:32, which speaks of God's word enlarging a man's heart. It was through his application to the word that Paul came to this large-hearted attitude. A smaller man than Paul would have trod mighty carefully with Corinth, making no more than succinct, measured statements. But his deep love for them led Paul to be as open-hearted as can be. Indeed, his pouring forth of his innermost soul to them in the autobiographical sections of 2 Cor. is evidence of how his heart and mouth were truly opened and enlarged unto them. There was no shrugging of the shoulders within Paul at the spiritual plight of Corinth: "Ye are in our hearts, to die and live with you"(2 Cor. 7:3). And it was this basic love which was in Paul's heart which led him to

a wonderful spirit of hopefulness; so that even towards the end of his second letter he can speak of his “hope, that as your faith groweth, we shall be magnified in you”(2 Cor. 10:15 RV).

### Corinth's Response

This love of Paul found at least some response from Corinth. Titus told Paul of their feelings for him: “He told us your earnest desire (for Paul), your mourning, your fervent mind toward me; so that I rejoiced the more”(2 Cor.7:7). Here they were, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, and Gentiles of the Gentiles; in a state of spiritual love with each other. The strange paradox of Paul's great love for them, yet also his repugnance at their evil ways, is perhaps explicable in terms of their spiritual 'in-loveness'. As a spiritual sister (cp. Abigail?) can marry an alcoholic (Nabal?) because she sees the good side in him, whilst not turning a blind eye to his drinking; as a father ever loves wayward children; so Paul felt towards his beloved sons, his attractive young bride (2 Cor.11:2) of Corinth. That there was at least some love for Paul by Corinth is made tragically evident from 2 Cor. 12:15: “The more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved”. This is surely the language of falling out of love. And Paul was the aggrieved party. As with so many a father and young husband, Paul had to go through the pain of sensing that the object of his love was keeping him at arm's length, was being partial in their response to the great love he was showing: “Ye have acknowledged us (our love) *in part* , that we are your rejoicing”(2 Cor.1:14). Yet Paul took great comfort from their albeit partial response: “Now I *praise you* brethren, that ye remember me in all things”(1 Cor.11:2); whilst struggling on to make them realize the intensity of his feelings towards them: “Out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears (picture the old boy sobbing as he moved his quill)...*that ye might know the love* which I have *more abundantly* unto you”(2 Cor.2:4). Despite the spiteful way in which they demanded Paul bring letters of recommendation with him (2 Cor.3:1), Paul jumped at their even partial spiritual response <sup>(1)</sup>: “Great is my glorying of you! I am filled with comfort, I am exceedingly joyful in all our tribulation” because of their positive spiritual reaction to the visit of Titus (2 Cor.7:4).

### Hard Discipline

It is often implied that Paul was perfectly happy to put up with the mess at Corinth, and that therefore we should not be unduly concerned at the state of our latter day ecclesias. This could just not be further from the truth. Perhaps the greatest indication of Paul's love for Corinth is seen in his apparent severity towards them, his desire that they really should abide in Christ. Thus in 1 Cor.4:21 Paul parallels coming to them in love with coming “with a rod”. The sarcasm of 1 Cor.4:8-14 (and many other places), his hard words of 1 Cor.3:1-

3, all indicate that he saw Corinth for the apostates which they were; and responded to this. “If I come again, I will not spare...know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?”(2 Cor. 13:2,5). This was more than the externally strict schoolteacher with a soft heart, more than dad just laying the law down one evening. What Paul was threatening was radical; it may be that he would have used the power of the Holy Spirit to smite them with literal death<sup>(2)</sup>. 1 Cor. 11:30 would imply that either Paul or another apostle had done this to them on a previous visit. “I am jealous over you with Godly jealousy”(2 Cor.11:2) is one of a series of allusions in that chapter to the events of Num.25, where Phinehas was moved with jealousy to slay those who were “unequally yoked” with the things of Belial (cp. 2 Cor.6:14). Paul had accused his Corinthians of just that; and he was quite willing to play the role of Phinehas.

“I will bewail many that have sinned...if I come again, I will not spare”(2 Cor.12:21; 13:2) is actually an allusion to Ez.8:18: “Is it a light thing to the house of Judah that they commit the abominations which they commit here (in the natural and spiritual temple of Yahweh, cp. 2 Cor.6:16)?...therefore will I also deal in fury: mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: and though they cry in mine ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them”. God's anger with Israel as expressed at the Babylonian invasion was going to be reflected in Paul's 'coming' to spiritual Israel in Corinth. Yet for all his high powered allusions, Paul mixed them with the most incredible expressions of true love and sympathy for Corinth. In this we see the giant spiritual stature of that man Paul.

## No Blind Eye

Paul evidently did not turn a blind eye to his brethren's failures. He spoke of them in one breath as being spiritually complete, whilst in the next he showed that he was truly aware of their failures. There's a glaring example of this in 1 Cor. 5:6,7: “A little leaven (which they had in their bad attitude, and also in the presence of the incestuous brother) leaveneth the whole lump. Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, *as ye are unleavened*”. They had leaven; otherwise Paul would not have told them to purge it out. But then he tells them that they are “unleavened”. In other words, he saw them *as if* they were unleavened, but he recognized that they had the bad leaven among and within them. There's another blatant example of this in 1 Cor.8:1,4,7: “As touching things offered unto idols, we know that we all have knowledge...(v.4) we know that an idol is nothing in the world...(v.7) howbeit there is not in every man (in the ecclesia) that knowledge”. So Paul starts off by saying that they all knew about the correct attitude to meat offered to idols. But then he recognizes that in reality, not all of them did know, or at best, they did not appreciate what they knew. 1 Cor.11:2 has more of the same: “I praise you,

brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you"; but then Paul goes on to show how they had blatantly disobeyed the ordinance he delivered them concerning the breaking of bread <sup>(3)</sup>. Again, Paul sees the Corinthians *as if* they were perfect, but then goes on to point out their failures. This is surely a reflection of how the Lord Jesus sees each of us His people. 1 Cor. 3:1,18 shows how the Corinthians thought they were wise, when actually Paul could only address them as carnal babes in Christ; they were not "wise". Yet in 1 Cor. 10:15 Paul concludes a section with the words: "I speak *as* to wise men...". He treated them *as if* they were wise, when he knew that they weren't in reality. He begins by rejoicing that "in every thing ye are enriched by him...in all knowledge"(1 Cor. 1:5), even though this was only potentially true- they had been given the knowledge, but had failed to turn it into true wisdom. Likewise Paul spells it out to them that their behaviour was likely to exclude them from the Kingdom; but in the same context he speaks as if it is taken as read that they will be in the Kingdom: "*The saints* shall judge the world. And if the world shall be judged by *you...we* shall judge Angels"(1 Cor. 6:2,3,9).

It is so significant that Paul did not turn a blind eye to his brethren's faults. In seeking to be positive, we so often do this. But we are asked to relate to each other, as Christ does to us. And he certainly doesn't turn a blind eye to our failures. Yet our problem is that if we don't turn a blind eye, we find it so hard to relate to our brethren. So what is the secret of being able to look at both the good and bad sides of our brethren? I suggest the answer is something along these lines:

At baptism, a new man was born inside us, personified in the New Testament as "the man Christ Jesus", "the Spirit", etc. Yet there is still the devil within us, a personification of our sinfulness. We identify our *real* selves as our spiritual man (note how Paul refers to that side of him as "I myself" in Rom. 7:25). God looks upon us *as if* we are Christ Jesus, He sees us as justified in Him, He sees us as if we are as perfect as Christ; not that we are in ourselves, of course. This is how He wants us to view our brethren; if we see them as God sees us, we will see them as the spiritual man which they have within them. Yet like God, we will not turn a blind eye to their weaknesses. Paul looked ahead to the day when God would have confirmed Corinth "unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus"(1 Cor.1:8). We too need to try to live the Kingdom life now; we must live *as if* we are in the day of Christ's Kingdom (Rom.13:12,13). So in some ways we must see our brethren as they will be in the Kingdom. Thus in 2 Cor.10:6,15 Paul speaks about the day when Corinth's "obedience is fulfilled...*when* your faith is increased...we shall be enlarged by you...abundantly". "We are your rejoicing, even as ye also are ours, *in the day of the Lord Jesus* . And in *this confidence* I was minded to come unto you..."(2 Cor.1:14). Paul's confidence in them was on account of the rejoicing he looked

forward to having concerning them at the day of judgment. Some of his final words to them totally summarize his attitude: “This also we wish, even your perfection”(2 Cor.13:9). He looked earnestly towards the day when they would be spiritually matured. We too must recognize that we are all only children. We must look to what both we and our brethren *will be* one day, in spiritual terms. This certainly takes some spiritual vision. Yet Paul had just this: ...having hope, *when* [not ‘if’] your faith is increased, that we shall be enlarged by you”(2 Cor. 10:15). He here recognizes that their faith is now weak, and must increase; but he also had written that they were to remain standing in the faith (1 Cor. 16:13). They were weak in faith; this he recognized. But he recognized their *status* as being ‘in the faith’. So concerned was he with them that he says that if they were obedient to what he had asked them, then he would be ready to “revenge *all* disobedience”(2 Cor. 10:6). It’s as if he was taking them one step at a time in bringing them to realize their errors; like the Lord, he spoke the word to men as *they* were able to hear it, not as *he was able* to expound it or expose their failures. We are seeking the salvation and betterment of our brethren, not simply to air our perceptions of their inadequacies.

### **Corinth: Washed And Sanctified**

He saw Corinth as truly saved in prospect, by reason of their being in Christ. He quotes the words of Lev. 26:13 “I will dwell in them and walk in them...and they shall be my God” about Corinth (2 Cor. 6:16)- even though those words were said to be describing a status conditional upon Israel’s obedience. “He which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and *shall* present us (not 'hopefully, if you get your act together!') with you”(2 Cor.4:14) sounds as if Paul fully expected the Corinthians to be there, and to be joined at the right hand side of the judgment seat by himself and Titus. 1 Cor.15:51 has the same certainty of their acceptance: “*We* shall be changed”. “*We* (Paul and Corinth) know...we have a building of God...eternal in the heavens”(2 Cor.5:1), i.e. the spiritual man Christ Jesus within each man who is in Christ. Truly could Paul write: “Our *hope* of you is steadfast, knowing that, as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so should ye be also of the consolation”(2 Cor.1:7). *They*, woolly Corinth, would judge the world in the Millennium (1 Cor. 6:2). “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, *be with you all*”(2 Cor.13:14) must have taken some writing, even under inspiration. “Be with *you all* “would have included those Judaist-influenced brethren hell-bent on destroying Paul's work and image, those who had sinned grievously, and those whose doctrinal appreciation was starting to slip. Yet this was how Paul saw them; as being in Christ, and abiding in the love of God and fellowship of the Holy Spirit; thanks to their baptism into Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and abiding (at least for that present time) in that blessed relationship. 2 Cor.11:2 even shows Paul likening Corinth ecclesia to

the guileless Eve in Eden, not yet having sinned, all innocence and uncorrupted beauty. And yet he saw himself as the Eve who had been deceived and punished by death (Rom. 7:11,13 = Gen. 2:17; 3:13); but he saw them as the Even who had not yet sinned. This was no literary trick of the tail; he genuinely felt and saw them as better than himself to be- such was the depth of his appreciation of his own failures. Paul saw Corinth as abounding in knowledge and love (2 Cor. 8:7), even though they had some who lacked the basic knowledge of God (1 Cor. 15:34), and they needed exhortation to confirm their love to the disfellowshipped brother (2 Cor. 2:6-8). Likewise, unfaithful Israel is still addressed as “the virgin of Israel hath done a very horrible thing”(Jer. 18:13); she was seen as a virgin right up until the Babylonian invasion, where she was as it were ‘raped’ (Jer. 14:17 Heb.). We reflect the same paradox in our efforts to see evidently weak brethren as still sanctified in Christ.

Having spoken of fornicators, idolaters, thieves etc., all of whom were found within the Corinth ecclesia, Paul says: “But such *were* some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the spirit of our God”(1 Cor.6:11). The reference to washing, and the Father, Son and Spirit all points back to baptism for the remission of sins (Mt. 28:19). The fact those people had been baptized meant so much to Paul. The significance of our brethren's baptisms should also make a deep impact on ourselves. By this act they became “in Christ”. The Corinthians were committing idolatry, fornication etc. Paul was aware of that. But he was prepared to see them as being sanctified in Christ; he counted them as if this was not happening: *for the time being*. There was coming a time when he would no longer accept that they were in Christ, and when he would not spare them in any way (2 Cor.13:2). The repented of failures of our brethren, however severe they may seem to us, must be overlooked if there is real evidence that they are making effort to abide in Christ. Unrepentant fornication or idolatry is hardly proof of this. “We pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God”(2 Cor.5:20) indicates that Paul did not see them as reconciled to God; yet he looked at the man Christ Jesus within them in order to be able to have all the positive feelings towards them which he did. So clear was Paul's vision of their spiritual man that he could actually boast about their 'good side' to other ecclesias (2 Cor. 7:4,14; 9:2). So enthusiastic was Paul about the great grace of God which Corinth basked in, that he actually made other ecclesias truly affectionate of Corinth: “which long after you for the exceeding grace (Paul knew just how exceeding it was to Corinth!) in you”(2 Cor.9:14).

And Paul showed this same spirit in all his dealings with his brethren. He could say in all honesty that “I am convinced, my brothers, that you are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another”(Rom.

15:14 NIV)- even though there must have been major problems in Rome, not least the Jew: Gentile division. He was so positive about them that he could write that he was sure that Corinth's labour was "not in vain"(1 Cor. 15:58)- and yet he knew that labour was in vain if converts fell away (1 Thess. 3:5). Yet he acted towards them, and genuinely felt as if, they would not and had not fallen away. This was quite some psychological and spiritual achievement, given the depths of their apostasy. Corinth hated Paul, slandered him, despised him. And yet he can write that their love for him "abounded"(2 Cor. 8:7). I take this not as sarcasm, but as a deep attempt by him to view them positively. We are challenged by Paul's example to look at our brethren the same way.

### **"As God...hath forgiven"**

We are told to forgive one another, "*as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you*"(Eph.4:32). All our sins were forgiven, in prospect, at baptism. All our irritating habits and attitudes, our secret sins, all these were forgiven then. And we must respond to this by counting our brethren to have received the same grace. Seeing we have received this grace, why do we find it so hard to see our brethren like this? Surely the answer rests in the fact that we don't fully believe or appreciate the degree to which God really does see us personally as being perfect in Christ. Paul was so super-assured of his own salvation, of the fact that God really did see him as a man in Christ, and therefore he found it easier to see his brethren in such a positive way. He was so conscious of how his many sins were just not counted against him. He knew that he was "chief of sinners", he didn't turn a blind eye to himself; because he could realistically face up to his own position before God, he found it easier to do the same for his weak brethren.

The fact that Paul saw the spiritual man in all his brethren means that to some degree he saw them all as equal. He seems to bring this point out in 1 Cor. 4:14,17: "As my beloved sons I warn you (Corinth ecclesia)...for this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son...". Paul calls both Corinth and Timothy his beloved sons. The implication is that to some degree, he felt the same towards dodgy Corinth as he did towards the spiritually strong Timothy. Likewise Christ showed his love for the whole church when he died on the cross. This does not mean, of course, that Paul did not have deeper bonds with some than with others. But the fact is that in spiritual terms, he saw all his brethren as equal, in that they shared the same status of being justified in Christ. Whether one had 2% righteousness and another 5% was irrelevant; they both needed the massive imputation of God's righteousness through Christ. As Paul could call both Timothy and Corinth his "beloved sons", so God calls both Christ and ourselves by the same title (Mt.3:17 cp. Col.3:12; 1 Jn.3:2; 2 Thess.2:13) . The reason? Because "he hath made us accepted (by being) in the beloved (son)" (Eph.1:6).

## “Yours, and yours, and yours...”

This equality of love for each of us is something which I find quite surpassing in its wonder. The bread and wine are equally divided amongst us, each of us partake of the love of Christ. By this we should all be equalled, levelled out. We are each justified by faith in his blood, we are each brought up to the same peerless standard of Christ's righteousness. We rejoice together in equal hope of the glory of God. I recall Stewart Algar ending a talk at Norwood with a verse about the love of Christ, which I scribbled at the back of my Bible:

“The love that I have is the life that I have,  
And the love that I have is all that I have,  
And it's yours, and yours, and yours...”.

### Appendix: Jude, Peter And Corinth

A case can be made that the letters of Peter and Jude were also written to Corinth. Peter visited Corinth, presumably focusing his preaching on the Jewish community, and perhaps he was writing his letters specifically to the Jewish house churches there (1 Cor. 1:12; 3:22; 9:5). The same concerns are apparent as in Paul's letters to Corinth: The need to distinguish between spiritual and unspiritual persons who despised others (Jude 19 = 1 Cor. 2:6 - 3:4; 8:1-3); those who perverted liberty into licence (Jude 4 = 1 Cor. 6:12; 10:23), becoming slaves of sensuality (Jude 8,10,16,23 = 1 Cor. 6:9-20; 2 Cor. 12:21); some eating and drinking abusively at the love feast (Jude 12 = 1 Cor. 11:17-33); refusing the authority of their elders (Jude 8,11 = 1 Cor. 4:8-13; 9:1-12); both Peter and Paul warn Corinth of the danger of worldly wisdom. Peter's reminder to them about the authority of Paul is very understandable in this case. However, the point of all this is to observe the tenderness of Peter and Jude in writing to the Corinthians ["my beloved..."], whilst at the same time warning them of the awesome judgment which their behaviour was preparing for them. It was the same passionate love for Christ's weak brethren which Paul showed them.

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### Notes

(1) It is significant that when dealing with Corinth's belief of those who sought to totally black Paul's character, he writes: “I write not these things (his answer to their allegations) to shame you...”(1 Cor.4:14). Yet when dealing with their doctrinal apostasy, Paul does seek to shame them: “Some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame”(1 Cor. 15:34).



(2) For more on this see my *James* pp. 99,125.

(3) It has been well argued that “Now I praise you, brethren...” in 1 Cor. 11:2 is one of many examples of Paul using irony to bring home to the Corinthians the enormity of their errors. See the exposition of 1 Cor. 11 in Mark Morris, *Man and Woman In Christ* (Pub. Cambridge City Ecclesia). The alternative view is presented in the above study; i.e. Paul's love for Corinth was such that one moment he saw them in exalted spiritual terms due to their place in Christ, whilst immediately going on to recognize their errors. There are so many examples of this in the Corinthian epistles that 1 Cor. 11:2 comfortably fits into place with this approach.

## 10 Paul And Weak Believers

There are times when it is necessary to separate from brethren and sisters because of gross doctrinal or practical error, or their refusal to separate from these things. But it is almost impossible to tell whether an active brother or sister in our community, who appears to believe and practice the Truth, is actually weak. Indeed, we shouldn't really go round trying to assess the spiritual strength of each other; we are all fellow servants, and what matters is what our Master, Jesus, thinks of us; not how we assess each other (Rom. 14:4). 1 Cor. 8:9 is one of several passages which warn us not to make the weak to stumble. But none of those passages actually says that we can know *who* is weak. What they are saying is that in God's eyes, there are weak members amongst every group of believers, and therefore we should watch our behaviour, because it will have an effect upon whoever is weak. But this doesn't mean that *we* actually know who the weak ones are. Because we don't know who is especially weak we must always be careful in our behaviour, *whoever* we are with. Indeed, as we'll see, we have to adopt the perspective that in a sense we are *all* weak.

To understand 1 Cor. 8:9, we must understand what it means to be weak. The Greek word translated “weak” here usually means one of two things: physical illness, or spiritual weakness. Sometimes these two senses are combined (e.g. when James speaks of praying for the “sick” brother, or when Jesus talks of how pleased he was that brethren had visited the “sick” brother in Mt. 25:36). Paul often uses the word in his letters to Corinth. He says that we are *all* weak because of our natures (1 Cor. 15:43), and that Christ died on account of the fact that we are weak (2 Cor. 13:4 Gk.). Because of this, Paul reasons, we're all weak, because Christ died for every one of us. He therefore says that to sin against a weak brother is to sin against Christ; because Christ has associated himself with our spiritual weakness, in order to save us from it (1 Cor. 8:12). Thus he says that when we visit a weak brother (spiritually? it's the same

word), we visit *him*. He so closely associates himself with the weak brother <sup>(1)</sup>. Christ on the cross carried the sins of “the weak”(i.e. all of us), and thereby left us an example of how we should behave towards the “weak”. In this context, Paul says that we should likewise love our neighbour (in the ecclesia; Rom. 15:1-4). What he seems to be saying is that we should understand that we are *all* weak, and therefore try to help each other, in the same spirit as Christ died for the weakness of each of us. If we recognize that we are *all* weak, we'll avoid two common mistakes: 1) Thinking that some brethren aren't weak and should therefore be followed blindly; and 2) Thinking that some believers are “weak” whilst the rest of us are “strong”.

Paul didn't want the Corinth ecclesia to think he was wagging the finger at them and implying: 'You lot are so weak, but I'm strong'. Several times he speaks of his own weakness, and he glories in the fact that although he is so (spiritually) weak, God works through him so mightily; indeed, he comes to the conclusion that God's strength is perfectly expressed through his spiritual weaknesses (2 Cor. 11:30; 12:5,9,10). He says that he preached to Corinth in the first place in (spiritual) “weakness”(1 Cor. 2:3)- because it seems that when he first got to Corinth, he wasn't spiritually strong enough to grasp the nettle of witnessing to the city as he should have done (Acts 18:9,10). Having admitted to Corinth that he himself was weak, he can say that whenever one of them is weak, he feels weak too; in other words he's saying that he can totally empathize (not just sympathize) with a weak brother's feelings (2 Cor. 11:29).

Paul's focus upon the positive is really tremendous, especially coming from a man so far spiritually ahead of the weak Corinthians. He commends their “readiness” to donate, whilst pointing out they are more talk than action; and later speaks to others of “*our* readiness”, identifying himself with the Corinthian brethren whose lack of actual action had got him into so many problems in fulfilling what he had confidently promised on their behalf (2 Cor. 8:11,12,19). He even gloried to others of their “readiness”(2 Cor. 9:2), whilst clearly not turning a blind eye to their failure to actually produce anything concrete.

Paul so often bids us follow his example. If we are going to truly help each other, there must be an admission of our personal weakness. Our brotherhood has rather failed in this, it seems to me. We all act, particularly those in the limelight, as if we're so righteous and strong that we all feel ashamed to discuss our weakness with each other. The result of this is that our meetings together become cold and formal, we go through the motions of spirituality and fellowship with each other, but we never really get under the skin of each other. Paul was different. He was writing to brethren that he knew were weak. But he harps on about his own weakness, he starts 1 Corinthians with the reminder that when he first converted them, he himself had been going through a weak patch,

a down cycle. And he gives many other examples of his weakness. It's quite rare for a leader of men to be as open about his weakness as Paul was. The world in which we live teaches us to never reveal our weakness, to never show a crack in the armour- especially if we are in a position of influence over others. Our lives in Christ should be different; we should be a community of men and women earnestly struggling for the imitation of the Lord Jesus Christ, openly acknowledging our failings, and striving together against them in a spirit of realistic self-knowledge, both individually and collectively.

## Paul And The Brotherhood

Paul had an amazing commitment to unity in the brotherhood. One could say that it was this which led him to his death, and certainly to political self-destruction in the politics of the early church. For his desire to unite Jewish and Gentile Christians was humanly speaking a loser- the Jewish converts simply would not give up their allegiance to the synagogue, with all the political and economic benefits this involved; nor would they really accept Gentiles. And Gentiles were never going to accept Jewish observances, indeed Paul knew this to be spiritually wrong. I submit that the whole epistle to the Romans is an exposition of the Gospel which has Jewish-Gentile unity as its underlying burden. This becomes apparent in the opening chapters. This to me is the key to understanding Romans 7. There Paul opens his heart and speaks frankly of his own inner conflicts. He says that he delights in [keeping] the law of God, yet he has a principle within him which seeks to make him captive to the law of sin (Rom. 7:22). I suggest he may be referring to his love, as an ex-Pharisee, of the Law of Moses, but this leads him to desire to keep the whole Law, including the *halakah* [the ordinances of the Rabbis]. He speaks of his struggle to both ignore the Jewish laws, and yet keep them. He concludes that he cannot keep them adequately, and so he surrenders to justification by faith in Christ alone. I read Paul as saying that he initially accepted justification in Christ, but then after his conversion he went through a period of seeking to keep the Law, and "sin revived". And so he strongly concluded that he must throw himself solely upon Christ's grace.

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## Notes

(1) The parable of Mt. 25:34-38 describes those on whom the righteous expend effort as sick, hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked, in prison: *every one of which* is a description used elsewhere in Scripture concerning our spiritually weak state. Therefore the parable is teaching that one of the grounds upon which we will be rejected or accepted relates to how we have treated spiritually weak brethren. The Lord confirms this when he adds his interpretation: "Inasmuch

as ye have done it unto one *of the least* (spiritually) of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me”(Mt. 25:40). The wondrous, wondrous thing is that the Lord of glory identifies himself with the spiritually *weakest* of his brethren: and structures his judgment seat around how others have behaved towards them.

## 11 Paul's Thorn In The Flesh

There is fair evidence that Paul did suffer from a physical ailment in order to keep him humble. The wonder is that he only asked three times for it to be removed. He knew it was for his spiritual good, and he believed this. The two possibilities which seem most convincing are poor eyesight and (perhaps related) malaria.

### Poor Eyesight

Gal. 4:10-13 speaks of an 'infirmity in the flesh' which would have led many to despise Paul's preaching; and yet the Galatians overlooked this when they first heard Paul's preaching. Speaking of the same period of time, Paul reminisces how they would have been willing to pluck out their own eyes and give them to him (Gal. 4:15). This would seem to make a fairly firm connection between the “thorn in the flesh” of 2 Cor. 12:7 and the “infirmity in the flesh” of poor eyesight. Thus he concludes the Galatian letter with a reference to the large letter he had written with his own hand (Gal. 6:11); not “large” in the sense of long, but perhaps referring to his physically large and unimpressive handwriting. Paul “earnestly beholding the council” employs a Greek medical term for squinting as a result of poor eyesight (Acts 23:1).

### Malaria

The description of Paul being with the Corinthians in “weakness and...trembling”(1 Cor. 2:3) uses a specific medical term describing the malaria shakes. This would explain why he was “in peril of waters”(Gk. rivers; 2 Cor. 11:26)- the breeding grounds of mosquitoes. Poor eyesight could be associated with malaria; although it is difficult to understand the malaria just beginning in mid-life as suddenly as the 'thorn in the flesh' passage seems to suggest. Paul may well have had malaria, as any such traveller was likely to- quite in addition to any physical 'thorn in the flesh'.

### A Spiritual Struggle

However, there are reasons to think that whilst Paul may have had a physical ailment, the “thorn in the flesh” may have referred to a spiritual affliction. One

would expect to read about a thorn in the *body* if Paul was only speaking of a physical weakness. But in Paul's thinking, "the flesh" so evidently refers to the more abstract things of human nature. The context of the "thorn in the flesh" passage would suggest that it was a spiritual weakness. Paul says that he will not boast of himself, "except in my infirmities" (2 Cor. 12:5). One of his "infirmities" was therefore his "thorn in the flesh". He is saying that he will not boast of his physical sufferings (which might include his weak eyesight) and achievements, rather he will exult in the fact that he, a man riddled with spiritual infirmity, especially one particular thorn in the flesh, had been used by God, and God's grace was sufficient to overcome all his spiritual weakness. Now this would fit in with the quintessence of Paul's belief: that by grace alone, not human achievement, God works through human weakness to bring about His purpose. Paul isn't adding to his list of physical glorying by saying 'And you know, on top of all this, I've had to struggle all my life with physical weakness'. This would only be continuing his boasting of 2 Cor. 11. But now he changes, and says that he wants to glory in his spiritual weakness, and how God has worked with him despite that.

Paul asked for the thorn to be taken away; but the answer was that God's *grace* was sufficient. Grace tends to be associated with forgiveness and justification, rather than with the ability to keep on living with a physical ailment. Likewise Moses, Paul's hero and prototype, asked a similar three times for entry to the land, and was basically given the same answer: that God's gracious forgiveness was sufficient for him.

## Women?

When Paul talks about being buffeted by a thorn in the flesh, he is in fact almost quoting passages from the LXX of Num. 33:55 and Josh. 23:13, where "thorns" which would buffet the *eyes* of Israel were the Canaanite tribes (cp. Ez. 28:24); and especially, in the context, their women. If they intermarried, those women and what they brought with them would be made by God as thorns in Israel's flesh. The implication could be that Paul had not driven out his Canaanites earlier, and therefore God gave them to Him as a thorn in the flesh, just as He had done to Israel earlier. There is fair reason to think that Paul had been married; he could not have been a member of the Sanhedrin and thus had the power to vote for the murder of the early martyrs unless he had been married and had children (Acts 26:10). His comment that he wished all men to be in his marital position (1 Cor. 7:8) has another slant in this case: he wished them to have had the marriage experience, but be in the single state. As a leading Pharisee, his wife would have been from an appropriate background. "...for whom I have suffered the loss of all things" would then have been written with a sideways glance back at his wife, children he never saw... all that might have been. In gripping autobiography, Paul relates the innocent days

when (as a child) he lived without the knowledge of law and therefore sin. But then, the concept of commandments registered with him; and this “wrought in me all manner of concupiscence”(Rom. 7:8). “Concupiscence” is a conveniently archaic word for lust; and in the thinking and writing of Paul, the Greek *epithumia* is invariably used in a sexual context.

As an ardent Pharisee, with all the charisma of the unashamed extremist and evidently rising leader, it is almost certain that the inevitable interplay of sexuality and spirituality, of flesh and spirit, would have played itself out. And after conversion, the inevitable attraction of the committed missionary would have been evident; not least in the charismatic preaching of a new and ultimately true religion which was largely comprised of young / middle aged females (according to contemporary historians). No wonder Paul's slanderers made him out to be immoral; it was the easiest slur to cast. At Thessalonika he was even accused of preaching solely in order to get the praise and financial support of women (so 1 Thess. 2:3-12 implies). And as a man, with the commandments of God producing in him all manner of concupiscence, he would not have lightly shrugged off all these temptations. If this “thorn in the flesh” became particularly strong at a certain time, this could be seen as reference to the beginning of some illicit relationship.

And yet it cannot be overlooked that as outlined above, there does seem to be an evident link between the thorn in the flesh and literal blindness (Gal. 4:10-13 = 2 Cor. 12:7). The explanation may be that because of Paul's wandering eyes and mind, his sight was severely impaired. He likens his ailment to a man plucking out his eyes with his own hands (Gal. 4:15), using language unmistakably recalling the Lord's command to pluck out, with ones' own hands, the eyes that offend, that we might enter the Kingdom. The command of Mt. 5:28,29 is in the very context of lustful thinking and looking. In His desire to save us, God has His way. Paul saw that his weakness for women would have cost him the Kingdom, and that therefore the Lord had plucked out his eyes. He had been given a thorn in his flesh spiritually; and so the Lord had given him a thorn in the flesh physically, that he might conquer that spiritual weakness. The other reference to plucking out the offending eye is in Mt. 18:9, in a context regarding the paramount need not to offend the little ones. Could it be that Paul's limitation was to protect some of his converts from stumbling? And so with us, the offending eye or limb must be plucked out or cut off; and if we will not do it, the Lord will: either now, by grace, or in the final destruction of condemnation. We either fall on the stone of the Lord and are broken now, or that stone will fall upon us, and grind us to powder. We either chose the baptism of fire now, or we will be consumed anyway by the fire of judgment. The logic of devotion, self-control and self-sacrifice is powerfully appealing.

## **Implications**

God *gave* Paul his thorn in the flesh. Whilst God tempts no man- for temptation is a process internal to human nature- He may still have a hand in controlling the situations which lead to temptation. Hence the Lord bid us pray that the Father lead us not into temptation. Each of us has his own specific human weaknesses. When the apostle wrote of shedding *the* sin which doth so easily beset us (Heb. 12:1), he may have been suggesting that we each have our own specific weakness to overcome. This is certainly a comfort to us in our spiritual struggles. We aren't alone in them. They were given to us. We aren't alone with our nature. The purpose and plan of God for us is articulated even through the darkest nooks of our very essential being. Understanding this should make us the more patient with our brethren, whose evident areas of weakness are not ours.

## 12 Paul's Shipwreck

There is no doubt that the great apostle Paul was a clear type of the Lord Jesus. He confidently holds himself up as an example to us to follow, so that we might follow the Lord Jesus. The links between Paul's sufferings and those of his Lord have been tabulated elsewhere<sup>(1)</sup>. I get the feeling that there are times when Paul consciously alludes to Christ's words, and appropriates them to himself. For example, in v.34 of Acts 27 we read of how he promised them that "not an hair (would) fall from the head" of any of them, just as Christ promised his disciples (Lk.21:18); and the way in which Paul twice encouraged them "be of good cheer"(v.22,25) as they huddled together breaking bread is also quoting the very words of the Lord Jesus, in the same context (Jn.16:33); and remember that Jesus also said those words when the disciples were struggling in another great storm (Mk.6:50). The way Paul broke bread in v.35 is also an echo of the way Christ did it: "When he had thus spoken, he took bread, and gave thanks to God in the presence of them all: and when he had broken it, he began to eat...and they also took some". We get the impression that Paul was slowly, deliberately copying the example of Jesus in the upper room (1 Cor.11:23,24). So it is as if Paul is seeing himself as typical of Christ, and those in the ship with him as typical of Christ's followers. The way the Angel appeared to him at night to strengthen him (v.23) also echoes the experience of Christ in the Garden.

If we study carefully this record of Paul's shipwreck, it becomes apparent that it is written in a way which is not just a narrative of certain historical events. All through there are phrases and ideas which connect with other Scripture. After all, if God's Spirit wrote this record, there are going to be connections with other Spirit-inspired Scriptures; for the Spirit of God is *one* (Eph.4:4), it's end product is unity, of whatever sort. So when we start to put together all the links with other parts of the Word which we find in Acts 27, it becomes crystal clear

that we are really intended to see these events as parabolic of the drama of our salvation. Now I want to labour this point about the Spirit-word having connections with other parts of the Word. Seeing types and parabolic meaning in Bible passages is not just a kind of hobby, an enthusiasm, for some who are keen on that kind of thing. We really are intended by God to make these connections. This is one reason why He wrote His word as He did.

### **Ship, Storm and Sea**

So let me give you an example of the sort of thing I mean. If you look at this whole story from a macro perspective, as it were half shut your eyes and just see the general outline, some bells should start ringing. There were a group of sailors, with an immensely spiritual man in their midst, caught in a freak, unexpected storm which threatened their life, filled with panic and desperation. Then the spiritual man stands up in their midst and inspires them with his words, and on his account they are saved by God and miraculously reach land. Of course - I hope!- our minds go back to the storm on Galilee, with the Lord Jesus standing up in the midst of those terrified men. And when we analyze the record in detail, we find this similarity confirmed. "A tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon" 'beat' (Gk., AVmg.) against the ship (v.14). The same Greek word for "beat" occurs in Mk.4:37, in the record of the Galilee storm. The disciples' comment must have been echoed by Paul's fellow passengers: "What manner of man is this...?". Closer study of Mk.4:37-41 reveals many links with Jonah's experience; and Acts 27 also has connections with this, admittedly different ones. The progressive lightening of the ship by throwing everything overboard (v.18,38) is a clear link back to Jonah 1:5. On Christ's own authority, we can interpret Jonah as a type of Christ, who saved the ship's crew (cp. the church) by jumping overboard to his three day death (cp. Christ). Thus the boat passengers in both Jonah and Acts 27 represent ourselves, and their physical rescue points forward to our spiritual salvation. When Paul tells them to eat food "for your *health*" (v.34), he uses the Greek word normally translated "salvation". And Young's Literal Translation brings out the correct sense of Acts 28:1: "They, having been saved...". They escaped safely to "*the land*"(v.44 Gk.), symbolic of the Kingdom.

Now you might have noticed that several times we read about them using the anchors. Then in v.41 we read of the forepart sticking fast and remaining "unmoveable". There are connections here with Hebrews 6:19, which speaks of the hope of the Gospel as "an anchor of the soul...which entereth into that within the veil, whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus". The idea of Christ as a forerunner, the firstfruits, is surely to be connected with "the forepart" of the vessel remaining unmoveable. As they crawled up the shore on Malta, Paul and the others would have looked back to that unmoveable bow of the ship; perhaps they went to see it the next morning, as it stood proudly amid



the calmed waters. That sight would have stayed with Paul; perhaps the Spirit used that memory when it inspired Paul to use the same Greek word (the only other occurrence in the NT) in Heb.12:28: “We receiving a Kingdom which *cannot be moved*, let us *hold fast*” (AVmg.), as the bow of the ship “stuck fast”. This is all further proof that we should see the incidents of Acts 27 as parabolic of deeper spiritual things.

## Forgotten Feasts

As always with this kind of thing, just one or two connections don't clinch the point. But what we want to do this morning is to go through this chapter, looking at the more evident pieces of evidence, pausing to draw the exhortations. So let's start in v.2. “Adramyttium” means 'the house of death'. That speaks for itself. You can easily jot that in the margin of your Bibles. Now down to v.9: “Sailing was now dangerous, because the fast was now already past”. Pliny records that long distance sailing was supposed to finish on the Day of Atonement; and seeing that this was the only Jewish feast which involved fasting, it is likely that they set sail just after the day of Atonement (so the Greek implies). The day of Atonement was on the 10th day of the seventh Jewish month. We can assume that they left Lasea (v.8) on about the 12th day of the seventh month, just after the day of Atonement on the 10th, when navigation was supposed to cease. But three days later (v.19), Paul and Luke were throwing overboard the loose tackling of the ship, in the midst of the storm. This would have been the fifteenth day of the seventh month; exactly when the feast of Tabernacles began. This feast lasted seven days (Ez.45:25 styles it “the feast of the seven days”). During that period, Paul and Luke were probably fasting, and doubtless sharing in the fear which gripped that vessel. It was obviously impossible to keep the feast. The sensitive Jewish-Christian mind of the first century would immediately have picked up on this; and if he (or she) grasped the idea that these events were parabolic, they would have seen in this the powerful demonstration that in Christ it is impossible to go on keeping the Mosaic feasts.

## Spiritual Magnetism

Paul was clearly held in some esteem on that ship. Even as a prisoner, he was able to muscle in on the discussions about whether or not to go on sailing: “Paul *admonished* them”(v.9) implies that he knew that he commanded enough respect to put his point quite forcibly. And v.11 is written in a rather strange way. It doesn't say that the Centurion disbelieved Paul; but rather that he believed the shipmaster more than Paul's *words*. He evidently had a great respect for Paul as a person. And as Paul stood on that cold, windswept deck, shouting above the noise of the wind (v.21), you get the picture of a man whose magnetism was fully effective on that rough crowd of seamen and prisoners.

Such was his authority that a word from him resulted in them ditching the lifeboat; the only human chance of salvation. Once they did that, they were completely dependent on the spiritual vision of this extraordinary man Paul. His repeated exhortation “Be of good cheer...be of good cheer”(v.22,25) was taken to heart by them: “Then were they all of good cheer”(v.36). And like a father with sick children, Paul got them, against their will initially, to sit down to a good wholesome meal. The uncanny appeal of Paul is brought out when we consider the implication of v.35: Paul prayed in the presence of them *all* , all 275 of them, presumably mustered on the deck, and then solemnly ate in front of them, passing the food on to them. Paul's magnetism is most clearly shown by the Centurion being willing to allow all the prisoners to make their own way to land, rather than allow Paul to be killed (v.43). Of course our mind goes back to how the jailor at Philippi was literally on the verge of suicide because he just *thought* that his prisoners had escaped (actually, none of them had). Yet among those 276 desperate men, there must have been some who secretly despised Paul. The Centurion “kept them from *their purpose* “of killing Paul (v.43). This may suggest that even in their personal desperation, some of the men on that ship were prepared to kill Paul, due to their own sense of inadequacy, and jealousy of his spirituality.

In all this we have a cameo of the position of the Lord Jesus amongst them who are called to salvation. We should be sensing, here and now as we face the emblems of his sacrifice, as we sense his presence in the midst of us this morning, something of his magnetism, something of the feeling of the disciples on Galilee when they muttered: “What manner of man is this”; something of the wonder of those soldiers when they returned to their C.O. with the quiet comment: “Never man spake like this man”. Or the wonder of another Centurion: “Truly this was *the Son of God*. Truly this was a *righteous man*”(Mt.27:54; Lk.23:47; imagine his tone of voice, and which words he emphasized in that sentence). Now each of us here ought to know this feeling. But I fear that we come here, to this table of the Lord, week by week, and somehow the sense of *marvel*, the sense of *wonder*, at the personality of the Lord Jesus, just isn't there. Do we really *know* him as we should? Do we really feel and respond to that spiritual magnetism which exudes from him, now just as much as in the first century? Are we really metal to the spiritual magnet of his perfect personality? These are things which no magic set of words from me can put right. *Do you know Christ as your personal saviour?* Well hacked, well worn words, I know. But they are right at the crux, at the very heart, of our spiritual lives. This ought to make us really sit up, take a hold on ourselves, realizing that time is *so short* to improve our knowing of Christ.

Now let's get back to the story. But let's not forget the spirit of what we've just said. We are talking about serious stuff. We've been touching the sky, as it were, without being unrealistic, speaking of heavenly things, striving to reach

out of our own humanity, thinking of spiritual reality. Verse 12 says that their temporary harbour “was not commodious” to stay in, so they left, “if by any means they might attain to Phenice”. Now I just don't think it's accidental, or irrelevant, that this very phrase was used by Paul a few years (or months?) later, once he got to Rome and sat down to write to the Philippians. He wrote of how he struggled to know the real spirit of Christ's self-crucifixion, having counted all the things of this life as dung, losing them all so that he might know the real mind of the crucified Christ, “*If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead*” (Phil.3:11). The horrific memory of the shipwreck would have stayed with him all his days. Under the Spirit's guidance, he would have recalled the spirit in that ship, as they all set sail if by any means they might attain unto Phenice. That run down old town of 'Fair Havens', its name promising what it certainly wasn't, full of lonely old men sitting in cheap tavernas... it must have been some depressing place, to make the sailors take the risk of sailing further on in such unpredictable weather. We might be able to imagine or remember towns like that which we know. And that run down ghost-town, Paul said, was typical of how we should see our lives in the world, worth making any sacrifice to leave, if by any means we might attain to a better resting place.

### **Fortnight of Fear**

It is difficult for us to imagine what that fortnight in the storm was like. Verse 21 speaks of the “harm” which they experienced, using a Greek word which is usually used about mental harm or damage. They were deeply perplexed in mind and body. Their helplessness amidst the fury of those winds is brought home by the Spirit: “We let (the ship) drive...and so (we) were driven...being exceedingly tossed with a tempest...no small tempest lay on us (i.e. smothered us)...we were driven up and down in Adria”. Our brief life of probation is described in widely different terms by the Spirit. Here we get the idea that it is a totally horrific experience, full of fear, first of one thing (e.g. of grounding on quicksands), and then of another (being broken on rocks). In other places our experience of life now is likened to a plodding on through the wilderness, in others to a short sharp battle, in others to the monotonous tramping out of corn by an ox, the patient waiting of the farmer, or the lonely, dogged endurance of the long distance runner. And in yet other passages we are promised a life of “all (possible) joy and peace through believing”, dashing on from victory to victory, more than conquerors, caught up with the ecstasy of the triumphant march in Christ, all our lives long. We must see our experience of spiritual life in holistic terms, we mustn't just emphasize one of these aspects. The way these different aspects all merge together in our spiritual experience is, to me, one of the most wonderful things about a balanced life in the Truth. An unbalanced approach will lead to us doggedly clinging on to the doctrines of the Truth, rejecting any suggestion that there should be an element of spiritual rapture and

ecstasy in our lives. Or it may lead to an over emotional, watery sort of spirituality which reacts against any hint that we ought to be gritting our teeth and holding on to our faith, fearing the ferocious satan of our own natures.

In our own strength, we really are like those sailors. "All hope that we should be saved was then taken away"(v.20). When they waved goodbye to the lifeboat, that really was the end of even the wildest dreams of salvation. They fixed their faith on the serene old man who spoke in calm confidence of his deep relationship with the true God. It has been said, quite rightly, that a healthy fear of the judgment seat is vital if we are to be saved. "Let us therefore *fear* ", Paul wrote (Heb.4:1), and later in Hebrews he holds up Noah as our example, in that he was "moved with (motivated by) fear" in working out his own salvation (Heb.11:7). The parable of the shipwreck certainly brings home to us this aspect of fear in our spiritual journey. So, there should be some element of fear in our spirituality. It is sometimes said that fear just means respect. This is sometimes true, but not always. The fear of the men in that boat was real fear, not just respect. Of course we must be balanced; a life of excessive fear of being spiritually drowned does not consider those other aspects of our walk in Christ which we mentioned earlier. But this morning, as we face the supreme holiness of the Lord Jesus, the Son of God, and the supreme justice and righteousness of the Most High God, Yahweh of Israel, a righteousness which is absolute and cannot be compromised at all; and as we consider the filth of our own natures, the endless list of failure, half hearted spiritual effort, even at times wilful ignorance of God's ways; there must surely be a significant element of fear within us, of panic and desperation as we sense the cage, the trap, of our own sinfulness. Do we really *love* righteousness? Do we so *hate* sin? So love God, so hate our sins, that we can enter into the feelings of those men in the storm, as they were driven up and down by the Mediterranean winds? We noted earlier the way in which the record stresses the power of those winds; and winds are a fairly common symbol of the pressure upon the believer from the surrounding world, and from the innate, sinful promptings of our own natures (Eph.4:14; James 1:6; 3:4; Jude 12). The howling of those winds must have militated against their having a total trust in Paul's words. When he spoke of how the Angel had appeared to him, no doubt they kind of believed him. But the record shows that in practice they tried to work out their salvation their own way. Despite having been told that they would all be saved if they stayed with Paul, some of them tried to escape using the lifeboat. The soldiers' suggestion that they kill Paul and the prisoners shows a like lack of appreciation. Yet they all took Paul's exhortation to "be of good cheer". Psychologically, he did cheer them up. They felt better after breaking bread with him and hearing his words. But they still tried to get out of that mess their own way. You can see the similarity with us this morning, as we sit here in the presence of the Lord Jesus, hearing him speak for these few moments, above the winds of temptation and this world. The words of the hymn come

powerfully to mind: “O let me hear thee speaking / In accents clear and still / Above the storms of passion / The murmurs of self-will”. *O let us hear him speaking*, not just now, but day by day, hour by hour, as we cling on in our fortnight of fear, our desperate spiritual struggle through this life.

### **Loving his appearing**

The description of Malta as a “land which they knew not”(Acts 27:39) is evidently similar to the account of Abraham going to a land which he knew not (Heb. 11:8,9). The land was a “strange” land, just as Malta was perceived as a “barbarous”, i.e. pagan, land (Acts 28:2). The desperate situation of Paul and those with him therefore points forward to an awful time of tribulation for the believers just prior to being ‘saved’ into the Kingdom. This climaxes in coming to the place where two seas meet (Acts 27:41)- surely a reference to the judgment seat. There, it becomes apparent what is to ‘remain unmoveable’ and what is to be ‘broken’ or dissolved. These very same Greek words occur in 2 Pet. 3:10-12, about the breaking up or dissolving of all things at the Lord’s return; and of the unmoveable quality of the Kingdom which we shall receive, when all other things have been shaken to their destruction and dissolution (Heb. 12:27,28).

One of the signs that they were nearing the end of their ordeal was that “neither sun nor stars in many days appeared”(v.20). Now this sounds very much like Lk.21:25-27: “There shall be signs in the sun and in the...stars...the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear...then look up...then shall they see the Son of man coming”. As soon as it was day, we read in v.39, they grounded the ship and swam to land, reaching their salvation at daybreak. This fits in to place alongside the many links between the second coming and daybreak. The men somehow sensed (“deemed”, v.27) that they were approaching land. It is quite likely that the spiritually aware will have a sense of the nearness of Christ's return. Christ too referred to this when he spoke of how in the Spring we have an innate sense that Summer is coming; so, he reasoned, you will be able to sense my return. Now if we really *know* Christ, have a real two-way, ongoing relationship with him, as a pupil-disciple to his teacher-master, then we will surely have this sense. “They *drew near* to some country” really implies that they were being drawn near; the Greek word is always used elsewhere about the believer drawing close to the Lord. 1 Pet.3:18 is the best example: “Christ also hath once suffered for sins...that he might *bring us* (same word) to God”. Now in our typology that would suggest that in some way Christ guides us into the Kingdom, helps us through the last lap. Watch out for other types and hints that this is the case. And talk about it to some dear old brother in his late eighties whose known the Lord all his days.

On that last night, the sailors prayed for the day to dawn (v.29 Gk., RVmg.). “The day” is an idiom for the Kingdom in Rom.13:12. This fits in alongside the many other connections between intense prayer and the second coming <sup>(2)</sup>. If we *know* Christ, as we've been saying, then we will long to share his glory, we will long to see his beauty with our own eyes. So *are we* praying earnestly for the day to dawn? Or are we just content with the knowledge that it will come, like a slow train coming? Those men prayed for the dawn so intently because they knew that if the winds blew for much longer, they just couldn't hold on, they would be swept away. They feared “lest we should be cast on rocky ground”(Acts 27:29 RV)- replete with reference to the parable of the sower. There are many indications that the body of Christ will be weak and sickly when he returns. The sailors [=us] even at the very end disbelieved the prophecy that the ship would be destroyed- for they sought to “bring the ship safe to shore”(Acts 27:22,39 RVmg.). Even for the wise virgins, the coming of Christ awakes them from their spiritual slumber. Unless the days are shortened, even the elect will be carried away with the ways of the world (Mt.24:22). If we can really see the spiritual dangers of the last days, if we can sense our real spiritual state, we will realize that we urgently need the coming of Christ, for the simple reason that we are all so weak spiritually that we will effectively lose our faith unless he's back soon. And in response to the elect's prayers, the days will be shortened. The Lord will help us through the final lap.

It was on the very last, fourteenth night, that some in the ship lost their faith in Paul. They tried to get away from the ship in the lifeboat, “under colour as though they would have cast (more) anchors out”(v.30). The Greek for “under colour as though” is always used elsewhere in the context of spiritual pretence, especially in prayer (Mk.12:40; Mt.23:14; Lk.20:47). Under the appearance of trying to make the salvation of the others more certain (by casting more anchors), these men were trying to leave the ship because they honestly thought that the rest of them stood no chance. Is there here some prophecy of how just prior to the Lord's return, some will try to leave the body of Christ, under the appearance of spiritually strengthening the rest of us? But the watchful Paul spotted what was going on, and somehow got them to abandon it. What this typifies is beyond even my imagination. “Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved”(v.31) sounds like Christ's words of Jn.15:6: “If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth...”. But there is a twist here in v.31; as if our all remaining together in the Christ-ship is somehow related to our collective salvation.

And so finally, there they were, crawling up the shore on Malta, the waves breaking over their heads, the backwash pulling them back, but struggling on up the beach in the early hours of that morning, cold and soaked, perhaps with hypothermia setting in, but brimming over with the joy of their miraculous salvation. Now that is the picture, in this type, of our salvation. As we enter the

Kingdom, we will be at our most bedraggled, the weakness of our natures will then be made fully apparent to us. "They knew not the land", only once they were saved did they know the name of it (27:39; 28:1). The total foreigners who gave them such a warm welcome perhaps point forward to the Angels welcoming us into the Kingdom. As Abraham went forth into a land which he knew not, so in many ways we do not know much about the Kingdom, our salvation. Remember that the 1000 years of the Millennium is just going to be a speck of a few millimetres in the infinity of our salvation; let's not think that the Kingdom is just the Millennium. We simply lack the ability to really understand what God's nature is really going to be like. We can only describe things with words and colours, perhaps words aren't enough to describe it, language is too limited, there must be other paradigms beyond words to express God's nature, the nature of our salvation; yet we now just cannot enter into them. We know that the arena of our salvation will be this earth. But if I point to say that square meter over there, all I know is that it will one day be in the Kingdom, I have some idea what might go on there during the Millennium, but through eternity, no. It's like if I gave you some Chinese writing to read, you wouldn't know how to pronounce the letters, whether to start reading from the top or bottom of the page, to start from the left or the right. So we would be with information about the Kingdom. But like those sailors, we are driven on by our desperate fear of our own sinfulness, of the eternal death which we are so close to, yet captivated by the words and assurance of the Lord Jesus in our midst, knowing that where he is, both physically and spiritually, indeed in *whatever* sense, there we earnestly wish to be for eternity.

So in the midst of this spiritually difficult life, a world which daily buffets us with its winds, which continually says to us "*Where is thy God?*", we are to break bread with the Lord Jesus. As God gave Paul all the men who sailed with him, so we have been given to the Lord Jesus (v.24). Of those whom God gave Jesus, He lost none (Jn.17:12). In many ways our lives are a case of hanging on, of hanging in there with Christ, abiding in him and he in us, through our constant meditation upon him and his word. We are all lacking in this; so let's be fired up this week to do something about it. But in the midst of their horrific experience, those mixed up men became "of good cheer" on account of doing this. And so it is with us. Week by week, we are throwing overboard the human things upon which we lean, upon which we hope, those things which promise us a Kingdom in this life; and more and more we fix our gaze upon the Lord Jesus, upon his assurance in the midst of this storm: "Be of good cheer". So let us now be silent for some minutes, to fix our minds upon him, to *know* him, to look ahead to hearing those simple words from his lips as we tremble before him at the judgment, our love and joy blending with our fear: "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom".

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## Notes

(1) See Harry Whittaker, *Studies In The Acts Of The Apostles* (Cannock: Biblia, 1996) .

(2) See my *The Last Days* pp. 35,43,114,142,202,212,241.

## 13 Paul's Self-Perception

With nothing less than a touch of genius, David Levin wrote: "Identity holds the most strategic position in our minds, and will have more impact on our behaviour than any single belief or bit of information. We can think of ourselves as *"a child of God"* or *"a disciple."* Or, we can think of ourselves as *"a loser"* or as *"a victim"*. Our identity shifts slowly, and is far more than the sum of what we do and where we do it. Someone once remarked, *"We are human beings, not human doings."* Whatever we think of ourselves will guide our lives. God sees us at this level, as He does not measure our behaviour or even our attitudes separately. He only sees a whole: a sheep or a goat. There's no such thing, in God's eyes, as *"a pretty good goat"* or a *"not-so-good-sheep"*. He judges, completely and ineffably, at the identity level. Either we are disciples, or we are not. Identity is the most important force in determining our lives. Even more important, God's assessment of our identity will determine our eternal destiny"<sup>(1)</sup>.

As an example, consider how we perceive baptism. Some will say 'I became a Christian on [20.11.83]', or 'I became a member of the XYZ ecclesia on ...'. They mean, that's when they were baptized. Others will perceive it as: 'I was baptized into Christ on 20.11.83...I accepted the Truth on...I committed myself to the Lord's service on...I came to Christ on...'. None of these are wrong. They are all true. My suggestion, and my own perception of my own baptism, is that it was a personal joining with the Lord Jesus Christ. This, it seems to me, must be the central perception which dominates our self-awareness. The human side of it- the name of the group or ecclesia- is true, and needs in some contexts to be ever remembered, but it is only the human side. The person who converted us, the ecclesia we joined...all these things will fade away, as time takes its course. But the essence will eternally remain: that we are in Christ, we share in His life and live it out, seeking to act as He would in every situation we face, and this is the life we will eternally live by His grace.



## Present Salvation

It could appear that I am saying ‘It’s not so important what Christian group we belong to’. No, I don’t mean that at all. We should be proud of our brotherhood and of our little part in it. What I’m saying is that first and foremost, we are God’s children. The height and depth of who we *are* right now, and who we will be, is such that it makes *all* else, including whatever ‘name’ we bear in this world, of very much secondary importance. Many a town and village has its share of small time Protestant religions- JW’s, Adventists, Baptists. May it not be that we perceive ourselves as just another such group, and nothing else; just another ordinary guy who wants God in his life, who has a religious conscience which is salved by baptism and attending church meetings. We are saved, in prospect, here and now. We have been translated into the Kingdom (Col. 1:13), we have been saved (2 Tim. 1:9), on account of being in Christ we not only died and resurrected with Him in baptism, but also afterwards ascended with Him and are as it were in heavenly places with Him (Eph. 2:5,6); our life is hid with Christ in God (Col. 3:3). We are in the process of receiving a Kingdom (Heb. 12:28 Gk.). “We have eternal life”(1 Jn. 5:13). We need to take a long, careful look at this question. You are in Christ; you *will* be there, in the Kingdom. In a sense, you *are* there. Me? Really *me*, I will be there? Yes, that’s what these verses teach. Perhaps you work such long hours you have little time to think, perhaps children demand all your attention. Perhaps the problems of your own personality grip your mind as you struggle with them subconsciously, every waking minute. But please. Make some time. Just five straight minutes alone. To think through the above verses. That because you were baptized into Christ and continue in Him, and have not rejected His grace, you *will* be there, and in a sense, you *are* there. We are constituted a Kingdom of priests *now* (Rev. 1:6; Ex. 19:6 cp. 1 Pet. 2:5,9). Take time to think it through, to the point that you feel that little gasp within you. Brethren, this is no philosophy we have believed, no piece of intellectual fascination we stumbled across along life’s way. This is the Truth, the eternal and saving Truth. A man cannot face these things and not have a deep impression of the absoluteness of the issues involved in faith and unbelief, in choosing to accept or reject the work of the struggling, gasping Man who hung on the stake to achieve it. It truly is a question of believe and be saved, or reject it and perish. And we have believed. We are not of them who draw back, who throw it all away and end in the gutter, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul by grace (Heb. 10:39). We perceive ourselves [as we walk down the street or play with our children] as winners, as more-than-conquerors, as those who will be there, as those who are there, those on the way there.

The Lord bid us cut off the hand or foot that offends, and thus enter into life halt...blind, rather than be condemned in Gehenna (Mt. 18:8,9). It sounds as if ‘entering into life’ means entering into the Kingdom; and so it can do, for this

clause is set as the antithesis for being condemned at the last day. Yet it is hard to imagine us entering the Kingdom somehow maimed, and in any case then we will not need to be without what causes temptation. The figure rings more true to our lives today; if we cut off our flesh *now*, we will live the rest of our mortal days somehow lacking what we could have had. In this case, we enter into life right now, insofar as we cut off the opportunities of the flesh. Jesus told another man that if he would enter into life, he must keep the commandments (Mt. 19:17). Insofar as he kept those commands, he would right now enter into life. We are entering into life, eternal life, right now! Likewise the camel must shed its load of riches and goods, so that it can pass through the gate into the Kingdom. But we are doing that right now! We will pass through the gate into the Kingdom when the Lord returns (Rev. 22:14), and yet through shedding our materialism, we do it now. John puts it more bluntly and yet more absolutely: now, through the life of faith, we have the eternal life, in that we begin to live now the type of life which we will eternally live. We receive the Kingdom of God here and now, in that we receive the Gospel of the Kingdom; and if we accept it as a little child, we begin to enter it, now- in that the lives we live determine whether or not we will enter it at the Lord's coming. We are on our way into life! We have received the Kingdom, our names were written from the foundation of the world, and only our falling from grace can take that away. This is almost too good news to believe.

### **Imputed Righteousness**

How can it be? Throughout Romans, the point is made that the Lord *counts as righteous* those that believe; righteousness is *imputed* to us the unrighteous (Rom. 2:26; 4:3,4,5,6,8,9,10,11,22,23,24; 8:36; 9:8). But the very same Greek word is used of *our* self-perception. We must count / impute ourselves as righteous men and women, and count each other as righteous on the basis of recognising each others' faith rather than works: "Therefore we conclude [we count / impute / consider] that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law... Likewise reckon [impute] ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord". (Rom. 3:28; 6:11). We should *feel* clean and righteous, and act accordingly, both in our own behaviour and in our feelings towards each other. Border-line language and expressions, clothing with worldly slogans, watching violence and pornography...these are not things which will be done by someone who feels and perceives him/herself to be clean and righteous, "in Christ". The mind of love imputes no evil to others, as God doesn't to us (1 Cor. 13:5; AV "thinketh no evil", s.w. to count / impute in Romans). And again the word occurs in 2 Cor 3:5: "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to *think* [s.w. impute] any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God". We *are* able to count / feel to ourselves as righteous; for God has counted us righteous. We are "in Christ" to the extent that we *are* Christ to this world. In this sense He has in this world no arms or legs or face

than us. Paul was a placarding of Christ crucified before the Galatians (Gal. 3:1 Gk.); to the Corinthians he was “the face of Christ”(2 Cor. 2:10 RSV). There is a prophecy of the Lord Jesus preaching: “How beautiful are the feet of *him* that preaches the Gospel”(Nah. 1:15); but it is quoted in Rom. 10:15 with a subtle change of pronoun: “How beautiful are the feet of *them* that preach”. We are the Lord Jesus to this world, because we are brethren in Him. This alone is a powerful imperative as to who we are, how we speak, the men and women we show ourselves to be. Imputed righteousness is given us on the basis of our faith. This means that insofar as we can believe all this is true, so it will be. In this sense “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God”(Rom 8:16). We are His dear children (Eph. 5:1), the pride and joy of Almighty God, counted as wonderful and righteous by Him.

### **The Body Of Christ**

We are the body of Christ. We are counted righteous because we are baptized into Him. We are counted as Him; and we are parts of His body, hands, feet, eyes, internal organs. As such, we are inextricably linked in with the other members of the body. We cannot operate in isolation from them. “We are members one of another...we are members of his body”(Eph. 4:25; 5:30). Only insofar as we belong to each other do we belong to Him. We must perceive ourselves not so much as individual believers but as members of one body, both over space and over time. We must soberly ‘think of ourselves’ as someone who has something to contribute to the rest of the body, even if first of all we are not sure what it is (Rom. 15:3-8). We feel their weaknesses as if they are our own. Self interest must die; their wellbeing becomes all consuming. This is why men like Daniel and Nehemiah could feel that “*we* have sinned...”- not ‘*they* have sinned’. Ezra said that because *we* have sinned, *we* cannot lift up ourselves before Yahweh. And he cast himself down before Yahweh in demonstration of how much he was with his people in this (Ezra 9:15; 10:1)! Esther, in an eloquent type of the Lord’s mediation for us, risked her life because she felt that “*we* are sold, *I* and my people, to be destroyed”(Es. 7:4). If she’d have kept her mouth shut, *she* wouldn’t have been destroyed. But she fought and won the same battle as we have daily or weekly before us: to identify ourselves with our weaker and more suffering brethren. The Lord Jesus didn’t sin Himself but He took upon Himself our sins- to the extent that He *felt* a sinner, even though He wasn’t. Our response to this utter and saving grace is to likewise take upon ourselves the infirmities and sins of our brethren. If one is offended, we burn too; if one is weak, we are weak; we bear the infirmities of the weak (Rom. 15:1). But in the context of that passage, Paul is quoting from Is. 53:11, about how the Lord Jesus bore our sins on the cross. We live out the spirit of His cross, not in just bearing with our difficulties in isolation, but in feeling for our weak brethren.

If we believe that we are counted righteous, we must likewise assume that all those properly baptized are equally righteous, and will be saved along with us. We cannot condemn each other; therefore we must assume each other will be saved. If we have a positive attitude to our own salvation, we will likewise perceive our whole community. And the reverse is true; if we cannot believe that God sees *us* positively, we will tend towards a negative outlook upon ourselves. My sense is that many of us fail in this area. Paul had many reasons to think negatively of his converts; and yet he writes to the Thessalonians as if ‘we all’, all his readership, would be saved (1 Thess. 4:17). And likewise to dodgy Corinth, he writes as if they would all be accepted at the Lord’s return (1 Cor. 15:52); he saw them *all* as innocent Eve in danger of being beguiled (2 Cor. 11:3).

## The Two Pauls

But we are real life men and women, only too aware that although yes, we are in Christ, we are also all too human still. We still sin the sins and think the thoughts and feel the feelings of those around us. We are only who we are, born in such a town, living in such a city, doing a job, trying to provide for a family. In our minds eye we see the spotless lamb of God, moving around Galilee 2000 years ago, doing good, healing the sick. But He was there, and we are here now, today, in all our weakness and worldly distraction. He was as He was, but *we* are as we are. Reading through his letters, it is apparent that Paul saw himself as two people: a natural man, a Jew from Tarsus, a Roman citizen living in the Mediterranean world...and also, a man in Christ. This is why in an autobiographical passage in 2 Cor. 12, he says of himself: “I knew a man in Christ”, who had great visions 14 years previously (at the council of Jerusalem of Acts 15), and who was subsequently given a “thorn in the flesh”. “Of such an one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory”, he writes (2 Cor 12:5), as if separating himself from this more spiritually exalted man who saw these visions. Paul is surely telling us that he sees himself as two people. He makes the point clearly: “I will not be a fool...I am become a fool”(:6,11). He was the greatest apostle; although he was nothing (:11). This language comes to a crisis in 12:10: “When I [i.e. the natural Paul] am weak, then am I [the spiritual Paul] strong”. Consider how this dualism is to be found in many other places:

### The Natural Paul

Paul could say: “I am a Pharisee...I am a man which am a Jew”(Acts 23:6; 21:13,39; 22:3; 2 Cor. 11:22) Circumcision and

### The Spiritual Paul

But he also stresses that “they are not all Israel who are of Israel” because only “the children of the promise”, those baptized into Christ, are counted as the seed (Gal. 3:16,27-29; Rom. 9:8). The spiritual Paul is neither Jew nor

being Jewish has ‘much advantage’ (Rom. 3:1,2). “Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel”(Phil. 3:5). He argues that all Jews are “the seed of Abraham”, including himself, by birth (2 Cor. 11:22).

“We who are Jews by nature and not sinners of the Gentiles”(Gal. 2:15). Paul makes the frequent distinction between Jews and Gentiles, saying that he addresses “the first, but the Greek also”.

I am carnal (Rom. 7:14)

No flesh may glory before God (1 Cor. 1:29)

“Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect”

Gentile. The ‘gain’ of being personally Jewish Paul counted as loss (Phil. 3:3-7). His circumcision meant nothing (Rom. 2:29; 1 Cor. 7:19). “We are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit...and have no confidence in the flesh [i.e. the fact of literal circumcision, see context]”(Phil. 3:7)

This contrasts sharply with Paul’s whole message that in Christ, there is neither Jew nor Gentile, and both groups are all equally sinners (Rom. 3:9,23). He speaks of “theirs is the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship...theirs are the patriarchs”(Rom. 9:4,5). He clearly dissociates himself from Jewry. He had to *become like a Jew* in order to save them, although he was Jewish (2 Cor. 9:20). He carefully kept parts of the law (Acts 18:18; 21:26; 1 Cor. 8:13). To the Jew he became [again] as a Jew; and to the Gentiles he became as a Gentile (1 Cor. 9:20). He acted “To them that are without law, as without law...”. He was “dead to the law”(Gal. 2:19) He was a Jew but considered he had renounced it, but he became as a Jew to them to help them. He saw no difference between Jew and Gentile (Gal. 3:27-29) but he consciously acted in a Jewish or Gentile way to help those who still perceived themselves after the flesh. “...(being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ)”(1 Cor 9:21).

But in Christ he was not carnal (1 Cor. 3:1 s.w.)

Paul, in his spiritual man, as counted righteous before God, could glory (Rom. 15:17).

“Let us therefore, as many as be perfect...”(Phil. 3:12,15). In 1 Cor. 13:10, he considers he is ‘perfect’, and has put away the

things of childhood. Thus he saw his spiritual maturity only on account of his being in Christ; for he himself was not “already perfect”, he admitted.

“I laboured more abundantly than they all... *... yet not I*, but the grace of God which was with me”(1 Cor 15:10)

God set the apostles *first* in the ecclesia (1 Cor. 12:28)      God set the apostles *last* in the ecclesia (1 Cor. 4:9)

“I live... *... yet not I*, but Christ liveth in me [the new ‘me’]... I [the old ‘me’] am crucified with Christ”(Gal 2:20) <sup>(2)</sup>

“I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office”(Rom. 11:13). He considered himself rightfully amongst the very chiefest apostles (2 Cor. 12:11).      He “supposed”, the same word translated “impute” as in ‘imputed righteousness’, that he was amongst the chiefest apostles (2 Cor. 11:5). He knew this was how his Lord counted him. But he felt himself as less than the least of all saints (Eph. 3:8). “For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am”(1 Cor 15:9-10).

This all shows that Paul wasn’t so heavenly that he was no earthly good. He saw himself from outside himself, as a Jew, as a Pharisee from Tarsus. And he used that self-understanding to get his message over to ordinary people. He could turn it on and he could turn it off; to the Jew he acted as a Jew, to the Gentiles as a Gentile. But most importantly, his own internal self-perception was that he was neither Jew nor Gentile but in Christ; a citizen of Heavenly Jerusalem, far more than earthly Rome (although he used that Roman citizenship at times). We too cannot obliterate who we are or where we came from. But superimposed upon this must be the realisation than now, we are in Christ. Likewise the record of the Lord’s wilderness temptations is almost certainly a reflection of *His* self-perception; He spoke to the ‘devil’ / personification of sin which was within Him, He saw Himself as two people, and His spiritual man triumphed gloriously against the man of the flesh. Lk. 4:8 records how “Jesus answered and said unto him, Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve”. He understood that we can only serve two masters: God or the flesh (“mammon” is another personification of the flesh, similar to ‘satan’). He saw

His own flesh, His own internal thoughts, as a master begging to be served which he must totally reject. His words are a quotation from Dt. 6:13, which warns Israel to serve Yahweh alone and not idols. He perceived His own natural mind and desire as an idol calling to be served. When the Lord explained what had happened in the wilderness to the disciples and thereby to the Gospel writers, He opened His heart to them. He gave us all a window on how He perceived Himself, as He sought to explain to men the internal struggles of the Son of God. Bringing it all back home, I must ask firstly how much we even *struggle* with temptation? And as and when we do, would we not be helped by the Lord's example of talking to ourselves, and personalising Scripture as He did? 'You don't want to do *that!* Give up your place in the Kingdom, for that...drug, that girl, that job? Of course not! Come on! There is a way of escape; Paul told me God won't try me beyond my strength, He will make me a way of escape'. The Lord in the wilderness was representative of us all. He was led of the Spirit at that time (Mt. 4:1); and Paul uses just those words of us in our present experience of trial (Rom. 8:14).

### **Serious Sinners**

We shouldn't be discouraged if in our self perception we see ourselves as serious sinners. We must say of ourselves that "we are unprofitable servants"(Lk. 17:10)- i.e. condemned, for this is how the phrase is used elsewhere in the Lord's thinking (Mt. 25:30). This is the finest paradox of all. If we perceive ourselves as worthy of condemnation, we will be saved. If we would judge [i.e. condemn] ourselves, we will not be judged / condemned (1 Cor. 11:31). This is written in the context of the breaking of bread. When we examine ourselves then, and at other times, do we get to the point where we truly *feel* through and through our condemnation? If this is how we perceive our natural selves, then surely we will be saved- if we *also* believe with joy that God's righteousness is counted to us. Over time, Paul's perception of his own sinfulness increased. The following quotes are in chronological sequence:

"I am the least of the apostles"(1 Cor. 15:9);

"Less than the least of all saints"(Eph. 3:8)

"Chief of sinners"(1 Tim. 1:15).

There is a tension between the fact we are saved and absolutely assured of a place in the Kingdom, and the evident awareness we must have of our own inadequacy and condemnation; that sense of the future we might miss. In the age to come, we will no doubt realise that this is how it had to be. But for now, we are left with that almost irresolvable tension.

## Christ Centredness

If we believe that we are counted righteous, we will with joy and gratitude be people who are centred upon another man- the Lord Jesus, the Saviour who made this great salvation possible. We run the risk, it seems to me, of being Bible centred rather than Christ centred; a community of Bible students, a kind of learned society that has more Biblical learning and erudition than most other 'Christian' communities; but precious little else. The man Christ Jesus must dominate our individual and collective consciousness, and the true doctrines we are blessed to know must enable this the more powerfully in practice. We must see in that Man who had fingernails, hair, who needed to shave, who sneezed and blinked, the very Son of God; the Man who should dominate our thinking and being. And we must grasp the wonder of the fact that from the larynx of a Palestinian Jew came the words of Almighty God. All that was true of natural Israel becomes a warning for us, Israel after the spirit. The tension between the following of Jesus and merely studying the pages of the Bible for academic truth is brought out in the Lord's encounter with the Jews in Jn. 5:39: "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: [but] ye will not come to *me* that ye might have life". Surely the Lord is using irony here: as if to say, 'Go on searching through the scrolls, thinking as you do that finding true exposition will bring you eternal life. But you must come to *me*, the word-made-flesh, the living and eternal life, if you wish to find it'.

## God Manifestation

We bear the Name of Yahweh / Jehovah, by reason of our baptism into it. His Name is declared as His character- merciful, truthful, judging sin, patient etc (Ex. 34:5-7). He who will be who He will be, manifesting His characteristics as He does so, must have His way in us too. Babylon and Nineveh were condemned for having the attitude that "I am, and there is none beside me"(Is. 47:8; Zeph. 2:15). Their self-perception was a parody on the Name and being of Yahweh: He alone can say "I am, and there is none else"(Is. 43:11; 44:6; 45:6,21) and seek to be who He is. He alone can seek to articulate the characteristics that make up His Name onto the lives of others, and onto the things that comprise His Kingdom. We are not to be who we are; to 'just be yourself'; to 'just do it', as foolish slogans and adverts encourage us. We are here to show forth His mercy, truth, judgment of sin, patient saving of the weak etc., not our own personality. We are, in the very end, Yahweh manifested to this world, through our imitation of the Lord Jesus. Paul was alluding to the Yahweh Name (as he often does) when he wrote: "...by the grace of God *I am what I am*"(1 Cor 15:10). 'Yahweh' means all of three things: I am who I am, I was who I was, and I will be who I will be. It doesn't *only* mean 'I will be manifested in the future' in a prophetic sense; that manifestation has been ongoing, and most importantly it *is* going on through us here and now. Paul felt



Yahweh's insistent manifestation of the principles of His Name through and in himself and his life's work. We are right now, in who we *are*, Yahweh's witnesses to Himself unto this world, just as Israel were meant to have been. Thus he felt "jealous with the jealousy of God" over his converts (2 Cor. 11:2); jealousy is a characteristic of the Yahweh Name, and Paul felt it, in that the Name was being expressed through him and his feelings. His threat that "I will not spare" (2 Cor. 13:2) is full of allusion to Yahweh's similar final threats to an apostate Israel. "As *he is* [another reference to the Name] so *are we* in this world" (1 Jn. 4:17). Appreciating this means that our witness is to be more centred around who we essentially *are* than what we *do*.

### **"Lord both of the dead and living"**

There are some passages which appear to teach [misread] that we go on living after death. It has been observed that Rom. 14:8,9 implies that Jesus is our Lord after death as well as in life: "For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living". We are the Lord's after death, in the same way as Abraham lives unto Him (Lk. 20:38). We are still with Him. He doesn't forget us when we die, just as I will remember my mother till the day of my death, regardless of when she dies. But if the Lord doesn't come, I will die, and my memory, my love, my fondness, will perish (for a small moment). But God doesn't die, His memory doesn't fade and distort as ours does; images of us don't come in and out of His mind with greater intensity and insistence at some times than at others; He remembers us constantly and will remember us after our death, right up until when the Lord comes. Because of this, He is the God of Abraham; Abraham is alive in the mind of God, He remembers his faith and his offering of Isaac, just as much as He was aware of it in Abraham's lifetime. The works of the dead follow them, in the sense that once they finish their labours their works are still in the memory of the Father (Rev. 14:13); for what father would not remember his dead child's ways and deeds? This is why Rom. 14:8,9 says that Jesus is our Lord after death just as much as He was and is during our lifetimes. Why? Because we are "the Lord's", because we were "added to the Lord" through baptism (Acts 2:41,47; 5:14; 11:24), because we are true brothers-in-Christ. From God's perspective, the dead believers are cheering us on as we run the race to the end; He remembers them as they were, and knows how they would behave if they were alive today, looking down upon us as we run the race (Heb. 12:1). Or in another figure, the blood of the dead believers cries out from under the altar, demanding vengeance on this world: on the Catholic, Protestant, Babylonian, Roman, Nazi, Soviet systems that slew them for their faith (Rev. 6:9). To God, their blood is a voice, just as real as the voice of Abel, which cried out (in a figure) for judgment against Cain (Gen. 4:10). After their death, those who had already died are spoken of

as being given “white robes” and being told to rest a bit longer (Rev. 6:11). Yet the white robe is given at baptism; a man may cast off Christ, but the prodigal is given again the robe if he returns (Lk. 15:22 s.w.); we are given white robes in this life through our acceptance of the blood of Christ and living in response to that redemption (Rev. 7:13,14; 22:14 Gk.). God giving believers white robes after their death can surely only be understood as His remembrance of how in their lives they had put on those robes. But His view of time is different, and He sees them as doing it again and again, as He considers how they had died for His cause and how thereby He will surely raise them. This is just as we would relive in our own minds the baptism of a child who has died. We know of course that there is no immortal soul, and that we personally feel nothing in death. But there is an immortal spirit, in that who we essentially are, our personality, lives on in the memory of a loving Father.

### **In the end**

In the end, we are all only ordinary men, nothing-special women, who have somehow been called by Almighty God to know the ultimately true faith, to have the hope of eternity with Him- life with His nature, with His Son, for ever and ever and ever... And yet we can treat this relationship, this essential being, as just something ordinary. For those brought up in the faith, it can just be an unthinking following of the faith of our fathers. Or just a church to attend which we got to know from our work colleague, our distant relative, because it seemed like the logical way at the time. Or just...mere religion, with its traditions and simple ceremonies of baptism and breaking of bread, with its meetings, with its psychology of religious feeling just like anything else. Brethren, this ought not so to be for us. This is the Truth, and the things we stand for stretch on into the spectre of utter infinity; they are the one and only Truth for our whole and eternal existence. It isn't just a crutch to help us through this life, which is all the religion of this world amounts to. It isn't mere Christianity, a badge to wear just as everyone else says 'I'm a Catholic...a Hindu...a Baptist'. It's infinitely and essentially more than that; so much much more.

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### **Notes**

(1) David Levin, 'A New Wineskin', *Tidings*, Dec. 1999.

(2) Gal. 2:20 and 1 Cor. 15:10 show Paul using the phrase “yet not I but....” to differentiate between his natural and spiritual self. Perhaps he does the same in the only other occurrence of the phrase, in 1 Cor 7:10: “And unto the married I

command, yet not I [the natural Paul], but the Lord [the man Christ Jesus in the spiritual Paul], Let not the wife depart from her husband”.

## 14 Paul, Philemon, Onesimus

As I see it, the letter of Paul to Philemon is a lived out exposition of grace, and the John 17-style unity that arises from this.

The fact that the Lord intercedes for us means that we should be open to others interceding with *us* on behalf of another. Paul explains what I mean. In one of his countless allusions to the Gospels, he speaks of how he ‘beseches’ Philemon to be generous and gracious to his runaway slave Onesimus (Philemon 10). Paul uses the word *parakleo*- well known for its repeated use in the Gospels to describe how the Lord Jesus is our *parakletos*, our comforter, interceder, beseecher of the Father for us. Surely he means us to get the connection. As the Lord Jesus beseches / intercedes the Father for us, Philemon included, so we, and Philemon, should be open to others beseeching *us*- and respond with a like grace and lavish response. And there’s another allusion to the Gospels in the very next verse of the letter to Philemon. The unprofitable servant of Mt. 25:30 is all of us, the Lord taught. And so when Paul appeals to Philemon to be gracious to his unprofitable servant Onesimus (Philemon 11), he’s alluding back to that parable. And making the point that Philemon is himself an unprofitable servant, graciously received by his Lord; and so he should be likewise gracious to *his* unprofitable servant.

The point is clearly made by Paul when he says that Philemon should *receive* Onesimus (Philemon 12,17)- for Paul had written to the Romans years before that they should receive one another, as God for Christ’s sake has received us (Rom. 15:7 s.w.). It seems that the case of Onesimus gave Paul an opportunity to practically exemplify what he had meant. Paul speaks of how Philemon would “receive” Onesimus “for ever”- and yet he is implying Onesimus should be sent back to minister to him in Rome. Surely what Paul has in mind is that if someone is truly our brother, then we will eternally “receive” them as such in the Kingdom ages- and therefore we ought to be doing that right now. The baptism of Onesimus was a hard call for Philemon. He had to believe that that difficult man who had defrauded him was now his brother, even though he hadn’t baptized him. Many an ecclesial upset has been caused by this kind of thing. Paul says that if Philemon received Onesimus, then he received Paul. Paul was one with his new brother Onesimus (:12). And if Onesimus returned to Rome and served Paul there, he would be ministering to Paul as if Philemon was doing this- “in thy stead he might have ministered”(13). So as Paul was represented by Onesimus, so likewise Onesimus would represent Philemon. This is the John 17-style unity which there is in Christ.

By receiving Onesimus with grace, there would be “benefit” and “profit” for Philemon (Philemon 11,14). Humanly speaking, there was only loss. For Onesimus had defrauded Philemon (Philemon 18 Gk.), and Paul was implying that Onesimus send him back to Rome to help him, with Philemon’s ‘agreement’ [AV “mind”] (Philemon 13,14 GK.). But by showing grace in this case, the material loss would become a spiritual profit for Philemon in the last day. And continuing the theme of ‘profit’, Paul says that Onesimus ‘owed’ him his very self because Paul had converted him; therefore any material debt that Onesimus ‘owed’ Philemon should be forgiven with pleasure (Philemon 18,19). The unpayable debt that we have should lead us to be forgiving of whatever others owe us. Note in passing how Philemon ‘owed’ his very [eternal] life to Paul. This is the power and responsibility of witnessing to others. The saviour is the Lord, and yet the preacher manifests that salvation to others to such an extent that effectively we owe our salvation additionally to the person who converted us. The same basic theme of a third party being responsible for the fortunes of another brother is reflected in verse 22. Paul trusted that through the prayers of Philemon he would be released; and he was so confident in the answer to that prayer that he asked him even to prepare a room for him ahead of time!

In the same way as God had done for us exceeding abundantly *above* all we could ask or think (Eph. 3:20), so Philemon was to do *more* [s.w.] than the grace that Paul was suggesting (Philemon 21, 16 s.w.). It’s not just a case of forgiving each other because we were forgiven; it’s a question of lavishing the grace upon each other which the Lord has upon us. And notice the context of all this. Paul says that as Philemon’s elder, he could just “enjoin” him to do that which was required of those in Christ. But he prefers not to work through a command from an elder, demanding obedience. Instead, he appeals to Philemon’s own experience of personal grace, and sees in *that* an imperative, a command to be ‘obeyed’ (Philemon 8,21). The picture we get of Philemon is that he was an active and good brother in many ways. He had an ecclesia that met in his house, probably, by implication, comprised of his own family / “house” whom he had converted. The “beloved Aphia” refers to a female [*agapete*]- probably his wife. He was well known for a truly generous spirit to the brethren, and for a deep faith (:5-7). And yet he his whole standing with the Lord, Paul implies, was going to be revealed, and stood now under question, over the issue of his attitude to his runaway slave who had now accepted Christ. If he wouldn’t accept him, then all this good upright living was in vain. Paul was giving him a test. He could’ve just kept Onesimus with him in Rome. But he sent him all the way back home to Philemon, to get his ‘agreement’ (Philemon 14, AV “mind”) that Philemon accepts Onesimus as a brother, and sends him back to Rome to serve Paul. He could’ve “retained” Onesimus; but instead, he seeks a “benefit”[spiritually] for Philemon by bringing the issue to a pointed head (:13,14). And so it can be with us, that providence brings one

specific case or person into our lives to test whether or not we have really accepted grace in the very core of our hearts. And on this, all else ultimately depends. And these things ‘God works oftentimes with man’. We find ourselves living out the situations of both Onesimus and Philemon. The crucial challenge of grace comes to us time and again in ecclesial life, and we too present it to others. Upon our response to it, our salvation-by-grace depends.

In this context, though, one final point. Paul recognized that Philemon “refreshed the bowels of the saints”, and he rejoiced that this was the case. Yet there was one saint whose bowels Philemon had not yet refreshed- and that was Paul himself. For Paul uses this very phrase in asking Philemon to rejoice *his* bowels by receiving Onesimus (:7,20). Here we see grace to the extreme. Paul could rejoice that a brother was genuinely loving and encouraging to other brethren, even though that brother had not been so to him personally. It’s so easy in personal disputes to write a brother off as totally no good because he was unkind or inappropriate or downright wrong in his treatment of us personally; we so easily forget that in many *other* walks of his life, he is a wonderful servant of the Lord. Yet Paul modelled the very grace which he asked Philemon to show to Onesimus.

## Appendix: Chronology of Paul's Life

Standard Chronology Of Paul's Life	John Robinson's Chronology Of Paul's Life (2)
AD 35 Paul's conversion	AD33 Conversion
36-38 In Arabia <sup>(1)</sup>	35 First visit to Jerusalem
38-43 Preaching in Damascus and Jerusalem	46 Second [famine-relief] visit to Jerusalem
44-46 Working in Antioch and Syria	47-48 First missionary journey
46-48 First missionary journey	48 Council of Jerusalem
49-50 Jerusalem Conference	49-51 Second missionary journey
50-52 Second missionary journey	52-57 Third missionary journey
53-57 Third missionary journey	57 Arrival in Jerusalem
57-59 Arrest- Jerusalem-Caesarea	57-59 Imprisonment in Caesarea
59-62 To Rome; first imprisonment	60-62 Imprisonment in Rome
63-66 Release; travels in Asia, Greece, Spain	
64-68 Nero's persecution of the Christians	
67 Arrest, imprisoned in a dungeon in Rome	
68 Final trial; executed.	

### Notes

(1) "Arabia" is from the word 'Arabah', and occurs in the LXX in Dt. 2:8; 3:17; 4:49 to mean simply the wilderness. Since Paul went there from Damascus, it has been suggested that he mixed with the Damascene Essene group. There are extensive parallels between the Qumran texts and the letter to the Hebrews, which could lend support to this suggestion- as if Paul wrote to an audience he knew.

(2) J.A.T. Robinson, *Redating The New Testament* (London: SCM, 1976) pp. 52,53.

# Peter

## 1 Peter The Rock

### Introduction

We begin these studies in full knowledge that Peter is presented to us in the Gospels as a believer who several times failed, who was unstable, and whose spirituality soared up and down. Yet the Lord nicknamed him “Peter”. Because ‘Peter’ is a common name now, it is hard to appreciate that before the Lord coined this nickname, ‘Peter’ didn’t exist as a name. “Neither *Petros* in Greek nor *Kepha* in Aramaic is a normal proper name”<sup>(1)</sup>. Likewise C.T. Grant: “*Petros* was not used as a name at that time”<sup>(2)</sup>. Simon / Shimon obviously existed- but not ‘Peter’. The Lord Jesus was nicknaming Simon ‘the rock’, or, ‘Rocky’. The American ‘Rocky’ is rather similar- it wasn’t a proper name in the English language, then it began being used as a nickname, and now it is becoming accepted as a personal name. Why, then, did the Lord nickname the most apparently *unstable* of the disciples ‘Rocky’? Surely because He perceived, in His generous and gracious way, that beneath all the surface instability, the ups and downs of loyalty to Him, there was a wonderful base stability and rock-like faith and commitment to Him in this man. May we learn likewise to discern our brethren, and also discern the rock-likeness of the man Simon. And we may also take some comfort that for all our mess ups, we are seen by our Lord for who we basically are. And of course, it is Jesus Himself who is “the rock”, just as He is the shepherd, and yet He calls Simon the shepherd (Jn. 10:11,14 cp. 21:15-17). He wished for Peter the rock to perceive that He truly was willing and eager to manifest Himself through him. Perhaps this is why John records Peter’s name change as occurring at the beginning of the ministry, whereas Matthew places it over halfway through- as if the Lord needed to encourage Peter, as Jacob needed to be encouraged, to believe that his name really *had* changed in God’s perception of things.

It has been pointed out that the name ‘Simon’ was “the commonest male name by far in 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine”; and that Peter was “originally not a name in its own right but simply the Greek word used to translate the Apostle Simon’s Aramaic nickname, *Kepha*, meaning ‘rock’”<sup>(3)</sup>. What this means is that the most mundane name was taken, and the owner of it given a totally unique and new name. And yet each of us are granted a new and totally personal name by the Lord, reflecting our essential personality; and this name will be confirmed

at judgment day. The same researcher, who extensively surveyed all Palestinian personal names in the first century through study of inscriptions etc, came to observe that many of the new names given to Jewish converts were names which she never found given to anyone else- they were freak names. There is the case of John Mark- 'Mark' was "a name not otherwise known among Palestinian Jews", and yet he was given it. This suggests to me that it was a practice to give a convert a new name, either a made up name like 'Peter' ['Rocky'] which nobody had used before, or a name quite ethnically inappropriate to them as a Jew or Gentile. This would have paraded before the world their unity and the radical transformation that had overtaken them through their personality-changing encounter with the living Jesus.

The great paradox that Peter was named 'rock' and yet was in some ways so un-rock like is carried over by him being called a 'pillar' in the new temple of God which the Lord Jesus built (Gal. 2:9). And yet he, the pillar, collapsed under pressure from the Judaizer brethren. Yet ultimately, he was the rock and pillar. And we need to see each others temporary failings in the same way. Significantly, Rev. 3:12 promises to each believer that they will be made a pillar in God's temple; Peter is being set up, by this allusion to Gal. 2:9, as a pattern for us all.

## Notes

(1) R.E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John* [New York: Doubleday, 1981 ed., p. 76].

(2) C.T. Grant, 'The nature of the Universal church', *Emmaus Journal* Vol. 7 No. 1, Summer 1998.

(3) Margaret Williams, *Palestinian Personal Names in Acts* in Richard Bauckham, ed. *The Book of Acts* Vol. 4 pp. 93, 104 (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1995).

## 1-2 Peter Our Example

Peter is set up as our example and pattern. The records portray him in such a way that we see so clearly the similarities between him and us. The good intentions, the flashes of zeal, the miserable failures, the essential loyalty to the Man who was better than he. The Gospels also portray Peter as the representative of the group of disciples. It is Peter who answers when the Lord asks a question of them all (Mk. 8:29 cp. the other accounts). The way Jesus



looks upon all the disciples as He speaks to Peter makes Peter some kind of representative of them all in the Lord's eyes (Mk. 8:33). In Mt. 16:17 Peter is commended for having had the Father reveal Jesus to Him. Yet Mt. 11:27 says that the Father reveals the identity of His Son to *all* who truly come to Him. Thus Peter is representative of all who have truly perceived the Son's identity in Jesus of Nazareth.

In one Gospel, all the disciples ask a question, while in the parallel passage Peter is stated to have asked it (Mk. 7:17 cp. Mt. 15:15 and Mt. 21:20 cp. Mk. 11:21). Even outsiders considered Peter to be representative of all the disciples (Mt. 17:24). "Peter and those with him" is how the group is described (Mk. 1:36; Lk. 8:45 Gk.; 9:32). Peter's crucial confession that he believed that Jesus was the Son of God is repeated almost verbatim by all the disciples, some time later (Jn. 6:69; 16:30). He is truly the representative disciple.

When about to drown, Peter our example called out: "Lord, save me" (Mt. 14:30); and He was saved. When he later preached to the crowds, he encouraged them to likewise call upon the name of the Lord and be saved (Acts 2:39). He saw himself then and there, in all his weakness and yet sincere desperation, as the epitome of us all. But the parallels don't stop there. Peter had asked the Lord bid him 'Come unto me' (Mt. 14:28). Yet this is the very language of the Lord to all: 'Come unto me...'. Yet Peter went further; in the same way as the Lord stretched forth His hand and saved Peter, so He stretches forth His hand, Peter observed, to save all who would come to Him (Mt. 14:31 = Acts 4:30). But Peter is framed as Jesus, in that he too stretched out his hand to save others as Jesus had done to him (Mt. 14:35 = Acts 5:15,16; Mt. 14:31 = Acts 3:7), bidding them come through the water of baptism as Jesus had done to him. As Jesus was worshipped after saving Peter, so men tried to worship Peter (Mt. 14:33 = Acts 3:11). So Peter went through what we all do- having been saved by Jesus, having come to Him and having been rescued by the outstretched arm, he responds to this by doing the same for others. When the Lord "caught" hold of Peter as he sunk in the waves (Mt. 14:31), a Greek word is used which occurs only once elsewhere: "He did not take hold [s.w. to catch] of Angels, but of the seed of Abraham" (Heb. 2:16). The Hebrew writer was surely alluding to the Lord's 'catching' of desperate Peter and pulling him to salvation- and saw in Peter a symbol of all those who will be saved by Christ.

The evolution of Peter's spirituality was influenced by a growing appreciation of the Lordship of Jesus, of His grace, and the real import of His cross. But fuelling this dynamic was an ever deeper realization of his own personal sinfulness. This was and is crucial for every man in Christ.

"When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren" (Lk. 22:32) found its fulfilment in the Lord's interview with Peter in Jn. 21. Three times He asks

him: ‘do you love me?’, and three times he invites Peter to care for the lambs and sheep- to strengthen his brethren. The triple denial and the triple reinstatement and triple confession of love both occurred by a fire, a *charcoal* fire on each occasion (Jn. 18:18; 21:9) just to heighten the evident connection. Peter’s conversion can therefore be equated with his response to the denials- the repentance, the realization of his own frailty, and desperate acceptance of the Lord’s gracious pardon. Yet Peter invites his fellow elders: “feed the flock of God”, repeating the Lord’s commission to him, as if he saw in himself a pattern for each man who would take any pastoral role in Christ’s ecclesia. The implication is that each man must go through a like conversion. And Peter points out that we are “a royal priesthood”, as if he saw each believer as a priest / pastor. Peter is our example. We all deny our Lord, camouflage it and justify it as we may. We all stand in Peter’s uncomfortable shoes. We do in principle what Judas did.

## 1-3 Peter's Conversion

### Condemnation

There is so much more implied in the statement that Peter “wept bitterly” contained in those two words. The Lord’s comment that satan had demanded to have the disciples, especially Peter (Lk. 22:31) is clearly based upon the experience of Job, whom satan also demanded. The Lord saw a similarity between Job and Peter, in that Job’s sufferings were to be repeated in their essence in the experience of Peter. Only through that bitter weeping and reflection upon it, corresponding in the Lord’s analogy to all that Job went through, would Peter like Job emerge triumphant. Peter stood somewhere that night, knowing he was condemned. Such a true, genuine sense is a vital component in any conversion. He “went out” from the Lord. “Went out” is the language of Judas going out (Jn. 13:30- in essence, Peter and Judas did the same thing at the same time). Other prototypes of the rejected likewise had gone out from the Lord. Cain ““went out” (Gen. 4:16), as did Zedekiah in the judgment of Jerusalem (Jer. 39:4; 52:7). Esau went out from the land of Canaan into Edom, slinking away from the face of his brother Jacob, sensing his righteousness and his own carnality (Gen. 36:2-8). Yet Peter in this life “went out” from the Lord (Mk. 14:68) and then some minutes later further “went out and wept bitterly” (Lk. 22:62), living out the very figure of condemnation- and yet was able to repent and come back. In this life we can be judged, condemned, weep...but still repent of it and thereby change our eternal destiny. But at the final judgment: it will be just too late. That ‘judgment’ will be a detailed statement of the outcome of the ongoing investigative judgment which is going on right now.

There are other connections between Peter's position at this time and that of the rejected before the judgement seat. He was 'remaining outside' of the Palace where the Lord was (Mt. 26:29 AV "sat without"). Yet the Greek *exo* translated "without" or "outside" is elsewhere used about the rejected being "cast out" (Mt. 5:13; 13:48), 'standing without' with the door shut (Lk. 13:25,28), like a fruitless branch cast out into the fire (Jn. 15:6). When we read that Peter "went out" from the Lord's presence (Mt. 26:75), the same Greek word is used. The oaths which Peter used would probably have included 'Before God!'. He was anticipating the judgment seat: before God he admitted he did not know His Son. The "day of *visitation*" is coming for us all (1 Pet. 2:12). The Greek is related to the word describing how after the denials, Christ turned and *looked* upon Peter (Lk. 22:61). This was for him his day of judgment, which we must all pass through. He called down Divine curses *upon himself* if he knew Jesus of Nazareth- and thus brought the curse of God upon himself (the record of his cursing and swearing refers to this rather than to the use of expletives). H.H. Rowley has commented: "In Hebrew thought a curse was not the mere expression of a wish; it was charged with power to work for its own fulfilment, and once uttered it had passed beyond the power of its utterer, and gone forth on its evil errand" <sup>(1)</sup>. The whole idea of 'I don't know Him' must, sadly, be connected with the Lord's words in Mt. 7:23 and 25:41, where He tells the rejected: "I never knew you". By denying knowledge of the Saviour, Peter was effectively agreeing that the verdict of condemnation could appropriately be passed upon him. In one of his many allusions to the Gospels, Paul wrote that "If we deny him, he also will deny us" (2 Tim. 2:12). Peter in this life denied his Lord *in front of men* (Mt. 26:70)- and the record of his failure intentionally looks back to the Lord's warning that whoever denies Him *before men* will be denied by Him at judgment day (Mt. 10:33). He sinned, and in the court of Heaven was condemned. Mt. 26:75 speaks of how Peter "went out"- the same word is used about the condemned going out of the Lord's presence in the last day- Mt. 5:13; 13:48; Lk. 13:28; Jn. 15:6; Rev. 22:15. Peter condemned himself.

But remember that Judas likewise "went out" into the darkness. Judas is described as "standing with" those who ultimately crucified Jesus in Jn 18:5. Interestingly the same idea occurs in Jn. 18:18 where Peter is described as standing with essentially the same group; point being, that Judas and Peter in essence did the same thing, they both denied their Lord and stood with His enemies. But one repented real repentance, whereas the other couldn't muster the faith for this. Lesson: We all deny the Lord, but the two paths before us are those of either Peter or Judas. Peter of course is our pattern. Paul says that none of the brethren 'stood with' him when he was on trial, but " the Lord [Jesus] stood with me" (2 Tim. 4:16,17). It seems to me that the Lord knew exactly what it felt like to be left alone by your brethren, as happened to Him in Gethsemane and at His trials; and so at Paul's trial He could 'stand with' him,

based on His earthly experience of being left to stand alone. In our lives likewise, the Lord acts to help us based on His earthly experiences; He knows how we feel, because He in essence went through it all. John maybe has the image of Judas and Peter standing with the Lord's enemies in mind when he writes that the redeemed shall stand with Jesus on Mount Zion (Rev. 14:1), facing the hostile world.

Peter's self condemnation is brought out in yet finer detail by considering what he meant when he thrice denied that he either knew nor understood about Jesus (Mk. 14:68). By that time, everyone had heard about Jesus- after all, the trial of Jesus was going on, and all Jerusalem were waiting with bated breath for the outcome. And there was Peter, standing by the fire in the High Priest's house, with everyone talking about the Jesus affair. Peter hardly would've meant 'Jesus? 'Jesus' who? Never heard of him. Dunno who you're talking about'. What he therefore meant, or wished to be understood as meaning, was that he didn't 'know' Jesus in a close sense, he wasn't a disciple of Jesus, he didn't know nor understand Jesus, i.e., he wasn't a follower of Jesus. When Peter tells the maid: "I know not, neither understand what you say [about this Jesus]" (Mk. 14:68), the other records interpret this as meaning that Peter said that he didn't know Jesus. So we may have to interpret the form of speech being used here; for Semitic speakers don't answer questions in the same way and form as we may be accustomed to. The "what you say" was about Jesus; and therefore Peter is saying that he neither knows [closely] nor understands this Jesus. And yet time and again, Peter's Lord had taught that those who did not or would not 'know and understand' Him were those who were "outside", unknown by Him, rejected. And Peter was saying, to save his skin, 'Yes, that's me'. And yet... Peter repented, and changed that verdict.

Mark's record of the Lord's trial is not merely a historical account. It's framed in terms of our need to testify for our faith too. The Lord's example in His time of suffering was and is intended to be our example and inspiration, in that we are to in a very practical sense enter into His sufferings. Mark records the Lord's prediction that His people would have to witness before both Jewish and Gentile authorities (Mk. 13:9-13)- and then Mark goes on in the next chapter to describe Jesus doing just this. The Lord asked His suffering followers not to prepare speeches of self-defence- perhaps exemplified and patterned for us in the way that He remained silent before His accusers. Peter is recorded as denying Christ three times- just as the Romans interrogated Christians and asked them to three times deny Christ (2). The Christians were also asked to curse, or *anathematizein*, Jesus (3). And when we read of Peter's cursing, the same word is used. We're left with the impression that Peter actually cursed Christ. And so Mark, who was likely writing the Gospel on Peter's behalf, is showing that Peter, the leader of the church, actually pathetically failed to follow his Lord at this time. And yet the Gospel of Mark was being distributed

to Christians who were being dragged before Jewish and Roman courts. The idea was surely to give them an example and encouragement from Peter's failure, rather than portray a positive example of a man overcoming the temptation to curse and deny Christ. But this was how the Lord used Peter- as an example from failure for all of us.

## **To The Cross**

So knowing his condemnation, where did Peter go? Probably he could quite easily have also gone and hung himself- for he was of that personality type. But instead he went to the cross- for he was a witness of the sufferings of Christ (1 Pet. 5:1), and his words and writing consistently reflect the language of Golgotha's awful scene. There, in that personal, hidden observation of the cross, probably disguised in the crowd, not daring to stand with John and the women, his conversion began. Then his love for his Lord became the more focused. Now he could *do* nothing- and his thinking had been so full of *doing* until that point. All he could do was to watch that death and know his own desperation, and somehow believe in grace. "Who his own self bare our sins in his body up on to the tree" (2:24 RVmg.) suggests the watching Peter reflecting, as the Lord's body was lifted up vertical, that his sins of denial and pride were somehow with his Lord, being lifted up by Him. "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God" (1 Pet. 3:18) could well have been written by Peter with a glance back at the way that after his denials, he the unjust went to the crucifixion scene and reflected just this. When in 5:1 he comments that he witnessed the sufferings of Christ, he could be saying that therefore these thoughts were his thoughts as he witnessed it: the just suffering for him the unjust, to bring him back to God. And then there was that graciously unrecorded appearing of the risen Lord to Peter (1 Cor. 15:5; Lk. 24:34). These passages suggest that the Lord simply appeared to Him, without words. It was simply the assurance that was there in the look on the face of the Lord. And now, finally, this interview with the Lord, where specific questions were asked.

There are times between parents and children, brothers, sisters, boyfriend and girlfriend, newly marrieds, old married couples wedded for a lifetime...when there is a slip by one party. An unusually hard and hurtful word, a sentence quite inappropriately said in public that betrays, that denies. And then a private meeting. The hung head on the one hand, and the soft, sincere, seeking question from the offended party: Do you love me? And the hung head mouths something to the effect that yes, you know that I love you, more now than ever before. All these so human scenes are but dim reflections of the Lord's meeting with Peter. Here was the Son of God, with eyes as a blazing fire, the One who truly knew and discerned all things, and before Him was the Peter who had undoubtedly denied Him, with oath and curses. Surely as he answered the

questions, he did so with tears, with a lump in the throat that would have made his voice sound so distorted and childlike. Do you love me? That was the question. Do you love me more than the others? You once thought you did. And finally he has to say from the heart: You (of all men) know all things. You really and truly do. And you know that I love you. I can't say to what degree, you can judge that. Now I realize I'm not stronger than my brethren, and I didn't love you as much as I thought. But then, you know all things. And you know that, all the same, I truly love you. Peter links conversion with repentance (Acts 3:19; see too Mk. 4:12; James 5:19,20). Although it is graciously unrecorded, it is left unspoken that Peter repented of his denials; and of his self-assurance, and of his feeling better than his brethren, and of so much else...

## Conversion

And this was conversion. Peter had been converted before, of course. The Lord spoke of conversion as really seeing, really hearing, really understanding, and commented that the disciples had reached this point (Mt. 13:15,16). But he also told them that they needed to be converted and become as children, knowing they knew nothing as they ought to know (Mt. 18:3). After seeing what happened to the sons of Sceva, it would appear that some who had 'believed' went up to a higher level of commitment: "Many also of them that had believed came, confessing and declaring their deeds. And not a few of them that practised magical arts brought their books together, and burned them" (Acts 19:18,19 RV). This would seem to imply that despite having 'believed', perhaps with the same level of shallow conviction as some 'believed' in the teaching of Jesus during His ministry, their faith wasn't so deep. They were taken up to an altogether higher level of commitment, resulting in 'confessing and declaring', and quitting their involvement with magic.

There are levels up the ladder, and Peter came to the higher conversion which we must all come to. As he stood with bowed head, converted to a child, knowing his own frailty, knowing the Lord's grace and his love of all the Lord was and is, he was converted. The Lord *then* could tell him to go on following Him, and to feed His sheep. Now Peter was converted, he could strengthen his brethren. Surely Peter had found the Lord's words strange when he first heard them: "When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren". He thought he *was already converted*; he was sure of it <sup>(4)</sup>. And you and me thought likewise when we rose from the water of baptism. It concerns me, it worries me no end, that in our preaching of the Gospel we seem to merely be teaching propositional truth- one God, no trinity, baptism by immersion, resurrection, no immortal soul...all of which is quite true and necessary to a true understanding of the Gospel. And our interviewing of candidates ensures that their understanding is in harmony with the statements in the Statement of Faith...and so they are baptized, and go off as many of us did to debate with the likes of JWs and

Adventists the truths which they have learnt. But this is not the full message of the Gospel. The full message is life with Christ, with His life as your life, with your heart and soul given over to fellowship with Him in every sense, to the glorification of God's Name. It means knowing your desperation, bowing with an unpretended shame before His righteousness and meekly rising up in service to the brotherhood. This was conversion for Peter, and it must be for each of us <sup>(5)</sup>. There will be some who in the last day will really think they have misheard: "I never knew you". *Never*. They knew the right propositions, they fought for the preservation of those doctrines, they can say that they "kept" the talent given them (the same word is used about 'keeping' the faith in the pastorals); but they never knew their Lord. And therefore He never knew them. For all their knowledge, they never knew Him. They never bowed before Him. They never said to Him: You know that I love you. Have you said those words, and felt them? *Have you wept for your wretched inadequacy?* I hope, earnestly, that each reader has, and does. And if we have, we know conversion. And like Peter we will stand up and quite naturally witness to all "the words of this life", full of God's word (12 out of the 22 verses devoted to Peter's speech in Acts 2 are simply him quoting Scripture), pouring it out to men in the earnest hope that they will share our path of conversion.

### **Peter And Conversion**

The Lord spoke of conversion as really seeing, really hearing, really understanding, and commented that the disciples had reached this point (Mt. 13:15,16)

But they needed to be converted and become as children, knowing they knew nothing as they ought to know (Mt. 18:3).

"When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren"

At the cross men "returned", s.w. convert

We later read that Peter only really believed on Jesus as Lord at Pentecost. Yet he had called Jesus Lord and Master well before this. It seems that only then did Peter go up to a higher level in faith, and only then did he perceive Jesus as *Lord*, which inspired that faith: "the like gift as he did also unto us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ...the Gentiles also...repented unto life" (Acts 11:17,18 RV). It was at Pentecost that Peter saw himself as having repented / converted, to a higher level.

### **Reconversion**

Paul Tournier has some relevant comment about conversion and re-conversion: "Conversion is never an act done once and for all, never an isolated, measurable fact. It is really growth, which needs time to develop-sometimes a long time. In very rare cases one can expect sudden transformations visible to the naked eye. That fruit that ripens altogether too quickly is premature, and soon falls" (6). It may *seem* that this isn't true- a new convert shows such apparent joy and zeal. But psychologically, it's clear that 'new converts' are often full of a zeal which doesn't necessarily come directly from the new set of beliefs which they hold [although it can and should come from this]. The energy behind their new dynamism can come from the fact they've revolted against their background [e.g. when a Moslem becomes a Christian], their parents, a worldview that they feel to have crushed them, and on which they can now get their own back. I'm not scorning the joy and zeal of conversion to Christ; I'm just sounding caveats.

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## Notes

(1) H.H. Rowley, *The Book Of Job* (London: Nelson, 1976) p. 38.

(2) Quotations from Pliny to this intent in A.N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society And Roman Law In The New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978) pp. 25,26.

(3) E. Bammel, *The Trial Of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1970) pp. 66-71.

(4) Another example of Peter coming to deeply know something which he had only theoretically known is in his perception of the Lord's resurrection. Peter knew Jesus had risen, and he had met him and been "glad" when he saw the Lord, and in some form had joyfully proclaimed the news to the others. But "when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher's coat unto him (for he was naked) and did cast himself into the sea" (Jn. 21:7), and then meets the Lord and as it were they settle the score relating to his denials. Again by a fire, the three fold "lovest thou me?" probed Peter's denials, and the threefold commission to "feed my sheep" confirmed his total re-instatement to grace. The whole flavour of this record would make it seem that this was the first time Peter had met the risen Lord. But it clearly wasn't. Surely the point is that like us, we can know theoretically that Christ rose; we can be sure of it. But the personal implications in terms of confession of sin and service to that risen Lord can be lost on us, to the point that we *don't really accept* that Christ is risen, even if in theory we do know and confess it.



(5) There is reason to think that like Paul, Peter is held up as a pattern for all who would afterwards believe. The way Peter is brought to Jesus and named by him has evident connection with the bringing of Eve [cp. the whole bride of Christ] to Adam [cp. Christ] to be named (Gen. 2:22,23 = Jn. 1;41,42). The way he remembers the word of the Lord at the time of his denials comfortably links with the way the Comforter was to bring to remembrance the word of the Lord to all His people. It's as if all comforted by the Comforter find their representative in Peter in the heat of his denials.

(6) Paul Tournier, *The Person Reborn* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975) p. 84.

## 2-1 Peter And The Cross

### Leaving All

The rich young man would fain have followed Jesus. But he was told that he must sell all that he had, give to the poor, and take up the cross to follow Christ (Mk. 10:21). Notice how the ideas of following Christ and taking up the cross are linked. The man went away, unable to carry that cross, that sacrifice of those material things that were dearest to him. Peter responds with the strong implication that he *had* done all these things, he was following the Master, and by implication he felt he was carrying the cross. Notice the parallels between the Lord's demand of the young man, and Peter's comment (Lk. 18:22 cp. 28; Mk. 10:21 cp. 28):

“Sell all that thou hast and distribute to the poor      “We have left all

...and come, take up the cross      [no comment by Peter]

and follow me”      ...and have followed thee”

Peter seems to have subconsciously bypassed the thing about taking up the cross. But he was sure that he was really following the Lord. He blinded himself to the inevitable link between following Christ and self-crucifixion; for the path of the man Jesus lead to Golgotha. We have this same tendency, in that we can break bread week after week, read the records of the crucifixion at least eight times / year, and yet not let ourselves grasp the most basic message: that we as followers of this man must likewise follow in our self-sacrifice to that same end. And was Peter really correct to say that he had really “left all”? He evidently had in mind how he had left his nets and walked away, following Jesus (Mk. 1:18). Then he thought he was following Jesus in the way the Lord

demanded. For some time later, the Lord “entered into one of the ships, which was (i.e. still, at that time) Simon’s...” (Lk. 5:1). Peter had been fishing all night (11:5)- strange, for a man who had so dramatically left his nets to respond to the Lord’s call. But after the miraculous catch of fishes, Peter “forsook all, and followed him”. Note that Mark’s [Peter’s] Gospel omits many incidents, but also uses the device of repetition to stress what the writer considers significant. Thus in Mk. 1:16 Peter tells us twice that he *was* a fisherman [cp. 14:68]. Now, by the time of Lk. 18 and the conversation with the rich young man, Peter was confident he had forsaken all. But “I go a fishing” (Jn. 21:3) would suggest that even this forsaking of all had not been so dramatic. The boats were still there. Peter still carried his fishing tackle round with him in his pack (Mt. 17:27). The Lord had taught that following Him meant not just leaving behind for a moment, but selling up and giving the money to the poor. This Peter had not done. But he assumed that because he was physically following Jesus, well therefore what the Lord demanded of the rich young man, he had as good as done; for that young man wouldn’t follow Jesus, but Peter would. It is easy to understand how Peter reasoned- for the fact we are apparent followers of the Lord in a world which chooses to reject Him, can lead to an assumption that we must of course be following just as He asks of us. Consider too how Peter asks the Lord: “Where are you going?” in the context of the Lord going to the cross. Yet later, the Lord pointed out that “Not one of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’” (Jn. 13:36; 16:5). Clearly enough the Lord’s point was that Peter had enquired about the cross, but not really enquired. And is it that same with us? That we wish to know of the cross, but we are not *really* enquiring as to it, as the personal implications are too great for us? It wasn’t that Peter [nor us] was unaware of the cross and the Lord’s teaching about it; it was rather that he [and we] failed to let the realities sink home. The Lord had clearly taught Peter that He must lay down His life for the sheep (Jn. 10:11)- but Peter wished to sacrifice his own life to save Jesus’ having to do this (Jn. 13:36-38). So great was Peter’s barrier to the idea of the Lord Jesus having to die. And we too run into this same barrier with the cross of Christ; it’s why, e.g., we find it so hard to make an extended study of the crucifixion, why people walk out of movies about the Passion of Christ half way through, why we find it hard to concentrate upon the simple facts of the death of Christ at their memorial meetings...

The Lord went on to define what leaving all really was- and he includes leaving wife and brethren. Peter hadn’t left at least one of his brethren; for Andrew was with him. And 1 Cor. 9:5 implies Peter’s wife accompanied him in his travelling. Jesus went on to point out that the last shall be first and the first last, as if warning Peter not to over-rate his following and cross-carrying. And He then gave the parable of the 11<sup>th</sup> hour labourer being rewarded with the same salvation as he who thought he deserved so much more (Mt. 20:1-16). Surely the Lord is broaching Peter’s intolerance of the rich young man’s honest

recognition that he couldn't follow as required. For Peter was to learn the paucity of his following, and to see how in sacrifice of material as well as more abstract things, he had not really understood what following Christ was all about. And yet even at that time, he could display a fierce and commendable loyalty for the things of his Lord. He knew Him as Lord and Master, and he said well. But there was so much further yet to go.

More than not fully forsaking his fishing gear by selling it, it would seem that Peter as a working man had a love of his job. He left his fishing in Mark 1 to follow the Lord, but returned to it by Luke 5. Then he left it, and returned to it in the post-resurrection crisis. The Lord's provision of fish on the shore was simply saying: 'You don't need to fish any more'. He asked them to drag the nets to land, which would usually have broken them, but they didn't break. Likewise He had earlier told fisherman Peter to cast the net on the other side, when Peter knew full well which side of the boat there were likely to be fish. And a whirlwind storm had come upon Galilee which would have drowned fisherman and sailor Peter were it not for the Lord's presence. In all these things, Peter was being taught to quit the life that he loved. "Lovest thou me more than these?" was asked with the huge catch of fish lying there on the shore- a fisherman's dream. It could be that the question referred to them. 'Go and feed *my* sheep rather than worry about *your* fish'. When earlier the boats had begun to sink with too many fish, the word used for 'sinking' occurs in 1 Tim. 6:9, about believers being drowned in materialism and thereby condemning themselves (Lk. 5:7). Whether it's a career that we love, a livelihood that we simply trust as a sure means of human survival, or the spiritual pride that we love the Lord more than our brethren, all these things are demanded of us by the demanding Lord, as we seek to follow Him to the cross.

Throughout the Lord's ministry, Peter had a mental barrier to the idea of his Lord suffering and dying. And yet Peter's later preaching harps on these themes greatly. And his letters contain quotations and allusions from Isaiah's suffering servant prophecies (1 Pet. 2:21 etc.). Further, if we accept the idea elsewhere discussed that Mark's Gospel is a transcript of Peter's preaching of the Gospel, it becomes significant that Mark's version of the Gospel likewise emphasizes Jesus as the suffering servant. Thus what Peter was once blind to, he made a special point of preaching. The content of his witness reflected his deep awareness of his past blindness- and therefore his appeal to others to 'get it' was the more powerful seeing that he himself had patently 'not got it' for some years. And it shouldn't be hard to translate his example into our daily experience, speaking of our weaknesses and former blindnesses rather than coming over as the self-congratulatory religious guy.

## “Follow me”

There is a clear link between following Christ and carrying His cross. Mt. 10:38; Mk. 8:34; 10:21 make it apparent: “Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me”. But there are other less evident connections. The man following his father’s coffin was told to break off and come follow Christ instead (Mt. 8:22)- as if following Him involved following Him unto the place of death. The faithful women who literally followed Him to the cross are described as *also* having followed Him in Galilee (Mk. 15:41), as if their following then and their literal following of Him to Golgotha were all part of the same walk. The blood-soaked warrior Saviour is followed by His people (Rev. 19:13,14). “He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it...if any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am (in the agony of decision in Gethsemane), there shall my servant be” (Jn. 12:25,26). The Gospel records, Luke especially, often record how the Lord turned and spoke to His followers- as if He was in the habit of walking ahead of them, with them following (Lk. 7:9,44,55; 10:23; 14:25; 23:28; Mt. 9:22; Jn. 1:38). As we saw above, Peter thought that following the Lord was not so hard, because he was literally following Jesus around first century Israel, and identifying himself with His cause. But he simply failed to make the connection between following and cross carrying. And we too can agree to follow the Lord without realizing that it means laying down our lives.

The Lord gently sought to get Peter to see that really and truly, he was called to a life of cross carrying. Mt. 26:36 has the Lord saying to the disciples: “Sit in this place [*kathisate autou*] until going away, I pray there”, and then He takes along with him [*paralambanein*] Peter. These are the very words used in the Gen. 22 LXX account of Abraham taking Isaac to ‘the cross’. Jesus is seeking to encourage Peter to see himself as Isaac, being taken to share in the cross. Now whether Peter discerned this or not, we don’t know. But the Lord gave him the potential possibility to be inspired like this.

The Lord brought Peter to face this with a jolt in Mt. 16:22-25. Peter was following Jesus, after He had predicted His crucifixion (for Jesus “turned, and said unto Peter”). He thought he was following Jesus. But he was told: “Get thee *behind me*...if any man will come *after me* (s.w. ‘behind me’), let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and *follow me* (s.w.)”. The italicized words are all the same in the original. Peter didn’t want the Lord to die by crucifixion at Jerusalem, because he saw that as a follower of Jesus this required that he too must die a like death. Peter needed to get behind Jesus in reality and really follow, in the sense of following to the cross, although he was there physically behind Jesus, physically following at that time. The Lord was saying: ‘Don’t think of trying to stop me dying. I will, of course. But concentrate instead on

*really* getting behind me in the sense of carrying my cross'. John's record stresses that the key to following Jesus to the cross is to hear His word, which beckons us onwards (Jn. 10:4,27). All our Bible study must lead us onwards in the life of self-sacrifice. But Peter loved the Lord's words (see *Peter: Bible Student*); but, as pointed out to him at the transfiguration, he didn't hear those words of Christ deeply. And so he missed the call to the cross. He had just stated that Jesus was Messiah; but soon afterwards he is recorded as saying that it was intrinsic within Jesus' Messiahship that He *mustn't* die or suffer. The confession of Messiahship and this incident of trying to stop the Lord dying are juxtaposed in Mark's Gospel, which seems to be Mark's transcript of the Gospel account Peter usually preached [note, e.g., how Peter defines the termini of the Lord's life in Acts 1:21,22; 10:36-42- just as Mark does in his gospel]. Surely Peter is saying that yes, he had grasped the theory that Jesus of Nazareth was Messiah; but the import of Messiahship was totally lost upon him. For he had utterly failed to see the connection between Messianic kingship and suffering the death of the cross. He knew Jesus was Messiah, but strongly rejected the suggestion Messiah must suffer. And yet the Lord warmly and positively grasped hold of Peter's positive understanding, such as it was [see *What Seekest Thou? In A World Waiting To Be Won* for more examples of focusing on the positive even if it is accompanied by negatives].

The Lord's comment 'Get behind me' was exactly the same phrase He had earlier used to the 'satan' in the wilderness when the same temptation to take the Kingdom without the cross had been suggested. It could even be that Peter was the 'satan' of the wilderness conversations; or at least, in essence he was united with that satan. Hence the Lord told him that he was a satan. And interestingly, only Mark [aka Peter] describes the Lord as being tempted in the wilderness of *satan* [rather than the *devil*]. And he records how *he* was a satan to the Lord later on.

The Lord "rebuked" Peter for seeking to stop Him die on the cross (Mk. 8:33). But the very same Greek word has occurred just prior in the narrative, when Peter has just declared Jesus to be "the Christ of God". The Lord responded by commending Peter for his blessed insight, but the record continues: "And [Jesus] straitly charged them [s.w. "rebuked"] them, and commanded them to tell [i.e. preach to] no man that thing", and He goes on to underline to them how He must suffer on the cross (Lk. 9:21). Why did the Lord both commend and rebuke Peter for discerning that He was indeed the Christ of God? Surely because, in the context, Peter understood Messiah to be someone who would there and then bring salvation without the cross. Again we see how there was something in Peter as there is in us all which somehow revolted at the idea of real cross carrying. And it was for the same reason that the Lord "straitly charged" [s.w. rebuked] those who wanted to blaze around the news that He

was Messiah- because they didn't perceive that the Messiah must first suffer and rise again before being declared in fullness "Lord and Christ".

But Peter, to his credit, did learn something from the Lord's rebuke and directive to follow Him in the sense of laying down his life. When he says "Though I should die with thee", he uses the word elsewhere translated "must" in connection with Lord's foreknowledge that He must suffer the death of the cross. Peter knew that he must share the cross- but the flesh was weak. When it became apparent that the Lord was going to actually die, he asked: "Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thy sake". He saw the connection between following and laying down life in death. He had heard the Lord saying that He would lay down His life for them (Jn. 10:15,17). And Peter thought he could do just the same for his Lord- but not, it didn't occur to him, for his brethren. He didn't then appreciate the weight or extent of the cross of Christ. The Lord replied that he was not yet able to do that, he would deny Him rather than follow Him, but one day he would be strong enough, and then he would follow Him to the end (Jn. 13:36,37) <sup>(1)</sup>. Peter thought he was strong enough then; for he followed (s.w.) Christ afar off, to the High Priest's house (Mt. 26:58). But in ineffable self-hatred he came to see that the Lord's prediction was right. After Peter's 'conversion', the Lord told Peter in more detail how he would die: "when thou shalt be old (i.e. more spiritually mature?), thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee (as Christ was carried to the cross) whither thou wouldest not (even at that last moment, Peter would flinch from the cross). This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God" (as Christ's death also did: Jn. 7:39; 12:28; 13:32; 17:1). Having said this, the Lord invited Peter: "Follow me" (Jn. 21:19). Live the life of cross carrying now, Peter <sup>(2)</sup>. And they went on walking, with Peter walking behind Jesus. But he couldn't concentrate on the crucifixion life. Like Lot's wife, he turned around, away from the Lord, and saw John also following, the one who had leaned on Jesus' breast at the last supper (is this detail included here to suggest that this was a cause of jealousy for Peter?). And he quizzed the Lord as to His opinion of John. Peter got distracted from his own following, his own commitment to self-crucifixion, by the powerful fascination human beings have in the status of others and the quality of their following. The Lord replied that even if John lived until His return, without ever having to die and follow Him to the literal death which Peter would have to go through, well, so what: "What is that to thee? Follow thou me". This was the same message the Lord had taught Peter through the parable of the 1<sup>st</sup> hour labourer getting distracted by the reward of the 11<sup>th</sup> hour one. He had that tendency to look on the faults of others (Mt. 18:21), to compare himself with others (Mt. 19:21 cp. 27; 26:33). And so, so many tragic times we do the same. We are distracted from the quintessence of our lives, the following, to death, of the Lord, by our jealousy of others and our desire to enter into their spirituality rather than personally following. Remember that it is

so often recorded that multitudes followed the Lord wherever He went. But they missed the whole point of following Him- to die the death of the cross, and share His resurrection life.

John's Gospel has a somewhat strange ending, on first sight. The synoptics end as we would almost expect- the Lord ascends, having given His last commission to preach, and the disciples joyfully go forth in the work. But John's Gospel appears to have been almost truncated. Christ walks away on His own, with Peter following Him, and John walking some way behind Peter. Peter asks what the Lord's opinion is of John, and is told to ignore that and keeping on following Him. John inserts a warning against possible misunderstanding of this reply- and the Gospel finishes. But when we appreciate that the language of 'follow me' is the call to live the life of the cross, to follow the Man from Nazareth to His ultimate end day by day, then this becomes a most impressive closing scene: the Lord Jesus walking away, with His followers following Him, in all their weakness. John's Gospel was originally the good news preached personally by John, and there is an impressive humility in the way in which he concludes with a scene in which he follows the Lord He has preached, but some way behind Peter. An awareness of our frailty and the regrettable distance with which we personally follow the Lord we preach is something which ought to be stamped on every witness to the Lord. To follow the Lord in cross bearing is indeed the end of the Gospel. And Peter understood this when he wrote that "hereunto were ye called [i.e. this is the bottom line of life in Christ]: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow in his steps" (1 Pet. 2:21). Fellowshiping His sufferings and final death is following Him. Little would Peter have realized that when he first heard the call "Follow me", and responded. And so with us. The meaning of following, the real implication of the cross, is something which can never be apparent at conversion. It is perhaps significant, given the theme of 'following' in the records of Peter, that he became well known for 'leading about' his wife (1 Cor. 9:5), as if she followed him everywhere. Peter translated the principles of following Christ into domestic life. There was a time when he may well have 'forsaken' his wife in order to follow Christ (Mt. 19:27-29). But further down that path of following he came to see that as he was to follow his Lord to the end, so he was to be as the self-crucifying Christ to her, and lead her in her following of him that she might follow Christ.

It is possible to argue that the young man who followed Jesus and then ran away was in fact Peter. Mk. 14:54 RV tells us after this incident that "*Peter* had followed him afar off". Peter describes himself in the third person a few verses previously: "A certain one of them that stood by drew a sword..." (Mk. 14:47 RV). And then we go on to read in v. 51 of "a certain young man" (RV). But when speaking of his denials, Peter records them in the first person- he totally

owns up to them. All of Mk. 14:27-52 concerns Peter's part in the story, and then vv. 54-72 likewise. So it is likely that the record of the young man following disguised in a linen cloth is in fact referring to Peter too. So Peter followed, ran back, followed again, then ran away to Galilee, and then followed again. This was how hard it was for him to pick up the cross of identification with Jesus and follow Him. And for us too.

Mark, who as we have suggested was effectively Peter writing, records three instances of where the Lord's prediction of the cross was met by the disciples' misunderstanding, and His subsequent efforts to teach them the real meaning of discipleship, and the paradoxes which this involves:

	Mark 8	Mark 9	Mark 10
Geographical description	Mk. 8:27	Mk. 9:30	10:32
Note that the incident took place whilst they were on the road walking	8:27	9:31	10:33,34
Misunderstanding by the disciples	8:32,33	9:32	10:35-41
Jesus calls the disciples to Him, implying they were no longer following behind Him	8:34	9:35	10:42
Teaching about true cross-carrying discipleship	8:34-9:1	9:33-37	10:42-45
Paradox	Save life / lose life	/ First last	/ Great least /

The point is, that following Jesus in the way involves picking up and carrying His cross. But this repeatedly wasn't understood by the disciples, and they seem to have stopped walking behind Him as they should've done. Be aware that Mark is a transcript of Peter's preaching of the Gospel message; He's surely pointing out how terribly slow he had been himself to pick up the fact that walking behind Jesus is a call to carry a cross. And of course a glance back at our own discipleship and walk behind Jesus indicates just the same with us; and perhaps we should admit that more freely in our preaching, in order to like Peter make a stronger appeal for men to follow Jesus with no misunderstanding of what this involves.

### **Denying The Call Of The Cross**

Peter's problem with the cross was perhaps at the root of his denials of the Lord. Before the cock crowed twice, he denied Jesus twice (Lk. 22:34). It's been pointed out that chickens couldn't have been anywhere near the High Priest's house because the priests forbade anyone in Jerusalem from keeping



chickens, lest they stray into the temple. The *Encyclopedia Judaica* points out that the priest who was the temple crier was called the *Gaver*, Hebrew for 'cock' or 'rooster'. This man opened the temple before dawn and called the priests and people to make the morning sacrifice. And he did this two or three times. Surely the Lord was referring to this when He spoke of the 'cock' crowing. Each time, Peter was being called to make the sacrifice with Jesus; but instead he denied knowledge of Jesus and the call to the cross which that knowledge entails. The context of the Lord's warnings to Peter about his forthcoming denial was that Peter had insisted he *would* die with Jesus, sharing in His sacrifice. And the Lord was foretelling that when that call came, Peter would deny the knowledge of Jesus.

### **Final Identity**

We have seen that although the Lord frequently spoke of His impending crucifixion, and taught plainly that His followers must go through a like process if they are to share His resurrection, Peter simply didn't want to accept it. He strictly forbade the Lord to die the death of the cross, knowing that this would become an imperative for him to follow this example, in principle if not actually. Yet Peter knew as head knowledge the Lord's doctrine of the cross. But there was something in it which he found almost offensive, it was a teaching upon which he couldn't comfortably focus. And the disciples likewise always changed the subject, whenever the Lord started on again about His 'last walk' to a place of crucifixion. And when we find, as we surely all do, that we cannot attain that sustained concentration on the cross which we faint would, or we own up to our hopeless mind wandering at the breaking of bread, we have just the same motive as they had: it becomes unbearably uncomfortable to realize that we are really called to this same inevitable and painful self-sacrifice. Yet Peter's objection to the Lord's going to die at Jerusalem surfaced several times. He wanted to build tents so that Jesus wouldn't go down from the mountain to the strange *exodos* which the prophets declared. When he wanted to "smite with the sword" in the Garden, it was to get the Lord out of the cross. Peter was willing to suffer, to fight, to even die in what would have been a hopeless combat, outnumbered dozens to one. But he just didn't want the cross to be the way. It is recorded that when Peter saw "what would follow" in the Garden, he wanted to start a fight in order to at least have some slim chance of avoiding that inevitable crucifixion which now looked so certain (Lk. 22:49). He didn't want the path of events to "follow" to that end. He again denied the connection between following and cross carrying. Later, the Lord told Peter in categorical terms that he personally was to follow Him to the death of the cross. And Peter turns round, sees John following, and gets sidetracked by the question of what the Lord thinks about John. As with us, quasi spiritual reasoning and issues were allowed to cloud and dilute the essential and terrifying truth- that we are called to bear Christ's cross to the end. Years later,

Peter had another blip on the screen. He turned back to circumcision, which was a denial of the imperatives of the cross <sup>(3)</sup>. Paul had to remind him that sustained meditation on the implications of the cross simply destroyed Peter's position, to the extent that yet once again, Peter was denying his Lord's cross.

But finally, Peter learnt his lesson. His letters are full of reference to the cross and various physical aspects of the trial and mocking of the Lord which he witnessed first hand:

- Girding ourselves with humility 1 Pet. 1:13), as the Lord did at the last supper (s.w. Jn. 13:5), although then, Peter had so misunderstood what He had done.

- Christ as the sacrificed lamb (1 Pet. 1:19)

- "Buffeted" (2:20) s.w. Mt. 26:67 re. Christ being struck with a fist- something Peter would have probably watched out of the corner of his eye from where he was.

- "No guile found in his mouth" (2:22)- the trial trying to find evidence that the Lord had spoken bad words during His ministry, but no conclusive evidence being found.

- "Found" (2:22)- a legal word, s.w. Mt. 26:60; Jn. 18:38; 19:4,6 concerning Christ's trial, parts of which Peter would have seen or heard first hand

- "Committed himself to him that judgeth righteously" (2:23)- a reference to the Lord's final words on the cross: "Into thy hand I commit my spirit"? We likewise should follow that example in our dying with Him, in that we too "commit the keeping of [our] souls to him in well-doing" (4:19).

- "stripes" (2:24)- Gk. 'wheals', the swollen up bruises, which Peter would have seen when Christ turned and looked at him through blackened eyes (after the beating of Mt. 26:67).

- "the tree" (2:24). An unusual term for the cross (he also uses it in Acts 5:30; 10:39). Perhaps because he saw the crucifixion (5:1) and was struck by the way the Lord carried a piece of a tree and was impaled upon it.

- "Who his own self bare our sins in his body up on to the tree" (2:24 RVmg.) suggests the watching Peter reflecting, as the Lord's body was lifted up vertical, that his sins of denial and pride were somehow with his Lord, being lifted up by Him.

- “For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God” (1 Pet. 3:18) could well have been written by Peter with a glance back at the way that after his denials, he the unjust went to the crucifixion scene and reflected just this. When in 5:1 he comments that he witnessed the sufferings of Christ, he could be saying that therefore these thoughts were his thoughts as he witnessed it: the just suffering for him the unjust, to bring him back to God.

- “Christ hath suffered for us *in the flesh*” (4:1). That He suffered “in the flesh” could be seen as stating the obvious until it is realized that Peter is referring to the way in which he actually saw the flesh of Christ really suffering.

- Elders are to be “ensamples” (5:3)- s.w. Jn. 20:25 about the “print” of the nails.

- It is interesting to note the changes of pronouns in 1 Pet. 2:20 ff: “Hereunto were *ye* called: because Christ also suffered for *you*, leaving *you* an example, that *ye* should follow his steps...who his own self bare *our* sins...that *we* having died to sin, might live unto righteousness; by whose stripes *ye* were healed”. In the context, Peter is speaking about the need for slaves to live out the death and life of Christ; but when he comes to speak of the Lord’s death for sin, he cannot but include himself as a sinner and a beneficiary in the cross.

In Peter’s final maturity, his mind was full of the cross. His letters and preaching were full of allusion to Isaiah’s prophecies of the suffering servant (especially Acts 3:13,26; 4:25-30; 1 Pet. 2:21 ff.); he and Philip are the only preachers to explicitly make this connection. It could be that Peter was so impressed by the way the Lord washed his feet that his mind was evermore transfixed with this image and the Biblical allusions behind it. And note that initially, Peter had totally failed to grasp that Jesus was indeed “the servant”. Every allusion he makes to Jesus as the servant was a reflection of his recognition of his earlier failure to perceive it.

This focus on the Lord Jesus and His death was the pattern of spiritual growth followed by Moses, Samson, Jacob, David, Paul... Peter saw the centrality of the cross, and its insistent, continual imperative. As he faced up to his own imminent time of dying, he saw that his death would be a death with the Lord (Paul also spoke of his death in this way). He spoke of his death as “my *exodos*” (2 Pet. 1:15), using the very same and specific word which he had heard at the transfiguration, when Moses and Elijah comforted the Lord regarding His *exodos* (Lk. 9:31). He preaches Christ as ‘the stone / rock’ in his letters, knowing that this was the title which the Lord had given *him*. He saw his death as a taking down of a tent (2 Pet. 1:13), using the same word for the tabernacle he had wanted to build for his Lord at the transfiguration (Mt. 17:4).

Then, he had wanted the tent to be set up so that the time of the Lord's departure wouldn't come; so that the Lord would stay with them there, with Moses and Elijah, in what must have seemed like the Kingdom of God. Again, Peter didn't want the cross, either for his Lord or for himself. But now he had learnt his lesson; he saw that his tent must be taken down, the vision of the glory of the Lord Jesus, the words of His coming death and future Kingdom, these were quite enough. There had been no need of the tent on the mountain, and now he saw there was no need for the tent of his body either. We are all the same. Our death will literally be a death with the Lord, in that our resurrection will be after the pattern of His (Rom. 6:5). The believer's death is a pouring out of blood on the altar (Phil. 2:17 Gk; Rev. 6:9), which is language highly appropriate to the Lord's death. It follows from this that the death of one in Christ is the pinnacle of their spiritual maturity, as the Lord's death was the pinnacle of His. It is a spiritual victory, more than the temporal domination of the flesh which it can appear. John repeatedly records Christ's description of the cross as Him being "lifted up" (Jn. 3:14; 8:18; 12:32,34). But Peter uses the very same word to describe Christ's exaltation in resurrection and ascension (Acts 2:33; 5:31). Looking back, Peter saw the cross as a lifting up in glory, as the basis for the Lord's exaltation afterwards. At the time, it seemed the most humiliating thing to behold. It was anything but exaltation, and Peter would have given his life in the garden to get the Lord out of it. But now he saw its glory.

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## Notes

(1) Jesus had already told the twelve that "ye which have followed me...ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones" (Mt. 19:28). They hadn't then grasped the idea of what really following involved; they hadn't in one way or another laid down their lives with Christ. And then there is the problem of "twelve". Judas didn't follow to the end, and will not sit upon a throne in the Kingdom. The Lord surely means, therefore: "You who will have followed me...". Or is that He spoke of "the twelve" as a title for the group of disciples, and what He meant was that even at that early stage He counted their desire to follow Him to the cross as if they had done it? We must see our failing, following brethren likewise. He counted His sheep as following Him (Jn. 10:27) even then, although he knew they were not then strong enough to follow Him to the end (Jn. 13:36). The risen Lord especially wanted the women to tell Peter that He was 'going before him' to Galilee (Mk. 16:7)- with the implication that even in his weakness and dejection, He wanted Peter to still try to follow Him and re-live the cross in his life.

(2) Earlier, Peter had thought that following Christ to the end could be achieved in a quick, dramatic burst of zeal- for surely his desire to “smite with the sword” in Gethsemane was almost suicidal, and yet by doing so he thought that he would fulfil his promise to lay down his life for Christ’s sake. He learnt the lesson, that crucifixion is a way of life rather than just dramatic death; for he said that the Jews had slain Christ *and* hung Him on a tree (Acts 5:30; 10:39). This seems strange- that they should have killed Him and then hung Him on the tree. Peter has in mind the practice of hanging an already dead criminal on a tree as a warning (Dt. 21:23). Paul appears to make the same mistake in Gal. 3:13, where he too says that the lifting up of Christ on the cross was typified by the lifting up of the already dead body of a criminal. Christ was not dead when He was lifted up- physically. But first Peter and then Paul came to understand that His death was actually in His way of life- so that He was as good as dead when lifted up. He was the dead bronze snake of the wilderness; the flesh had been put to death by a daily life of crucifixion.

(3) See Peter The Shepherd for more explanation of this conclusion.

## 2-2 Peter And Quo Vadis?

Yet it is an observable feature in the lives of many giants of faith that they die with elements of weakness still (Samson with his unChristian desire for personal vengeance would be the clearest example, or Jacob speaking of how he took land from the Amorite with his strength and his bow, when the Lord gave it to him by grace, cp. Ps. 44:3). And in this matter of following the Lord to the cross, it could be that even Peter faltered <sup>(1)</sup>. Jn. 21:18,19 could be taken as meaning that Peter was to die the death of crucifixion, which would be the final fulfilment of the charge to “follow me”. Jn. 21:19 contains the observation that as he would be led to that place of execution, it would be a death that “thou wouldest not”. The Lord foresaw that Peter’s unwillingness to accept the cross would surface even then. One of the most well attested extra Biblical traditions about Peter is found in the apocryphal ‘Acts of Peter’. It is that as he was being led to crucifixion, the Lord Jesus appeared to Peter, and Peter asked: ‘Domine, quo vadis?’- ‘Lord / Master, to where are we going?’ (repeating his words of Jn. 13:36), as if somehow even then, he found the final acceptance of the cross hard. As indeed, it would be. In Jn. 13:36, the Lord had answered the question by telling Peter that then, he wasn’t able to follow Him to death. But he would do so at a later date. And that time had come, although it took a lifetime to reach. This tradition has, to me, the ring of truth about it, from all that we know of Peter’s problem with the cross. And it exactly mirrors our own difficulty in facing up to the stark realities of the life of self-sacrifice and ultimate self-crucifixion to which we are called, the question of Quo Vadis?. Only then, at the very very end, did he realize that following Christ was a call to follow Him

to His cross. And another extra Biblical tradition has a similar likelihood of truth: it is said that when finally Peter was brought to the place of crucifixion, he insisted on being crucified upside down, as he was unworthy to die the same death as his Lord. Another tradition says that because of this unusual angle of crucifixion, the nails fell out and Peter was offered the chance of release, which he refused, and asked to be crucified with his Lord, still upside down. If all this is so, he finally learnt the lesson which we likewise struggle for a lifetime to learn: that following Christ means going to His cross with Him, and in the process learning and feeling through and through our unworthiness. And he learnt too that to die with Christ is never forced upon us by the Lord who bought us: in Peter's final, willing choice of death, as with our day by day denials of the flesh for Christ's sake, we make the choices purely from our own volition. We alone decide, in the terror, pain and difficulty of a genuine freewill, that thus it must be for us. And for us, Quo Vadis?

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## Notes

(1) As an aside, there is an OT background to the Lord's invitation to follow Him in the taking up of the cross and following to the place of crucifixion. It is in the frequent references to the faithful following after Yahweh Himself (e.g. Dt. 7:4; 2 Chron. 34:33). It's as if the Lord was saying that the essence of Yahweh was in the cross He carried. To follow Him to the end, to live the life of cross carrying, leads us to Yahweh Himself.

## 3-1 Peter's Preaching

It would have become public news in Jerusalem that the man who nearly killed Malchus had slipped in to the High Priest's yard, and just got out in time before they lynched him. And the fool he had made of himself would for sure have been exaggerated and gossiped all round. Jerusalem would have had the small town gossip syndrome, especially at Passover time. Every one of his oaths with which he had disowned his Lord would have been jokingly spread round in the three days while Jesus lay dead. But then Peter's preaching of the Gospel after the resurrection reached a pinnacle which probably no other disciple has reached, not even Paul. No one individual made such huge numbers of converts, purely on the basis of his words of preaching. Nobody else was *so* persuasive, could cut hardened men to the heart as he did, and motivate them to be baptized immediately. He brought men far more highly educated and cultured than himself to openly say from the heart: "What shall we do?", in the sense: 'Having done what we've done, whatever will become of us?'. And of course Peter had been in just that desperate position a month ago. He was just

the man to persuade them. And yet on the other hand, there was no man more unlikely. The rules of social and spiritual appropriacy demanded that someone who had so publicly denied his Lord keep on the back burner for quite some time. And Peter of all men would have wished it this way. Further, he was an uneducated fisherman. Who was he to appeal to Jerusalem's intelligentsia? He was mocked as speaking *a-grammatos*, without correct grammar and basic education even in his own language (Acts 4:13; AV "unlearned"). The way his two letters are so different in written style can only be because he wrote through a scribe (2 Peter is actually in quite sophisticated Greek). So most likely he couldn't write and could hardly read. So humanly speaking, he was hardly the man for the job of being the front man for the preaching of the new ecclesia. But not only did his Lord think differently, but his own depth of experience of God's grace and appreciation of the height of the Lord's exaltation became a motivating power to witness which could not be held in. We all know that the way God prefers to work in the conversion of men is through the personal witness of other believers. We may use adverts, leaflets, lectures etc. in areas where the Gospel has not yet taken root, with quite some success. But once a community of believers has been established, the Lord seems to stop working through these means and witness instead through the personal testimony of His people. We all know this, and yet for the most part would rather distribute 10,000 tracts than swing one conversation round to the Truth, or deliberately raise issues of the Gospel with an unbelieving family member. If we recognize this almost natural reticence which most of us have, it becomes imperative to find what will motivate us to witness as we ought, *a-grammatos* or not <sup>(1)</sup>. The example of Peter leaves us in no doubt:

1. Appreciation of personal sinfulness and the reality of forgiveness
2. The height of Christ's present exaltation
3. Appreciation of the cross

### **Appreciation Of Personal Sinfulness**

Peter's maiden speech on the day of Pentecost was a conscious undoing of his denials, and consciously motivated by the experience of forgiveness which he knew he had received. Having been converted, he was now strengthening his Jewish brethren. He went and stood literally a stone's throw from the High Priest's house, and stood up and declared to the world his belief that Jesus was and is Christ. Peter also preached in Solomon's Porch, the very place where the Lord had declared Himself to Israel as their Saviour (Jn. 10:33; Acts 5:12). He appealed to Israel as those who were "afar off", just as he had followed the Lord afar off on the night of betrayal (Mk. 14:54 cp. Acts 2:39). When Peter

speaks of how the Lord Jesus will ‘turn away’ sinners from their sins (Acts 3:26), he is using the very word of how the Lord Jesus told him to “put up again” his sword (Mt. 26:52), thereby turning Peter away from his sin. Peter’s appeal for repentance and conversion was evidently allusive to his own experience of conversion (Lk. 22:32 cp. Acts 3:19; 9:35). In this he was following the pattern of David, who sung his ‘Maschil’ (teaching) psalms after his forgiveness in order to convert sinners unto Yahweh (Ps. 51:13). Like Peter, David did so with his sin ever before him, with a broken and contrite heart (Ps. 51:3,17). He invited them to seek forgiveness for their denial of their Lord, just as he had done. He dearly wished them to follow his pattern, and know the grace he now did. He reminds his sheep of how they are now “returned” (s.w. ‘converted’) to the Lord Jesus (1 Pet. 2:25), just as he had been. His experience of the Lord’s gracious spirit inspired him. It had been generous spirited of the Lord to pray on the cross: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do”. He may have meant they were relatively ignorant, or it may be that He felt they were so blinded now that the recognition of Him they once had had was now not operating. And Peter, who probably heard with amazement those words from the cross as he beheld the Lord’s sufferings, found the same generous spirit to men whom naturally he would have despised: “In ignorance ye did it” (Acts 3:17 cp. Lk. 23:34).

Peter would have reflected how his denial had been in spite of the fact that the Lord had prayed he wouldn’t do it- even though He foresaw that Peter would. Just a short time before the denials He had commented, probably in earshot of Peter and John, “ask them which heard me, what I spake unto them” (Jn. 18:21 RV). Perhaps He nodded towards them both as He said it, to encourage them to speak up rather than slip further into the temptation of keeping quiet. He had used the same phrase earlier, just hours before: “These things have I spoken unto *you*” (Jn. 16:33).

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## Notes

(1) This theme is discussed at length in ‘We’re All Preachers’ and ‘The Humility Of The Gospel’ *in A World Waiting To Be Won*. Peter’s confidence in preaching to the wise of this world in his *a-grammatos* way is continued in the way his letters stress that the only true knowledge is that of Christ (2 Pet. 1:5,6; 3:18). He was writing in response to the Gnostic heresy that ‘gnosis’, knowledge, enlivens the eternal spark within man until a man’s knowledge becomes his ‘immortal soul’. Peter didn’t leave this for the more erudite to combat. Like an illiterate peasant farmer unashamedly challenging atheistic evolution, Peter powerfully made his point.



## 3-2 Peter And The Stone Of Daniel 2

Simon Peter, Simon-the-rock, emphasized in his first epistle that Jesus was the real rock / stone. But he clearly saw himself as manifesting Jesus in his work of founding the church of Jesus- as we are all manifestations of Jesus in our witness. It could be that Simon-rock was the man through whom the church was founded- for the mass conversions on Pentecost and straight afterwards were not repeated it seems. From those conversions the world-wide church came into being. Those converts, who were from “every nation under heaven”, took the message back home with them. And later, through his preaching to Cornelius, it was Peter who “opened the door of faith to the Gentiles”. Before Peter and the apostles, the gates of the grave would open (Mt. 16:18); and yet as Jesus makes clear, it is He personally who has the keys of the grave and of death. The Pharisees had shut the door to the Kingdom (Mt. 23:13), but Peter and the apostles had the keys to open it again. It was perhaps Peter’s putting together of these two sayings of Jesus that gave him the courage to stand up and preach as he did to the Jews- the door had been shut, but the Lord had given him the keys to open it. For all his sense of personal inadequacy, he couldn’t just sit and toy with the keys in his hand. Thus the work of Jesus was manifested through that of His zealous apostles and Peter. Through the Pentecost conversions, the reign of Jesus in the lives of men and women, the power of the Kingdom life, spread world-wide due to the witness of that man who was so, so aware of his failure, and who likely considered that he ought to be left on the back-burner for a while after his shameful denials. This all leads to the inevitable connection with the vision of Daniel 2. A stone hits the kingdoms of men and spreads to form a world-wide Kingdom. Lk. 20:17 describes Jesus as the stone who became the headstone, in His impact upon men and women here and now. It could be that the feet part of iron and part of clay refers to the Roman empire rather than a system of affairs that arose after the Roman empire ended. The 10 toes of the image correspond to the 10 horns of the beast in Revelation- and the horns were part of the beast / fourth empire, just as the toes had the iron element in them. Note that the legs are described as representing “the fourth empire” (Dan. 2:40), but the feet are not called “the fifth empire”. Indeed the toes are spoken of as representing how “the Kingdom shall be divided...” (Dan. 2:41), implying they are part of the fourth kingdom (Rome) spoken of in the preceding verse. The heralding of Christ’s ministry with the words “The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand” and His talk of it ‘coming upon’ people, being entered, received, unexpectedly found, and ‘coming’ (Mk. 1:15; Lk. 11:20; Mk. 10:23-25; Mk. 10:15; Mt. 13:44-46; Lk. 11:2) would likely all have been understood as a reference to Dan. 2:44 and maybe 7:27. Likewise Mt. 12:28: “If I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the Kingdom has already come to you”. In the person of Jesus, the Kingdom of God was amongst the people of Palestine. The Kaddish, an old Jewish prayer,

was much recited by Jesus' contemporaries: "May God establish his Kingdom in your lifetime and in your days, speedily and at a near time". Jesus was surely alluding to this in declaring that in a sense, the Kingdom had now come nigh. He described those who responded to the Kingdom Gospel as entering into a marriage supper (Mk. 2:18,19; Lk. 14:12-24), which was a well known figure for the future Messianic Kingdom (Is. 25:6-9). By eating / fellowshiping with Him in faith, His followers were in prospect enjoying the Kingdom life.

John Baptist had described the Lord's work as a fan that would sweep the chaff away- replete with reference to Daniel's words about the sweeping away of the Kingdoms of men. The future political Kingdom of God will of course only be established at the Lord's return. The vision can only have its total fulfilment then. But the essence of that Kingdom, the reigning of God in the lives of Christ's people, those who lived out the spirit of all the parables which described what "the Kingdom of God" was to be like in the lives of mortal men and women...this began with the founding of the church of Christ. And this momentous act began in the conversions at Pentecost, made by Simon-rock. In the work of the disciples it would be true for Israel that "the Kingdom of Heaven has come near" (Mt. 11:4; 10:7). Peter as the leading and representative disciple likewise brought the Kingdom near and real to men and women in his preaching. Dan. 2:35 RVmg. speaks of how "the stone became a great rock". Unstable, nervous, mixed up Peter became the great rock of Christ, insofar as Simon manifested Him to the world in his preaching. Peter was the epitome of what would happen in the lives of countless others who would become "in Christ".

Whether or not one fully accepts the interpretation of Daniel 2 offered above, the essence of the lesson and the encouragement remains. That a man whose tremendous sense of unworthiness, awkwardness and embarrassment would have held back many a man in Christ, rose up to the challenge of witness. And he did it through gripping on firmly, even desperately, to his Lord's promise to him- that he was really Simon-rock, the one with the keys that could open the Kingdom's gates to people. And so he rose up and witnessed, and in doing so he manifested Jesus...and his Lord blessed mightily the witness he made. And each of us are in Christ, the true and mighty rock / stone. We each can manifest him as Peter did. For it is on each of us that He builds His church.

### **3-3 Peter's Realization Of Sinfulness**

Peter had heard the Heavenly voice bidding: "Hear ye him" (Mt. 17:5). This was intended to take his mind back to Dt. 18:15, where it was written that Messiah would be 'heard' by the faithful. But Peter fell down paralyzed with

fear; he didn't really hear the son of God then. Yet in Acts 3:22, Peter quotes Dt. 18:15 and asks his hearers to obey the passage by hearing Jesus, through his preaching of Him. He was asking his audience to do what he himself hadn't done.

Later on, it was Peter who opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. It was evidently a huge paradigm break for Peter- to be responsible for Gentiles accepting baptism and thereby becoming brethren in fellowship, and members of the Israel of God. The key was for him to realize that God is no acceptor of persons. Reflection on God's acceptance of him after the denials must surely have been an important factor in inspiring him to preach to those whom previously he would have rejected out of hand as a worthy audience for the Gospel. The incident occurred in Joppa, where Jonah likewise had struggled with the problem of preaching to the Gentiles. The Lord's comment 'Simon bar Jona' (Jn. 1:42) may have reflected His understanding that Simon Peter had the characteristics of Jonah even then. Peter preached that *all* the prophets testify to the fact that both Jew and Gentile can find salvation in Christ (Acts 10:43)- when it was self-evident that he hadn't grasped this or believed it, for all his familiarity with the OT. It's almost as if in his witness he is signalling his own blindness in this area; and thereby his preaching had power, in that he openly admits his own earlier inability to grasp that which he now preaches to others.

The Father seems to have wanted Peter to make the connection between preaching and recognition of personal sinfulness quite early on. "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Lk. 5:8) was followed by a commission to go preach the Gospel to Israel, just as Isaiah had been brought to the same point and then been sent on a like mission. And yet there later on, Peter's witness was just as motivated by this same recognition. The Gospel records are transcripts of how those authors preached the Gospel; they would have repeated the same basic message of Jesus so many times that an inspired copy was made. "The word of the Lord (Jesus) endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the Gospel is preached unto you" (1 Pet. 1:25). There is ample reason, chronicled in many commentaries, to believe that Mark's Gospel is a transcription of that of Peter. If this is so, it becomes highly significant that Mark plays down Peter's greatness and makes more pointed reference to his failures. This means that Peter's witness to the Gospel was inextricably linked with his own sense of unworthiness. Consider the following examples of this:

- Matthew and Luke record a blessing on the disciples because they understood (Mt. 13:16,17; Lk. 10:23,24). But Mark's record has: "Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?"

- Mark alone records that Peter drew attention to the fact that the fig tree had indeed withered from the roots, just as the Lord had said it would. The

implication is that he marvelled at how the Lord's word had come true, implying less faith than he ought to have had.

- "Who touched my clothes?" seemed to the disciples an unreasonable question, "and the disciples were saying so with a bluntness which is mellowed in the other accounts" apart from Mark's (L.G. Sargent, *Mark* p. 79).

- Peter's recognition that Jesus was indeed the Christ is recorded by Mark in great brevity, without the accolade from the Lord Jesus which Matthew records (Mk. 8:29). Peter realized that at that stage he didn't really know the full implications of knowing Jesus as Lord and Christ.

- The same writer comments regarding the disciples' response to the Lord's invitation for the disciples to provide food for the hungry crowd: "In their retort to Jesus as Mark gives it there is a touch of impatience which is softened in the other accounts" (p. 93).

- Likewise it is Mark [Peter] who records that the Lord's teaching had made all foods clean; for He had said that a man is defiled by what comes out of him rather than what goes into him. But it was Peter who had been so so slow to realize this, as was well known through his much publicized account of the events at Caesarea. There he had refused to eat 'unclean' animals, quite forgetting the implications of his Lord's words. And in his recounting of those words as he preached, he makes this apparent.

- "Thou art Petros, and upon this rock [Gk. *petra*] I will build my church" (Mt. 16:17,18) is carefully omitted in Mark's record, as if to downplay any possible self-exaltation in preaching. And Christian preachers can take a lesson from this.

- It is only Mark who records the two cock crowings at the time of Peter's denial. Peter wished to quietly emphasize the exactness of fulfilment of the Lord's words about his denial. Mark / Peter likewise record Peter's words as: "I neither know nor understand what you mean". The 'what' can apply to both Jesus personally as well as the general 'being with' Jesus. Peter is admitting that He had denied having any understanding at all of the Lord- the Lord whose knowledge he now preached. One can imagine Peter's voice quivering as he recounted his Gospel story. Note how Luke says that all the disciples slept in Gethsemane (Lk. 22:45); but Mark [Peter] records how only Peter, James and John slept (Mk. 14:37).

- And only Mark records that the women were told to go and tell the disciples "*and Peter*".

- Mark 14:19 reads: “And they began to be sorrowful, and to say unto him one by one, Is it I? and another said, Is it I?”. It is easy to assume that this “another” was Judas. But it has been suggested that in spoken Aramaic, “and another said...” would be a device for saying ‘And I, I said...’. If Mark’s Gospel is a verbatim account of Peter’s preaching of the Gospel, this would be so appropriate. Peter would be saying: ‘All the disciples couldn’t imagine it was them who would betray Jesus; and I, yes I also asked if it was me who would betray Him. I was so sure I wouldn’t’. The record in Mark 14 then goes on to describe how Peter *did* effectively betray / deny the Lord.

- Mark’s [Peter’s] Gospel omits many incidents, but also uses the device of repetition to stress what the writer considers significant. In Mk. 14:68 he records himself as having said: “I know not, neither understand I what thou sayest”. He stresses the nature of his own rejection of knowledge of the Lord. A similar awareness of the weakness of the flesh is found in 7:21: “From within, out of the heart of man...”.

- In Acts 3:4, Peter commanded the lame man: “Look on us”. The lame man responded, and the people were amazed at the subsequent miracle. But Peter then tells them: “Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this man? or *why fasten ye your eyes on us* [i.e., why do you ‘look on us’], as though by our own power or godliness we had made him to walk? The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Servant Jesus” (Acts 3:12,13). I wonder if Peter was here publicly acknowledging an inappropriate turn of phrase, when he had asked the lame man to ‘Look on us’ - and immediately, he humbly and publicly corrected himself, redirecting all glory and all eyes to the Father and Son.

It was for all these reasons that the Lord could observe that “thou art Peter (*Petros* – a little stone), and upon this rock (*Petra*) I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” (Mt.16: 18). It was in the smallness of Peter that his greatness lay- something so great as the ecclesia could only be built on the preaching of a man small in his own eyes.

### **3-4 Appreciation Of Christ’s Exaltation**

Who God is, and the nature of His Name, is of itself an imperative to action. Man cannot truly know God and be passive to that knowledge; he must somehow respond to the God he sees so abundantly revealed to him <sup>(1)</sup>. And so it is with an appreciation of the height and nature of the exaltation of the man Christ Jesus. This motivates to repentance and conversion, and therefore the man who has himself been converted by it will glory in it, and hold it up to others as the motive power of their salvation too. Acts 5:31 is the clearest

example: “Him (Jesus) hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses of these things”- in the sense that Peter himself was a witness to the repentance and forgiveness brought about by God’s resurrection and exaltation of His Son. Earlier Peter had preached Jesus of Nazareth as “made...both Lord and Christ”, and when they heard *this*, when he reached this climax of his speech in declaring that Jesus was now made *kurios*, the Greek word that would be used to translate Yahweh, *then* they were pricked in their heart and repented and desired association with Him in baptism (Acts 2:36-38). Later he boldly declared: “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men [i.e. no other name given to any man as this Name was given to Jesus], whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Paul, in one of his many humble allusions to the words and thought of Peter, alludes to these passages in Phil. 2:9, where he declares that God highly exalted Jesus *so that* at His Name, in response to that exaltation now given, every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. The ‘confession’ he has in mind is that strange confession of sin and faith that is particularly made at the time of conversion, when the response to “the word of faith, which we preach” is to confess Jesus as Lord and “be saved” (Rom. 10:8-10). This is why Peter preached Jesus as having been made “Lord and Christ”; for he saw that whoever believes that message will in their turn confess Him as Lord and Christ too. The response of men to his message was to confess their guilt in crucifying the Lord Jesus, to be “pricked in their heart” (Acts 2:37). This was effectively confessing Jesus as Lord; to know the height of His Lordship is to know the depth of our sinfulness. This is why ‘confess’ carries the sense of both confession of sin, and also confession in the sense of statement of belief. The two things are inter-related, and Peter himself was the prime example. Those crowds would have known of Peter’s denials, of how as he ran out of the door he was crying, so the girl keeping the door would have reported with the glee of the underling temporarily in the limelight. And now, there he was standing up in almost the same place and preaching the exaltation and wonder of this Man from Nazareth, and the absolutely real offer of forgiveness and new spiritual life in Him. And as with every true preacher, in Peter, the man was the message. Peter had once struggled with the teaching of the Lord that whoever humbled himself would be exalted (Lk. 14:11). Now he joyfully preached the height of the Lord’s exaltation, knowing that by so doing he was testifying to the depth of His humility in His life. Now he valued and appreciated that humility (his allusions to the Lord’s washing of feet in his letters is further proof of this).

He himself had cried out “Lord, save me!” when most men in that situation would have simply cried out “Save me!”. But his grasp of the Lordship of the One he followed inspired faith. If He was truly Lord, He was capable of all things. “Lord, save me!” was a call uttered in a moment of weakness. His

“sinking” (Mt. 14:30) is described with the same word used about condemnation at the last day (Mt. 18:6), and yet Peter in his preaching persuades condemned men to do just the same: to *call* on the *Lord* in order to be *saved* (Acts 2:21,40,47; 4:12; 11:14). He invited all men to enter into the weakness and desperation which he had known on the water of Galilee, and receive a like unmerited salvation. And when he tells his sheep that the righteous are “scarcely saved” (1 Pet. 4:18) he surely writes with memories of that same gracious deliverance. And in discussing ecclesial problems he points out that all of us have had a similar salvation, and should act with an appropriate inclusiveness of our brethren (Acts 15:11).

The basis of the Lord’s exaltation was the resurrection. When asked why he preached when it was forbidden, Peter didn’t shrug and say ‘Well Jesus told me too so I have to’. His response was: “We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20). It would have been like saying that, say, sneezing or blinking was a sin. These things are involuntary reactions; and likewise, preaching is the involuntary reaction to a real belief in the Lord’s death and resurrection. His preaching was a ‘hearkening unto God’, not so much to the specific commission to preach but rather to the imperative to witness which the Father had placed in the resurrection of His Son. When arrested for preaching a second time, Peter says the same. I’d paraphrase the interview like this:

Q. ‘Why do you keep preaching when it’s forbidden?’

A. ‘Jesus has been raised, and been exalted to be a Prince and Saviour, “for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins”. We have to obey the wonderful imperative which God has placed in these things: to preach this wondrous message to those for whom so much has been made possible’ (Acts 5:28-32).

It’s not that Peter was the most natural one to stand up and make the witness; he spoke *a-grammatos*, but it was somehow evident from his body language that he had “been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13). In rebuking the false teachers, he likens himself to the dumb ass that spoke in rebuke of Balaam- i.e. he felt compelled to make the witness to God’s word which he did, although naturally, without the imperatives we have discussed, he would be simply a dumb ass.

### “Lord of all”

Peter’s grasp of the extent of Christ’s Lordship was reflected in the scope of his preaching. He had known it before, but understood it only to a limited extent (see *Peter And Christ*). It seems that he preferred to understand the commission

to preach “remission of sins *among* all nations” as meaning to the Jewish Diaspora scattered amongst all nations (Lk. 24:47)- notwithstanding the copious hints in the Lord’s teaching that His salvation was for literally all men. He preached forgiveness (s.w. remission) *to Israel* because he understood that this was what the Lord’s death had enabled (Acts 5:31). It was Israel who needed it, because they had crucified God’s Son- this seems to have been his thinking. Peter applies the word “all” (as in “to all nations”) to his Jewish audiences (Acts 2:14,36; 3:113; 4:10). But he was taught in the Cornelius incident that because Christ is “Lord of *all*”, therefore men from *every* (s.w. “all”) nation can receive forgiveness of sins (Acts 10:35,36). He makes the link back to the preaching commission in Acts 10:43: *all* in *every* nation who believe can receive remission of sins (s.w. Lk. 24:47)- as he was commanded to preach in the great commission. He came to see that the desperate need for reconciliation with God was just as strong for those who had not directly slain His Son; for, Peter may have mused, all men would have held him “condemned by heaven” if they had been Jerusalem Jews. And he realized that Christ was truly Lord of all, all men, everywhere, and not just of a few hundred thousand Jews. And with us too. The wider and the higher our vision and conception of the ascended Christ, the wider and more insistently powerful will be our appeal to literally all men. Yet Peter had heard the Lord’s words, when He had asked them to tell all nations, and when He had prophesied that His cross would draw all men unto Him. And his comment that “unto you *first* God, having raised up His Son, sent him to bless you” (Acts 3:26) suggests he suspected a wider benefit from the resurrection than just Israel. But all this knowledge lay passive within him; as with his understanding of the cross, he just couldn’t face up to the full implications of what he heard. But it was his recognition of the extent of Christ’s Lordship that motivated him to make the change, to convert the knowledge into practice, to throw off the shackles of traditional understanding that had held him from understanding the clear truth of words he had heard quite clearly. An example would be the words recorded in Mk. 7:19 RV: All meats were made clean by Christ. But Peter had to be told: “What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common” (Acts 10:15). He had to be taught to simply accept the word he loved, with all its implications.

We have shown (*Peter And The Cross*) that not only did Peter initially fail to make the connection between giving up material things and following the pattern of the cross. He also had the impression that by forsaking all and following the Lord, he would somehow benefit: " We have left all and followed thee...what shall we have therefore?" (Mt. 19:27). He still had to learn that the carrying of the cross is not to be motivated by any desire for personal benefit, spiritual or otherwise. We live in a world in which religion, like everything else, is seen as a means toward some personal benefit. If we love the Lord, we will follow Him, wherever the life in Him leads us; sheerly for love of Him, and recognition that His way is the way to glorifying the Father. Peter had left



all, but expected something back. For the excellency of fellowshipping the sufferings of the future Saviour, Moses gave up all the riches of Egypt. The Lord responded by saying that nobody who had left all *for His Name's sake* would go unrewarded (Mt. 19:29). The riches, the surpassing excellence of Christ, all the things tied up in His Name, these were not appreciated at that time by Peter. They are enough, purely of themselves, to make a man count all things as dung. Later, he understood this. He told the lame man that the silver and gold which he had was the salvation possible in the Name of Jesus (Acts 3:6). Peter rejoiced that he was counted worthy to suffer shame for the Name, and he preached in that Name. There is quite some emphasis on this: Acts 2:21,28; 3:6,16; 4:10,12,30; 5:41. Now he had learnt his mistake, or rather he realized the poverty of his understanding of the Lord. He now found the excellency of the Lord's Name an imperative of itself to witness to it. Likewise "for his name's sake they went forth" in obedience to the great preaching commission (3 Jn. 7; Rev. 2:3) <sup>(2)</sup>.

Peter understood what it was to be in Christ. All that he did, all that he preached and taught by word and example, was a witness to the one in whom he lived and had his being. As he reached forth his right hand to lift up the cripple, he was manifesting how the right hand of God had lifted up (in resurrection) and exalted His Son and all those in Him (Acts 3:7). Likewise he took Tabitha *by the hand* and then *lifted her up* and "presented her alive" (Acts 9:41), just as the Father had done to His Son. When Peter "stood up" after his conversion (Acts 1:15; 2:14), he was sharing the resurrection experience of his Lord. And now he reflected this in his preaching to others. As God stretched forth His hand to heal through Christ (Acts 4:30), so Peter did (Acts 9:41). And he includes us all in the scope of this wondrous operation: for as God's hand exalted Christ, so it will exalt each of us who humble ourselves beneath it (1 Pet. 5:6).

### **Appreciation Of The Cross**

Peter was a "witness" of the sufferings of Christ (1 Pet. 5:1). The same word is used to characterize his witness of preaching in Acts 1:8; 5:32; 10:39. The Greek word doesn't convey that he simply saw the Lord's sufferings, but that he saw-and-therefore-spoke it. There is something in the cross that cannot be held passively once it has been seen / understood. It *must* be spoken out. Having described the physicalities of the cross, Is. 52:15; 53:1 continue: "So shall he sprinkle many nations...for that which had not been [i.e. the like of which had never been] told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard [ever before the like of] shall they consider. Who hath believed our preaching (Heb.)? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" by our preaching? There is an undeniable link between the Lord's sufferings and the preaching of them. They are in themselves an imperative to preach them. *So*

shall He sprinkle many nations with His blood of atonement and new covenant, in that His sufferings would provoke a world-wide (“to all nations” cp. “many nations”) witness to them by those who knew them. Paul sums it up when he speaks of “the preaching of (Gk. ‘which is’) the cross” (1 Cor. 1:18). This is how essential the link between preaching and the cross. Peter’s witness to men is a living exemplification of this. Matthew and Mark record how the Lord told the disciples to go world-wide with the message of His death and resurrection; He commanded them to do this. Luke’s account is different. He reminds them of His death and resurrection, and simply adds: “And ye are witnesses of these things” (Lk. 24:48). Not ‘you *will be*, I’m telling you to be, witnesses...’. The very fact of having seen and known them was of itself an imperative to bear witness to them. This is the outgoing power of the cross.

## Conclusion

Peter not only preached on Pentecost. His life became dedicated to the work of the Gospel. Paul referred to the Jews to whom he preached as his “brethren” (Acts 13:26), and it may be that Peter at least initially understood his commission to “strengthen thy brethren” as meaning preaching to his unbelieving Jewish brethren (although the same Greek word is used by Peter regarding his work of upbuilding the converts, 1 Pet. 5:10; 2 Pet. 1:12). Gal. 2:8-10 informs us that Peter had a ministry to the Jews of the Diaspora in the Roman empire just as much as Paul did to the Gentiles living in the same area (Gal. 2:8-10). Because the Acts record focuses more on Paul’s work rather than Peter’s doesn’t mean that Peter was inactive. 1 Peter is addressed to Jewish converts living in the provinces of Asia Minor, and we can assume that Peter had spent years travelling around building up groups of believers based around the families of the individual Jews he had converted in Jerusalem at Pentecost. It would seem from 1 Cor. 1:12 that Peter had made a number of converts in Corinth, and 1 Pet. 5:13 strongly suggests Peter lived for a while in “Babylon” and had begun an ecclesia there. Whether this be taken as a code name for Rome or as literal Babylon (where there was a sizeable Jewish community), this was somewhere else Peter reached. All through this remarkable life of witness, he was motivated by his own experience of the Lord’s greatness, and His all sufficient grace toward him in his weakness. And a similar life of powerful witness lies before any who are touched likewise.

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## Notes

(1) See *The Power Of Basics*.

(2) Peter learnt the lesson, of forsaking all *for His Name's sake*. But the Lord had promised that those who did so would be given brethren, sisters, houses, lands etc. in this life. This surely can only be true through the members of the ecclesia counting nothing as their own, and sharing what they have, emotionally and materially, with their brethren. In this we see the limitation of God: the Lord's prophecy has a fulfilment whose extent is conditional on our generosity. Peter realized this when he led the early ecclesia into having all things common, so there were none who lacked.

## 4-1 Peter The Shepherd

As with his preaching, Peter's pastoral work was shot through with an awareness of his own failure and taste of his Lord's grace. The lack of energy in our collective care for each other is surely reflective of a lack of awareness of our sinfulness, a shallow grasp of grace, and a subsequent lack of appreciation of the need to lay down our lives for the brethren, as the Lord did for us. Jesus Himself encouraged Peter to see things this way, in that He arranged circumstances so that Peter had to pray for Simon as Christ had prayed for him (Acts 8:24 cp. Lk. 22:32). And His triple commission to Peter to feed His lambs was prefaced each time with the question: Do you love me? It was an eloquent undoing of Peter's triple denial of the Lord. Now, three times, he was asked: Do you love me? It could have been 'Do you know me?'. But Jesus knew that to know Him was to love Him, and so He put it that way, more kindly and more graciously. And Peter knew that for all his denials, he loved his Lord. With hung head he commented from the heart: 'You know that I love you'. And then, and only then, was the time right for the great commission to feed the sheep; to be a pastor in the fullest sense a man has ever been invited to be. Earlier the Lord had asked Peter to give himself to the strengthening of his brethren, "when thou art converted". 'Do you love me? Do you know me?' was really asking him: 'Are you converted now?'. Of course, Peter had been converted by Galilee, when he left all (or so he thought and felt then) and followed. But the Lord foresaw that there were levels of conversion; levels of accepting and living His truth. He understood Peter's conversion as being the point where that man concentrated all his love upon Him, with a full awareness of his own frailty and specific failure. This was, and is, the conversion of the converted. And it is only on that basis that successful and powerful pastoral work can be accomplished.

An over-reaction against Catholic views of Peter can lead us to under-estimate the undoubted supremacy of Peter in the early ecclesia. He was in the inner three along with James and John, and in incidents involving them he is always mentioned first, as the leader (Mt. 17:1,2; 26:37; Mk. 5:37). He is the first to confess Jesus as Messiah (Mt. 16:13-17), the first apostle to see the risen Christ

(Lk. 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5), the first to preach to the Gentiles. Being given the keys of the Kingdom is language which would have been understood at the time as the Lord making Peter the Chief Rabbi of His new ecclesia<sup>(1)</sup>. The Acts record without doubt gives primacy to Peter as the leader and chief representative of Christ's fledgling church. But, humanly speaking, he was the most unlikely choice. The one who in the eyes of the world and brotherhood should have sat a fair while on the back burner, done the honourable thing...in fact, many honourable things, in just keeping a respectful and bashful silence. And there is no lack of evidence that Peter himself would have preferred that.

But no, he was commissioned by the Lord to specifically lead the church. The early church was to be built on the rock of Peter. Whether we like to read this as meaning the rock of Peter's confession that Christ was the Son of God, or as simply meaning Peter's work as the manifestation of Christ, *the* rock, the Acts record shows clearly that the early church was built upon the specific work of Peter. Remember that 'Peter's real name was Simon. 'Peter' was a name given to him by Jesus- 'Simon the rock' was how Jesus surnamed him. And the name stuck. He became known simply as 'Peter', the rock-man. "The fact that the word *Kepha* was translated into Greek is significant. It confirms that the word is not a proper name; proper names are usually not translated" (Oscar Cullmann, *Peter: Disciple, Apostle, Martyr* (London: S.C.M., 1962) p. 21). There are many examples of names being changed or added to, in reflection of the Divine perspective upon the individuals (Gen. 17:5,15; 32:28; Is. 62:2; 65:15). It was common for Jewish rabbis to give their disciples such new names. The Lord likewise surnamed the sons of Zebedee *Boanerges*. Although Peter seemed so unstable, he 'dissembled' due to fear even in Gal. 2:11, he had the potential to be a rock; the basic stability of the man's tenacious basic faith was perceived by the Lord. We too will be given a new name, and it is for us to live up even now to the name of Jesus by which we have been surnamed in Christ. Even though it seems too good for us- we are to live up to the potential which the Lord sees in us. I even wonder whether it was the Lord's renaming of Peter which inspired him to the spiritual ambition of Pentecost- to stand up in front of the Jerusalem crowd, with all the gossip about his own denial of Jesus staring him in the face, and so preach that he achieved the greatest mass conversions of all time. Perhaps ringing in his ears were the Lord's words: 'You, Simon, are the rock, and upon you, Simon-rock, I will build my church'. The Lord entrusts us with the Gospel, and we respond to this trust and belief which He shows in us. It's like the schoolteacher telling the most disruptive child: 'I'm going out of the classroom for 5 minutes. You're in charge. And when I return I want there to be deathly silence'. And there likely will be. After the shock of the high calling wears off, the pupil often rises up to the unexpected trust given him [or her].

Steven Snobelen pointed out the following: “It is significant that ‘Peter’ occurs a disproportionate number of items with the article- as if, ‘*the* Peter’.

Name	total	%with article	% w/o article
Moses	79	16.46	83.54
Abraham	72	16.4	83.6
David	58	8.6	91.40
Solomon		12	8.33
			91.66
Elijah	29	0	100
Isaiah	21	0	100
Isaac	20	20	80
Jacob	25	20	80

I thought it best to test the closest parallel, which is OT PNs used in the NT, but the pattern seems to hold up with purely NT names, like John (the Apostle):

John	34	11.8	88.2
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Curiously the pattern breaks down with *ho Petros* (Peter), since of the 92 occurrences 59 have the article. This seems to be explained by the fact that Peter often heads the lists of the 12 disciples and because his name occurs more often on its own in constructions that give him (and hence his name) prominence”.

Mt. 14:31 records the Lord rebuking Peter as he sunk into the water. He rebukes Peter for his “doubt”, using a Greek word meaning ‘to duplicate’ [Strong’s]. Peter’s lack of faith is thus made equal to having a double heart. James alludes here in saying that “A double minded man is unstable...ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed” (James 1:6,8). James is clearly telling his readers not to be like Peter. It is easy for our reaction against Catholic extremism to lead us to under-estimate the high status of Peter in the early church. Here was James, also a respected elder, telling the flock to take a snapshot of their great leader Peter in his moment of weakness on the lake- and not be like him! Leaders of

worldly organizations have a way of telling the flock that all their fellow leaders are as spotless as they are. But this wasn't the case in the early church. It was Peter's very humanity which was and is his inspiration.

And the man chosen for this great work was one who so frequently referred to his own weaknesses, and seems to have gone out of his way to show to the world that the Lord's commissions to him were *not* to be taken as meaning that he alone had the great responsibility of strengthening others and building up the ecclesia. He had been told that his experience of forgiveness and re-instatement would be such that he would thereby be able to strengthen his brethren, feed the sheep, and therefore fulfil the prophecy that the ecclesia would be built up upon him. We can construct a parallel:

Upon this rock (of Peter fully and truly believing in Christ as Son of God, with all it implies)

I will build my church

When thou art converted

Strengthen thy brethren

[As Peter with hung head says] " thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee"

Feed my sheep / lambs

Follow me to the cross, die my death with me

Building up the church, strengthening the brethren, feeding the sheep- this is the life of the cross. Self-giving to others, all the way. Peter often shows that he is the pattern of every true convert; all must strengthen their brethren, feed the sheep, and thereby the ecclesia will be built up upon them too. Thus the Lord's words "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church" can be read as meaning 'on this *type of rock and confession* as you exhibit and will more fully show, I will build up the ecclesia'. This is why Peter can tell *all* his readers to build up the house (ecclesia) of God (1 Pet. 2:5 GK.), just as it had been promised he would after his conversion. Having promised that the ecclesia would be built up upon the rock of Peter's faith, the Lord promised him the keys of the Kingdom to enable this to happen. But He repeated this promise to the others, as if to confirm that what He meant was that all who follow Peter's pattern would quite naturally have the same abilities and achieve the same end, without consciously trying to do so. "Feed my sheep" is a commission passed on by Peter to all pastors (1 Pet. 5:2), whom he pointedly describes as "fellow elders", as if to safeguard against any possible misunderstanding to the effect that he was the senior, special elder. They were *all* to follow his path and thereby achieve the same for others. It is only the

typical perversity of the Catholic church which makes them read Peter as the very opposite: as a father figure unapproachable in achievement by any other. The way Peter calls Christ the *petra* of the ecclesia (1 Pet. 2:8) is surely to warn against any view of himself as the rock.

It's significant and instructive that the other leaders of the early church not only accept Peter's authority, but do so exactly because of how he had dealt with his weaknesses and failures. It's as if they see in his humanity a reason to elevate him in their own estimations. Thus Peter's wavering when walking on the water is picked up by James, in one of the earliest of the New Testament letters [note the allusions to Stephen, John the Baptist, the references to Christians as still meeting in the synagogue, etc.- it has been argued by John Robinson and Paul Wyncs that James was in fact the first of the epistles. It seems that the "scattered abroad" audience of James 1:1 refers to the scattering abroad of the Jewish believers in Acts 8:1]. James warns that we shouldn't waver in faith, like a wave on the water, blown and tossed around by the wind (James 1:6). James of course had seen Peter wavering on the water; and he holds up Peter, who at that time was the senior elder of the very early church, as an example of how *not* to be. My point is that the greatness of Peter was in his example of failure and how he overcame it.

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## Notes

(1) K. Stendahl, *The School of St. Matthew* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968) p. 28.

## 4-2 Peter And The Judaizers

### Led Away...

The Peter who had come so far, from the headstrong days of Galilee to the shame of the denials, and then on to the wondrous new life of forgiveness and preaching that grace to others, leading the early community that developed upon that basis...that Peter almost went wrong later in life. Peter and the Judaizers makes a sad story. And as always, it was a most unlikely form of temptation that arose and almost blew him right off course. As often, the problem arose from his own brethren rather than from the hostile world outside. There was strong resistance in the Jewish mind to the idea that Gentiles could be saved without keeping the Mosaic law. And more than this, there was the feeling that any Jewish believer who advocated that they could was selling out and cheapening the message of God to men. Paul has to write about this whole shameful episode in Gal. 2. It becomes apparent that Peter very nearly denied

the Lord that bought him once again, by placing on one side all the evidence of salvation by pure grace, for *all* men whether the be Jew or Gentile, which he had progressively built up over the past years. Paul, using Peter's old name, comments how Cephas seemed to be a pillar- but wasn't (Gal. 2:9). Paul "withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed" (2:11). Peter and some other Jewish believers "dissembled" and along with Barnabas "was carried away with their dissimulation", with the result that they "walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel" (2:12-14). Paul's whole speech to Peter seems to be recorded in Gal. 2:15-21. He concludes by saying that if Peter's toleration of justification by works rather than by Christ was really so, then Christ was dead in vain. Paul spoke of how for him, he is crucified with Christ, and lives only for Him, "who loved me and gave himself for me". These were exactly the sentiments which Peter held so dear, and Paul knew they would touch a chord with him.

### **The Denial Of Grace**

Yet Peter very nearly walked away from it all, because he was caught up in the legalism of his weaker brethren, and lacked the courage to stand up to the pressure of the Judaizers on him. Peter had earlier stayed with a tanner, a man involved in a ritually unclean trade (Acts 9:43). This would indicate that Peter was a liberal Jew, hardly a hard-liner. His caving in to the Judaist brethren was therefore all the more an act of weakness rather than something he personally believed in. For it was Peter, too, who had gone through the whole Cornelius experience too! And many a humble, sincere man in Christ since has lost his fine appreciation of the Lord's death *for him* and the whole message of grace, through similar sophistry and a desire to please 'the brethren'. In some of his very last words, facing certain death, Peter alludes to this great failure of his- his second denial of the Lord. He pleads with his sheep to hold on to the true grace of God, lest "ye *also*, being led away (s.w. Gal. 2:13 "carried away") with the error of the lawless, fall..." (2 Pet. 3:17). Ye *also* invites the connection with Peter himself, who was led away by the error of the lawyers, the legalists- whereas his sheep had the error of the *lawless* to contend with. The point surely is that to go the way of legalism, of denying the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, is every bit as bad as going to the lawless ways of the world. Peter was carried away with the "dissimulation" of the Judaizers (Gal. 2:13), and he uses the same word when he appeals to the brethren to lay aside "all hypocrisies" (1 Pet. 2:1); he was asking them to do what he himself had had to do. He had been a hypocrite, in living the life of legalism within the ecclesia whilst having the knowledge of grace. We may so easily pass this off as a mere peccadillo compared to the hypocrisy of living the life of the world 6 days / week and coming to do one's religious devotions at a Christian church on a Sunday. But Peter draws a parallel between his own hypocrisy and that of such brethren; this is how serious it is to bow to the sophistry of legalism. It may be



that an unjust disfellowship ought to be contended, and we say nothing. Or that a sincere, spiritual brother who places his honest doubts on the table is elbowed out of being able to make the contribution to the community he needs to. In our after the meeting conversations and in our Sunday afternoon chats we can go along with such things, depending on the company we are in. And it seems just part of Christian life. The important thing, it can seem, is to stay within the community and keep separate from the world. But not so, is Peter's message. His ecclesial hypocrisy was just as bad as that of the worldly believer whom Peter wrote to warn. Paul seems to go even further and consciously link Peter's behaviour with his earlier denials that he had ever known the Lord Jesus. He writes of how he had to reveal Peter's denial of the Lord's grace "before them all" (Gal. 2:14), using the very same Greek phrase of Mt. 26:70, where "before them all" Peter made the same essential denial.

## Unlearning

The sad thing about Peter's reversion to the Judaist perspective was that it was an almost studied undoing of all the Lord had taught him in the Cornelius incident. There he had learnt that the Lordship of Jesus, which had so deeply impressed him in his early preaching, was in fact universal- because "He is Lord *of all*", therefore men from *all* (s.w.) nations were to be accepted in Him (Acts 10:35,36). God shewed him that he was not to call any man common or unclean on account of his race (Acts 10:28). But now he was upholding the very opposite. And he wasn't just passively going along with it, although that's how it doubtless started, in the presence of brethren of greater bearing and education than himself. He "compelled" the Gentile believers to adopt the Jewish ways, as if Peter was a Judaizer; and every time that word is used in Galatians it is in the context of compelling believers to be circumcised (Gal. 2:14 cp. 2:3; 6:12). So it seems Peter actually compelled brethren to be circumcised. And the Galatian epistle gives the answer as to *why* this was done; brethren chose to be circumcised and to preach it lest they suffer persecution for the sake of the cross of Christ (Gal. 5:11; 6:12-14). Consistently this letter points an antithesis between the cross and circumcision. The body marks of Christ's cross are set off against the marks of circumcision (Gal. 6:17); and the essence of the Christian life is said to be crucifying the flesh nature, rather than just cutting off bits of skin (Gal. 5:24). Peter's capitulation to the Judaizers, Peter's reversal to circumcision, was effectively a denial of the cross, yet once again in his life. There was something he found almost offensive about the cross, an ability to sustainedly accept its message. And he turned back to circumcision as he had earlier turned to look at John's weaknesses when told he must carry the cross. And we turn to all manner of pseudo-spiritual things to excuse our similar inability to focus upon it too.

Eventually Peter wouldn't eat with the Gentile brethren (Gal. 2:12). But he had learnt to eat with Gentile brethren in Acts 11:3; he had justified doing so to his brethren and persuaded them of its rightness, and had been taught and showed, so patiently, by his Lord that he should not make such distinctions. But now, all that teaching was undone. There's a lesson here for many a slow-to-speak brother or sister- what you start by passively going along with in ecclesial life, against your better judgment, you may well end up by actively advocating. It can be fairly conclusively proven that Mark's Gospel is in fact Peter's. Yet it is there in Mk. 7:19 that Mark / Peter makes the point that the Lord Jesus had declared all foods clean. He knew the incident, recalled the words, had perhaps preached and written them; and yet Peter acted and reasoned as if he was totally unaware of them.

Paul gently guided Peter back to the Cornelius incident, which he doubtless would have deeply meditated upon as the inspired record of it became available. Peter had been taught that God *accepted whoever* believed in Him, regardless of their race. But now Paul had to remind Peter that truly, God "*accepteth no man's person*" (Gal. 2:6). The same Greek word was a feature of the Cornelius incident: whoever believes *receives*, accepts, remission of sins (Acts 10:43), and they *received*, accepted, the Holy Spirit as well as the Jewish brethren (Acts 10:47). With his matchless humility, Peter accepted Paul's words. His perceptive mind picked up these references (and in so doing we have a working model of how to seek to correct our brethren, although the success of it will depend on their sensitivity to the word which we both quote and allude to). But so easily, a lifetime of spiritual learning could have been lost by the sophistry of legalistic brethren. It's a sober lesson. And yet Peter in his pastoral letters (which were probably transcripts of his words / addresses) makes these references back to his own failure, and on the basis of having now even more powerfully learnt his lesson, he can appeal to his brethren. And so it should be in our endeavours for our brethren. Paul warned him that by adopting the Judaist stance, he was *building again* what had been destroyed (Gal. 2:18). And Peter with that in mind can urge the brethren to *build up* the things of Christ and His ecclesia (1 Peter 2:5,7 s.w.), rather, by implication, that the things of the world and its philosophy.

## 4-3 The Letters Of Peter

Peter's letters are packed with allusion, consciously and unconsciously, to the Gospel records. And yet closer analysis reveals that he has an undoubted fondness for two areas: the cross, and incidents which include his own weakness, both morally and intellectually. In this lies Peter's power, and it must have made him quite some pastoral figure in the early ecclesias. He could plead with men, both in and out of the Faith, with a credibility that lay in his

ready acceptance of his failures, and his evident acceptance of his Lord's gracious forgiveness and teaching. Consider how he tells Ananias that Satan has filled his heart (Acts 5:3), alluding to what everyone full well knew: that Satan had desired to have him too, and in the denials he had pretty well capitulated (Lk. 22:31,32). Peter's disciplining of Ananias, so soon after his own deference to the pressures of Satan as opposed to those of the Lord, would have been done surely in subdued, saddened and introspective tones. There also seem to be a number of unconscious allusions by Peter back to his own failures- e.g. "Go shew these things unto James, and to the brethren" (Acts 12:17) was an allusion to the women being told to go and shew the news of the resurrection to the brethren *and Peter*, who was then in spiritual crisis. Those words, that fact, was ingrained upon Peter to the point that he unconsciously builds it in to his own words. Consider the following examples in the letters of Peter of how he uses the areas of his own failures as the material for exhortation:

- Peter must have felt to the false teachers with whom he contended as he did towards Ananias. He warns that they even deny the Lord who bought them (2 Peter 2:1). They *even* do this- as if denying the Lord was the worst possible, imaginable sin. And it was the very thing which he had so publicly done, three times, and had effectively done again when bowing to Judaist false teaching. They deny "the Lord"- and that had been Peter's favourite title for Jesus during the ministry (see *Peter And Christ*). As he warned of the evil of the apostate brethren, his own sense of personal failure and frailty was so evidently shown. And yet it was no reason for him to simply say 'So, I can't judge, I can't criticize another after what I did'. What he had learnt from the whole experience of forgiveness and grace was that the wondrous grace and atonement of Christ *must at all costs be preached and preserved*.

- And he goes on to speak of how these men loved "the reward of unrighteousness" (2 Peter 2:13), using the very same Greek phrase he had used earlier about how Judas betrayed the Lord for "the reward of iniquity" (Acts 1:18). Judas and Peter had committed in essence the same sin of denying their Lord, and at the very same time. Peter would have intensely been aware of this. And yet he holds up Judas as a prototype of all who fall, as if to say: 'And there, but for the Lord's grace, nearly went I. See the terror of it, and turn away from that road. I of all men can tell you that'.

- These Judas types "are carried with a tempest [in] the mist of darkness" (2 Peter 2:13). The Greek for "carried with a tempest" only occurs elsewhere in Mk. 4:37 and Lk. 8:23 in description of how Peter and the disciples, proud of their sailing ability, were driven by the storm / whirlwind in the darkness. The Greek for "tempest" is highly specific- it refers only and specifically to the whirlwind storms which can arise on Galilee. Peter clearly intends the allusion

back to the night when he too was driven in a Galilee whirlwind, and had been rebuked for his lack of faith. He is really saying that he too has been a condemned man and can relate to how they feel; yet he was converted out of it, and came to gracious forgiveness. And so, he implicitly appeals, can each of you my readers be.

- He urges his brethren: “Gird yourselves with humility to serve one another” (1 Peter 5:5 RV). This is a clear reference to the Lord’s humility at the last supper. But it had been Peter who didn’t perceive it. Now, it is as if he pleads with his readers not to be as slow as he had been to perceive the supremacy of humility.

- The letters of Peter urge his readers to “be mindful of the words which were spoken before” (2 Peter 3:2). Yet this is evidently alluding to the frequent references to the disciples being slow to “remember” [s.w. “mindful”] the words which their Lord had “spoken before” (Lk. 24:6,8; Jn. 2:17,22; 12:16). Indeed, the same word is used about Peter ‘remembering’ [s.w. “be mindful”] all too late, the words which his Lord had “spoken before” to him (Mt. 26:75). So Peter was aware that his readers knew that he had not ‘remembered’ the words his Lord had “spoken before” to *him*- and yet, knowing that, he exhorts his readers to ‘remember’ or ‘be mindful’ [s.w.] of words which had been previously spoken. His readers likely had memorized the Gospels by heart. And yet Peter asks them to learn from his mistake, not to be as slow to remember as the disciples had been, and he especially. This is the basis of powerful exhortation- a repentant life, not an appearance of sinlessness.

- Peter had found it hard to accept that truly “God is no respecter of persons” (Acts 10:37). And, as was well known, there had come a time when he had slipped back into the old mindset, and had once again respected persons by refusing to break bread with Gentiles. And yet he reminds his Jewish readers that their prayers ascend to a Father “who without respect of persons judgeth according to *every* man’s work” (i.e. Jew or Gentile, 1 Pet. 1:17). He was asking them to learn what he had so slowly and falteringly come to accept as the articulation of the very same grace to the Gentiles which had been his salvation too.

- He asks his sheep: “Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man...unto governors...as free...honour all men” (1 Pet. 2:13-17). This is all evident allusion to the way he had once felt that as free in Christ and in Israel, he didn’t need to submit to men and pay taxes. But the Lord had gently rebuked him, and provided the coin to pay for them both (Mt. 17:25-27). The Gospels records would have been well known amongst the early believers; there is a tradition that at least the Gospel of Mark was learnt by heart as part of instruction for

baptism. Peter's readers would have known of the incident, and now, here he is telling them to learn the lesson he had had to learn.

- The letters of Peter recount the transfiguration experience, and tells his brethren that they need to take heed to the word (2 Pet. 1:16-18), just as he had to be almost rebuked: "This is my beloved Son: *hear* him". Peter loved the word (see *Peter: Bible Student*), but so often didn't hear it, and at the crucial moment didn't remember his Lord's word. He had said "at thy word" I will let down the net; but when he saw the huge catch, he was amazed; he realized that he hadn't really believed his Lord's word. And he knew he was simply "a sinful man", worthy of condemnation for his lack of faith ("depart from me"). He had to be taught that his own natural abilities were nothing at all. He was taught this in relation to fishing (see *Peter And The Cross*), to his faithfulness, commitment to laying down his life for Christ. He was made to learn that he knew nothing as he ought to know. And he implicitly admits this to his readers, when he asks us to take heed of the word which we may think we well know, just as he had to. Peter learnt the lesson of the transfiguration, for he told the Jewish authorities that he had to hear God's word rather than theirs (Acts 4:19).

- 'Be babes' he exhorts, 'and grow as they do' (1 Pet. 2:2). The same word occurs in Lk. 18:15 in description of the "infants" whom Peter rebuked. The Lord's response had been to tell Peter to be like them (Lk. 18:17). And, having been humbled into learning something of a child's teachableness, a babe's desire for the sincere milk, Peter now asks others to learn the lesson.

- James and John had desired the senior places in the Lord's Kingdom. "And when the ten heard it, they were moved with indignation against the two brethren", and we can imagine Peter to have been the most indignant. For he had thought then that he loved the Lord more than any of the others (cp. Mt. 26:33; Jn. 21:15). "But (in admonition) Jesus called them unto him" and taught that only in the world did men worry about who was greatest and mind that others were over them, and went on to teach that the true greatness was in humility: "whosoever will be great among you, let him be your servant: even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life..." (Mt. 20:25-28). These words were lived out in epitome at the last supper- and again, Peter had objected to it. He had failed to grasp the Lord's teaching here. And having learnt the lesson finally, he can teach others that they like their Lord should not 'lord it' over their brethren, but rather be clothed with humility after the pattern of the kneeling Lord in the upper room (1 Pet. 5:3,5).

- They were to "be watchful" (1 Peter 5:8 RV), watching unto prayer as the end approaches (4:7), as Peter had not been watchful in the garden and had earned

the Lord's rebuke for going to sleep praying (Mt. 26:40,41). They were to learn from his mistake. Their watchfulness was to be because the devil was prowling around, seeking whom he could desire (5:8). This was exactly the case with Peter: satan desired to have him, he should have prayed for strength but didn't do so sufficiently (Lk. 22:31). He was warning his brethren that they were in exactly the situation he had been in, a few hours before he went into that fateful High Priest's house.

- The "day of *visitation*" is coming for us all, according to the letters of Peter (1 Peter 2:12). The Greek is related to the word describing how after the denials, Christ turned and *looked* upon Peter (Lk. 22:61). This was for him his day of judgment, which we must all pass through.

- They were to be ready always to give an answer to those who ask, albeit with fear (1 Pet. 3:15)- exactly what Peter failed to do on the night of the denials.

- Peter, in a rare autobiographical comment on his life before conversion, admits that he "walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine...running with them (the Gentiles) to the same excess of riot" (1 Peter 4:3,4). He uses the same Greek word as in Lk. 15:13 regarding the riotous behaviour of the prodigal. He saw himself in that younger son, rejected by the Judaistic elder brother, who would not sit at meat in table fellowship with him. According to other NT allusion, we are to see the prodigal as a symbol of all of us who will ultimately sit at meat with the Father in His house. And yet Peter makes the link plain for all to see.

And the power of David's exhortations in later life was because he had been through the Bathsheba humiliation; James could tell others not to speak against their brother (James 4:11 RV) knowing full well he had done the same to Jesus, his brother. Preaching and pastoral work is so often powerfully achieved on the basis of having personally experienced grace.

### **True Comfort**

Not only in warning does Peter allude to his own weaknesses. The two on the way to Emmaus commented that they thought Christ would have "redeemed" Israel (Lk. 24:21). A.D. Norris makes a powerful case for one of those two being Peter (*Peter: Fisher Of Men* p.109). The only other time the Greek word is used is (again?) by Peter in 1 Pet. 1:18,19, where he reassures his weary sheep that "Ye were redeemed by the precious blood of Christ"- as if to say 'it's really all wonderfully true! I too doubted it, as you know. But I know now that it is true; even I was redeemed, from the shame of those denials, and so much else. Believe it with me!'. After all the Lord had taught about salvation,

the eloquent and yet simple explanation of salvation in the Kingdom through His death, Peter and the others thought that His cross (“precious blood”) hadn’t brought redemption. How weak their understanding was, how slow they were. And Peter again is gently prodding from his own example and pattern of growth: ‘Can’t you see the reality of it all? Or are you still as inexplicably slow to see it all as I was?’.

Looking back, it must have been shameful for Peter to recollect how he had sought to dissuade the Lord from going up to Jerusalem to die there for the world’s redemption. At that time the Lord had called him a rock, upon whose declaration of faith he would build his church, and then soon afterwards a stumbling-stone, an offence. Peter combines these two descriptions in styling the Lord “the head(stone) of the corner (upon which the ecclesia would be built), and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence” (1 Pet. 2:7,8). There is undoubted allusion to the very titles which the Lord had given Peter. And yet here Peter applies them both to the Lord Jesus, even the “rock of offence”. His point perhaps was to show that he saw Christ as manifest in him, and he being “in Christ”, *even in his weakness*. Nothing could separate Peter from the love of Christ; and therefore he merges the titles of Christ with those of himself, even when they describe his weakness. This was the unity that was possible between a man and his Lord, and Peter holds it up in inspiration to his readers.

‘The Lord’ to Peter meant ‘the Lord Jesus’. He comforts them that the Lord knows how to deliver the Godly out of temptation (2 Pet. 2:9). Surely he was referring back to how the Lord Jesus had prayed for him, knowing the temptation that was to come upon him in the High Priest’s house, knowing Satan’s desire to have him <sup>(1)</sup>. And although it might have seemed that in the short term Peter’s weakness rendered that prayer powerless, in fact in the end, his faith didn’t fail, just as the Lord had prayed. And so from his own example he could comfort his readers that surely their Lord knew how to deliver from temptation, even if like Lot and like Peter those he delivers may deserve to be left to the outcome of their own words and actions.

### **Remembering The Word**

One of the themes in Peter’s second letter, written as it was at the very end of his life (2 Pet. 1:14), was that of the need to “remember” the words of the Lord Jesus (2 Pet. 1:12,13,15; 2:3; 3:1). This was with evident allusion (the same word is used) to the way that on his shameful night, Peter had remembered the word of Christ, and wept those bitter tears of ineffable regret (Lk. 22:61). As Paul in his time of dying remembering his row with Mark (2 Tim. 4:11), so awareness of sinfulness is a sign of spiritual maturity in us all <sup>(2)</sup>. Peter knew some of his sheep were weary with the way, and needed a like repentance and subsequent energizing which he had known. He was wishing all his readers

(and that includes us) a path of growth that followed his. He had always *known* the words of Christ; indeed, he had loved them. He shows himself an enthusiast for Bible study and reflection on the Lord's words (see *Peter: Bible Student*). But he didn't remember them in that they weren't living as a compelling force within his conscience. After his first denial and the cock crowing, surely he 'remembered' the Lord's words: that before the cock crowed twice, he would deny Him thrice. He must have shrugged off that first cock crowing as coincidence, sure he wouldn't deny again. And then the second denial- well, there was no cock crow, so, don't worry... But he wasn't aware enough of his own liability to failure to have the Lord's warning words in the forefront of his mind. He didn't pause to reflect that the cock would soon crow again, and therefore he would be sorely tempted to make the third denial. He knew the word of the Lord, but failed to remember it. And this he now realized. And he urges his readers to learn more quickly and less painfully what he had to be forced to learn.

When dealing with the tricky ecclesial situation which arose over the admission of the Gentiles, Peter had truth and right on his side. But in his account of what happened to the elders, he constantly makes allusion to his own failures. "Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said..." is an unmistakable reference to his remembering of the Lord's word all too late after his denials. It's as if he was saying: 'And there I was again, not remembering the Lord's word, not facing up to what it obviously implied, almost denying Him again by hesitating to accept these Gentiles'. He comments that the vision of the unclean animals came "even to me", as if he was the least worthy to have been involved with this work.

The point of all this is that we will only strengthen our brethren as Peter did after 'conversion' in the sense of facing up to our own sinfulness (see *Peter's Conversion*). "When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren", the Lord had said (Lk. 22:32). His appeal for repentance and conversion was evidently allusive to his own experience of conversion (Lk. 22:32 cp. Acts 3:19; 9:35). He invited them to seek forgiveness for their denial of their Lord, just as he had done. He dearly wished them to follow his pattern, and know the grace he now did. He reminds his sheep of how they are now "returned" (s.w. 'converted') to the Lord Jesus (1 Pet. 2:25), just as he had been. Now Peter was converted, he was strengthening his brethren. This theme of strengthening was evident in Peter's letters (s.w. 1 Pet. 5:10; 2 Pet. 1:12; 3:17). Some of his last written words were that "Ye...be *established* in the present truth" (2 Pet. 1:12); he uses the same Greek word which the Lord used when He asked Peter so *strengthen* his brethren (Lk. 22:32). Peter at the very end knew that he had made it. His awareness of his own failures was at the root of his appreciation of his Lord's grace, and this was the motive power behind all his pastoral work. We're all priests, Peter reminds us (1 Pet. 2:5); we're all converts, and therefore



strengtheners of our brethren. But it can be that we are nervous to show any chink in our armour. A speaking bother who frankly confesses an intimate failure would likely not be asked to speak again. Some would twitch in awkwardness as he made his confession from the platform. We're all fine, we're all obedient, just a few surface failures, and we want to help you and teach you...that's the feeling so many a church, gathering and member can give. When if we are honest, we each have some huge skeletons in our cupboards. We all struggle, if we know the call of Christ at all, with the frailty and laziness of our natures, with a low, low pain threshold, over which we so easily say 'this shall not be unto thee'. What I am suggesting is a more frank admission of failure, more open and unashamed personal testimony to the Lord's grace and the newness of life that there is daily in Him (not to the exclusion of the ministry of the word, of course), a preaching and exhortation by example to our brethren.

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## Notes

(1) Not only did the Lord pray that Peter's faith wouldn't fail. He repeatedly made the point in the lead up to Peter's temptations that His disciples really *did* know Him (Jn. 14:7,17; 15:21; 17:3), and He taught them that all men *must* know they were His disciples, if they truly were (Jn. 13:35). He was trying to strengthen Peter against the trial He knew would come: to deny that he knew Him. Likewise we may try to strengthen those prone to specific temptation, but the power of it depends on their recognition of their own weakness, and whether they have ears to hear. It would seem Peter didn't, so confident was he of his own strength.

(2) One wonders about the way that Peter describes the apostate believer as drunk in the day time (2 Pet. 2:13), when he had dismissed with a confident logic the claim that he was drunk at Pentecost by saying that it couldn't possibly be so, because it was early in the day and people can only get drunk at night (Acts 2:15). Could it be that his perception of sinfulness and the grossness of this present evil world had increased by the end of his life?

## 5-1 Peter And Christ

The focus of Peter in the final maturity of his letters was undoubtedly the Lord Jesus. We have shown elsewhere how Paul's recorded words and writings refer to the Gospels at least once every three verses. Alfred Norris (*Peter: Fisher Of Men*) has listed around 40 connections between Peter's letters and the Gospels. And there are more. This makes a similar figure- once every three verses, Peter

is alluding to the Lord's words. And the figure is probably higher, seeing that we don't know all the words and actions of the Lord Jesus, and probably Peter is alluding to incidents and words which aren't recorded. Like Paul, Peter's mind was saturated with the Lord Jesus. This was the secret of his spirituality, this was why he could cope with the ministry to the Gentiles which he had so boldly started being taken away from him and given to Paul, this was why he didn't slump into a life of melancholy bitterness.

Some of his allusions are conscious allusions (e.g. those to the transfiguration). Others seem almost unconscious- e.g. the way he cites both Noah and Lot (2 Pet. 2:5-8) as warnings for the last generation, when the Lord had likewise used both of them together (Lk. 17:26-32). Another unconscious allusion would be the way in which he describes the Angels 'looking into' the blood of Christ with the same word which described Peter looking into the tomb (Jn. 20:5,11; Lk. 24:12). Or when he told the messengers: "I am he whom ye seek: what is the cause wherefore ye are come?" (Acts 10:21). This is full of allusion to the Lord in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:56; Jn. 18:4-6). There is perhaps no exact sense in the allusions; but they reflect the fact that the experience of the Lord's death and resurrection so indelibly impressed Peter that he reflected it both consciously and unconsciously. Likewise with us- even our body language should reflect our experience of such great salvation in so great a Saviour. In Acts 12:17 the same Greek words are used by Peter as by the Lord: "Go shew these things...to the brethren". Peter felt that his deliverance from prison was like the Lord's resurrection, and perhaps unconsciously he used the Lord's words to Mary Magdalene. Peter then went "to another place" just as the Lord did on saying those words. He saw that his life was a living out of fellowship with the Lord's mortal experiences, every bit as much as our lives are too.

Peter's last words in 2 Pet. are full of the theme of knowing Christ (1:2,3,5,8; 2:20). Finally, He came to really know the man whom he thought he once knew. His very last recorded words urge us all to follow his pattern: to grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour (3:18). He wrote this with awareness that he had denied the knowledge of the Lord; his very last words reflected his sense of inadequacy and shame at his failures, and yet the sure and certain knowledge that he knew the grace of the Saviour whom he believed.

## **5-2 Peter And The Titles Of Christ**

How Peter speaks of the Lord Jesus Christ over time, as reflected by an analysis of Peter's use of the titles of Christ.

**The Gospels**

1. Master
2. Lord
3. Lord
4. Son of God
5. Master
6. Lord
7. Christ, the son of the living God
8. Christ, the son of the living God
9. Lord
10. Lord
11. Lord
12. Lord
13. Master
14. Master
15. Lord
16. Lord
17. Lord
18. Lord
19. Lord
20. Lord
21. Lord
22. Lord

**Peter's recorded speech in Acts**

23. Jesus
24. Lord Jesus
25. Lord
26. Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God
27. Holy One (of God)
28. Christ
29. Christ
30. Jesus
31. Lord
32. Lord and Christ
33. Jesus Christ
34. His Son Jesus
35. Holy One and the Just
36. Prince of life
37. Christ
38. Jesus Christ
39. His Son Jesus
40. Jesus Christ of Nazareth
41. This man
42. Head stone of the corner

43. Jesus
44. A Prince and a Saviour
45. Jesus Christ
46. Jesus Christ...Lord of all
47. Jesus of Nazareth
48. Judge of quick and dead
49. Lord
50. Lord
51. The Lord Jesus Christ
- 1 Peter**
52. Jesus Christ
53. Our Lord Jesus Christ
54. Jesus Christ
55. Jesus Christ
56. Christ
57. Christ
58. Jesus Christ
59. The Holy One (1:15 RVmg.)
60. Christ
61. Lamb without blemish
62. Lord
63. Jesus Christ
64. Chief corner stone
65. Stone of stumbling and rock of offence
66. The King
67. Christ
68. Shepherd and bishop
69. Christ
70. Christ
71. The just
72. Jesus Christ
73. Christ
74. Jesus Christ
75. Christ
76. Christ
77. The chief shepherd
78. Christ Jesus
79. Christ Jesus
- 2 Peter**
80. Jesus Christ
81. Our saviour Jesus Christ
82. Jesus our Lord
83. Our Lord Jesus Christ
84. Our Lord and saviour Jesus Christ

85. Our Lord Jesus Christ
86. Our Lord Jesus Christ
87. (God's) beloved Son
88. Lord
89. Lord and saviour Jesus Christ
90. The Lord and Saviour
91. The Lord
92. Our Lord
93. Our Lord and saviour Jesus Christ

### **Analysis**

- Over time, Peter uses a far richer variety of names and titles for the Lord. At the transfiguration, He addressed Jesus as Lord (Mt. 17:4), rabbi (Mk. 9:5) and master (Lk. 9:33). Job, Jacob, Moses and others displayed a like feature- of diversifying in the titles with which they approach to God as their spiritual maturity increases. This was evidently a sign of growing appreciation of who the Lord is and was- not just a display of certain lexical items. The woman of John 4 likewise grew, quickly. She addressed the Lord as: a Jew (4:9); "sir" (4:11); greater than Jacob (4:12); a prophet (4:19); the Christ (4:42); saviour of the world (4:42). M.R. Vincent (*Word Studies In The NT* Vol. 1 p. 113) has observed that Christ is progressively addressed as "Lord" as the NT record progresses; as if the community's perception of Him increased over time.

- Whilst Peter evidently grew in appreciating the height and exalted nature of the Lord's present glorified position, his spoken words reflect a progressive emphasis on the Lord's humanity- he uses the title "the man", and three times emphasizes that this man really came from so human Nazareth. And so it should be with us; an appreciation of the Lord's vital and essential humanity is connected with a growth in appreciation of the wonder of who He is and was, and thereby we will appreciate the height of His exaltation. It is tragic, really, that Trinitarians think that by rejecting the Lord's essential humanity they somehow magnify Him the more- when the very opposite is the case.

- Even without making the above analysis, the Lord Himself commented that "ye call me Lord and master" (Jn. 13:13). These titles were the usual form of address used by the disciples, and the analysis of Peter's words bears this out in his case. But after the resurrection, this ceases to be the commonest way he perceives of his Lord. Could it not be that over time, he came to see the Lord as someone far more than a Master who gave commands for his slave / servant to obey. He used a far richer range of titles for the Lord; he came to see the multi-faceted beauty of the Lord's being, both in His mortality and now in His glory. It is Peter who likewise makes the observation that the grace of God is

“manifold”, using a Greek word which means multi-faceted, many coloured, light split into its various components through a prism (1 Pet. 4:10).

- At different stages in spiritual growth, we perceive different aspects of the Lord. In his early days of discipleship, Peter saw Him as Lord and Master. At the time of writing his first letter, he saw Him as ‘Christ’, with all that goes with that title. In his final maturity at the time of 2 Peter, he saw Him as our personal saviour, on account of His being Lord and Christ.

- At the end of Peter’s recorded words in Acts, he comes to a climax of understanding in coining the phrase “the Lord Jesus Christ”. In 2 Pet. 2:1 he describes Christ as “Lord” using a word which is never used of Christ in the Gospels, but only of God. He saw the extent of Christ’s perfection, the height of His exact manifestation of the Father. He was the “Lord” who bought us through His blood, and therefore and thereby He has an almost God-like authority over us. Appreciating the true implications of the cross leads to a true sense of His Lordship. At the end of 2 Peter Peter reaches an even greater height in the title: “Our Lord and saviour Jesus Christ”. He brings together in one title all the different aspects of his Lord he had learnt and come to appreciate in the course of his life. And this should surely be the climax of every life of discipleship.

### **The Titles Of Christ**

Peter used the Lord’s titles with a growing understanding. Eventually his understanding of the Lordship of Christ was going to be one of the fundamental inspirations behind his preaching on Pentecost and also extending the grace of this “Lord of all” to all the Gentile world (see *Peter And Preaching*). Peter had declared that Jesus of Nazareth was son of the living God (Mt. 16:16), even though before this the disciples on Galilee had confessed: “Of a truth thou art the Son of God!”. Peter’s confession was evidently of an altogether higher level. But straight after his confession, he showed his complete misunderstanding of the Lord’s death, and the whole message of following Him to that same end. He was rebuked: “Thou savourest not the things of God”, straight after having been told that his understanding of Jesus’ Sonship was given to him of God. If he savoured that knowledge, he would have understood the message of the cross which his Lord so insistently preached. But he wasn’t yet at that level. He had to be told at the transfiguration: “This *is* my beloved Son...hear ye him” (Mt. 17:5). It was as if the Father was emphasizing the imperative which lay in the fact that Jesus really is Son of God: if that is truly comprehended, we must hear Him. The implication is surely that Peter had almost painlessly confessed the Divine Sonship of Jesus. Perhaps the Father had in mind the way Peter, for all his acceptance of that Sonship, would later forget the Son’s words and mindlessly deny Him. Straight

after this incident, Peter says that his Master pays taxes, as if this is something the Lord just had to do. But the Lord seems to rebuke Peter, by reminding him that if He is truly Son of God and Lord of all, then it is quite inappropriate for Him to have to pay such taxes; for the Father's children are free (Mt. 17:24-27). This evidence all indicates that there are different levels in knowing that Jesus of Nazareth is Son of God. 1 Jn. 5:13 says as much: those who believe on the name of the Son of God must come to believe (i.e. on a higher level) on the name of the Son of God. We must ask ourselves of our own degree of appreciation. For every member of the ecclesia is built up on the foundation of faith that Christ is the Son of God.

Likewise with Peter's profession of the Lordship of Jesus. He asked: "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?". Jesus responds with a parable in which a man who calls his king "Lord" is himself forgiven, but refuses to forgive another man. Surely that parable was specifically for Peter, the one who delighted to know Jesus as Lord. He was warned through the parable that calling Him 'Lord' wasn't enough. An appreciation of Him as Lord of his life would mean quite naturally that he had a spirit of frank forgiveness for his brother, not carefully measuring it out, but rather reflecting his Lord's forgiveness of him. If Jesus is really Lord, then everything which He does and all that He shows becomes an imperative for us to follow. When Peter realized that it was Jesus standing on the shore in Jn. 21, this was probably the second or third time he had met the risen Lord. But when John says "It is the Lord", Peter throws himself into the water to rush to Him as if it's the first time they have met after the denials. Surely it was a higher appreciation of what Christ's Lordship entailed that suddenly struck him at that moment, and he now rushed eagerly to Him, believing surely in His gracious forgiveness. No wonder in a month or so's time he was appealing for men to repent and accept forgiveness on the basis that really, Jesus is Lord. The Lordship of Christ convicted Peter (and all men) of both their sinfulness (as they see themselves in the peerless light of His moral majesty) and also of the reality of His forgiveness. "I am a sinful man, *O Lord*" (Lk. 5:8) is a case in point. A case could be made to argue that Peter's use of 'Master' tends to be at times when he is weak or doubting (Lk. 5:5; 8:45; Mk. 11:21); whilst he saw Jesus as a master who simply gives directives to His slaves, there was not such great inspiration to faith. But the utter and surpassing Lordship of Jesus had quite a different message. Peter's perception of Jesus as 'Lord' climaxed when he perceived that "It is the Lord!" whilst fishing on Galilee after the resurrection. His sense of the greatness of this more-than-man led him to do something counter instinctive and even absurd- he adds clothes before jumping into the water to swim to Him, in order to be attired as best he could be before Him. It would seem that He was imitating the body language of the Lord when He washed Peter's feet- he tied a towel around Him [s.w. as Peter wrapping his outer garment around him, Jn. 13:4,5 cp. 21:7].

Peter's growth of understanding of Jesus as 'Christ' also grew. He declared Him as this during His ministry (Jn. 6:69), and also as 'Lord', but he preached Him as having been *made* Lord and Christ after the resurrection (Acts 2:36). He saw the Lord's status as having changed so much, even though he used the same words to describe it, and therefore he responded the more fully to Him. He so often refers to the Name of Christ, which had now been given Him (Acts 4:12 RV)- as if this new Name and the redemption in it was the motive power for his witness. Jesus had been born a Saviour, Christ the Lord (Lk. 2:11). But Peter uses each of these titles as if they had been given to the Lord anew, after His resurrection. And indeed they had been. They were no longer just appropriate lexical items for Peter to use; they were the epitome of all that the Lord was and had been and ever would be, all that He stood for and had enabled. And he preached them to men as the basis upon which salvation and forgiveness was now possible.

## 6 Peter: Bible Student

We can almost sense a rather rare exaltation of spirit in the mind of our Lord Jesus when Peter said those words: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Mt. 16:16). In His humanity, the Lord Jesus must have suffered so much from feeling totally misunderstood, unrecognized, not appreciated for who He really was. The fact that Peter so artlessly expressed his true grasp of who Jesus was led Him to respond: "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven" (:17). And then Jesus goes on to say that the nature of Peter's belief will be exactly copied by all members of His church; it was to be on the rock of a similar faith that Christ would build His church (v.18). So Peter's faith in Christ is being held up to us as an example which we should all follow. Closer analysis makes it evident that his attitude to God's word was the secret of Peter's faith. Unless he had made some kind of personal effort to achieve the faith which he did, the Lord would not have commended him for it. God did not just chose to reveal the true nature of Jesus to Peter as opposed to other people for no good reason. Faith is related to our own effort in responding to God's word (Rom. 10:17); Peter's faith in the Messiahship of Jesus must have therefore been related to his attention to the word. For this Christ praised him, mentally He enthused over that fisherman as they stood (or walked) on the road to Caesarea.

Later on, we see another cameo of the Lord's love for Peter. There was a crisis in the Lord's ministry, when "many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with Him. Then said Jesus (surely with a lump in His throat, a slight quiver in the voice) unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered Him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast *the words* of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God"



(Jn. 6:66-69). Notice how again Peter's faith in Jesus' Messiahship is related to his attitude to Christ's words. His faith came by hearing the word. How Jesus must have loved him in that moment. Peter loved Christ because of His words; that was why he stuck to him, through the thick and thin of his own spiritual collapses, through persecution, desertion and humiliation at the hands of his own brethren. In other words, Peter realized that Christ was His words, He was the word made flesh (Jn. 1:14). Unless we too realize this in a practical rather than purely academic sense, we just will not have the motivation to hold on like Peter did. We can love the Bible, but not love the Christ it breathes. The Jews searched the scriptures, thinking that by their Bible study alone they would receive eternal life. But they never came to Christ that they might know the eternal life that is in Him (Jn. 5:39,40). They thought "eternal life" was in a book, a reward for correct intellectual discernment and exposition, rather than in the man Christ Jesus. And for all our Biblicism, we need to examine ourselves in this regard. For like Peter, we must be Christ-centred more than purely Bible-centred; we must see Him "in all the Scriptures", knowing that the whole word of God's revelation was made flesh in Him .

'Simon' means 'hearing', one who listens. This was one of his distinct characteristics. I'd like us to consider a number of points which reveal Peter's attitude to the word.

- Firstly, something which indicates the depth of Peter's familiarity with the Old Testament. Look at Mt. 16:22: " Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee" . Peter is quoting verbatim here from Is. 54:10, which speaks (in the Septuagint) of showing mercy to oneself. As an illiterate fisherman, he must have meditated and meditated upon the words he heard spoken to him in the synagogue readings. Let's be aware that in the preceding verse 21, Jesus had been explaining that passages like Is. 53 pointed forward to Christ's suffering and resurrection. Peter is responding by quoting a verse a little further on, in the same context. If Peter understood that Jesus was the Old Testament Messiah, he surely understood, in theory at least, that the Old Testament required a suffering Messiah. For him, of all men, to discourage Jesus from fulfilling this was serious indeed; hence Christ's stiff rebuke, likening him to the satan of His wilderness temptations, in that Peter too misquoted Scripture to provide an easy way out.

- Another example of relevant Old Testament quotation is shown when Christ asked Peter to kill and eat unclean animals. He replied by quoting from Ez. 4:14, where Ezekiel refuses to eat similar food when asked to by the Angel. Perhaps Peter saw himself as Ezekiel's antitype in his witnessing against Israel's rejection of the word of God in Christ (note how Ez. 4:16 is a prophecy of Jerusalem's destruction in AD70). 'In the same way as God made a concession to Ezekiel about this command to eat unclean food', Peter reasoned,

'so perhaps my Lord will do for me'. But the Lord was to teach him even greater things than Ezekiel.

- Peter's unswerving respect for his Lord's word is seen as he looked out of that sinking ship on Galilee, battling with his own humanity as he weighed up in his own mind whether to be spiritually ambitious enough to get down into that raging water. He only felt able to take such a leap of faith if he had Christ's word behind him. So he yelled out above the noise of the wind: "If it be thou, *bid me come* unto thee" (Mt. 14:28). In other words: 'With your word behind me, I'll have a go; without it, I won't'. How much spiritual ambition is there within us? Or do we huddle in the sides of the ship, or desperately expend our own strength to bring about our salvation, without even seeking the word of Christ?

- Peter's preaching in Acts is largely comprised of quotations from Old Testament passages- probably ones he had eagerly meditated upon during his fisherman days, and then throughout the three and a half years of foot slogging round Galilee that followed.

- He was one of the few who really grasped the meaning of the Lord's miraculous provision of bread, and the discourse which followed. The Lord had said that He was the living bread, of which a man could eat and live for ever. Peter's comment that only the Lord had the words of eternal life showed that he quite appreciated that it was the *words* of the Lord Jesus which were the essential thing, not the physicality of the miracle (fascinating as it must have been to a fisherman; Jn. 6:51 cp. 68).

- Despite having toiled all night and caught nothing, Peter was able to subdue his natural wisdom, his sense of futility, and the sense of irritation and superiority which exists in the experienced working man: "Nevertheless (how much that hides!) *at thy word* I will let down the net" (Lk. 5:5). It would seem that the parallel record of this is found in Mt. 4:18, which describes the call of the disciples soon after Christ's triumphant emergence from the wilderness temptations. We learn from Jn. 1:41,42 that it was Peter's brother, Andrew, who first told Peter about Jesus, and who brought him to meet Jesus first of all. The point is that at the time of Peter's call as he was fishing, he had probably heard very few of Christ's words personally. He had heard about Him, and listened to His words for perhaps a few hours at different times in the past. So where did he get this tremendous respect for the word of Christ from, which he demonstrated when Christ called him? The answer must be that he meditated deeply on those words that he had heard and understood, and came to appreciate that the man saying them was worth giving all for. Our far easier access to God's word does not seem to make us more meditative as individuals. We have access to hearing God's word which previous generations never had.

We can listen to it on a Walkman, have tapes of well read Scripture playing at home, analyze it by computer, hear it sung to us according to our taste in music, read it from pocket Bibles as we work and travel... we *can* and *could* do all these things. My sense is that we just don't make use of our opportunities as we should. Why has God given our generation these special opportunities to be ultra-familiar with His word? Surely it is because our age contains temptations which are simply more powerful than those of former years. So it is *vital*, vital for our eternal destiny, that we do make as much use as possible of all these opportunities. We should be *cramming*, yes cramming, our hearts and brains with the words of God. I certainly get the feeling that Peter would have listened to a tape of Isaiah on his Walkman if he had one, as he went out fishing; that he'd have had tapes of the Psalms going all evening long in his little fisherman's cottage, wife and kids caught up in his enthusiasm too (Mk. 10:10,15 suggests that the incident with the little children occurred in Peter's house). There *are* a handful of Christian homes where this spirit is truly seen.

- With this background, it is not surprising to read that when a nervous Peter heard Moses and Elijah speaking God's word to Jesus, " he wist not what to say" (Mk. 9:5,6), and earnestly desired to make the three tents so that the wondrous experience would last the longer. There was Peter, hearing words intended to encourage the Son of God, fearful of his own humanity, evidently not understanding the depth of the glory which God's word was revealing, yet ever eager for more, to just bask in the experience of it. Would our sense of our own sinfulness, and our thirst for the word of God, was like that man's.

- Years later Peter was to comment on this: " There came *such* a voice to (Christ) from the excellent glory...and this voice which came from heaven *we* heard...we have also a *more sure word* of prophecy, whereunto *ye* do well that *ye* take heed" (2 Pet. 1:18,19). Notice the progression in his reasoning here. Peter considered it such an honour that he could hear the words which God primarily intended for Christ. And even more wondrous, the word of prophecy which we have all heard is an even *more* wondrous revelation of God's glory than the word of God which came at the transfiguration. Yet do we even begin to reach that sense of wonder which Peter had on the mount? That sense of rapture, of real spiritual transport, of reaching out of earthly things into Heavenly, that desire for the experience never to end, even though we realize that we only understand a fraction of the infinity which is revealed by God's word?

- The Lord had taught that when one was invited to a feast, they should take the lowest seat. It seems that at the last supper, Peter did just this. There would likely have been petty jealousy over who sat next to Jesus, and there may have been a desire to sit closest to Him as a sign of faithfulness to their beloved

teacher. John was clearly sitting next to Jesus, as he was able to have his head on Jesus' breast. And the fact the Lord dipped in the dish at the same time as Judas may imply that Judas was also next to Him. It's tempting to imagine John at Jesus' right hand and Judas at His left. But it seems Peter was the last to have his feet washed. Jesus "came to Simon Peter" to wash his feet, and when he had done so, He commented that now, all His men were clean (Jn. 13:6). This implies to me that Peter was sitting at the end of the couch, furthest away from Jesus. He certainly wasn't that close to Jesus, because he had to signal [Gk. 'to nod'] to John to ask the Lord who the betrayer was (Jn. 13:24). So I conclude from all this that Peter took the lowest seat at that feast- in conformity to what the Lord had taught them earlier. And I imagine it would have been especially difficult, as the order of seating at the Jewish Passover was a classic opportunity to demonstrate a pecking order within a group of friends or family.

- Paul was Peter's hero, partly because of the spiritual depth of his writings " according to the wisdom given unto him" (2 Pet. 3:15,16). And Paul made precisely the same point as Peter; that the Scriptures which were relevant to Christ are actually directly applicable to us too, who are in Christ. Thus Paul reasons: " Christ pleased not himself, but as it is written (he quotes Ps. 69:9), The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me. For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for *our* learning...." (Rom. 15:3,4). So here Paul points out a well known Messianic prophesy, applies it to Christ, and then says that it was written for *us*. This is exactly Peter's point, when he says that the words which were spoken to Christ at the transfiguration were also for our benefit, and that the word of prophecy which we have is to be treated in the same manner as if we had been cowering with Peter on the mount, hearing the words which Moses and Elijah spoke to Jesus.

- Appreciating the extent of Peter's devotion to Christ's words enables us to more fully enter into the man's spiritual and emotional tragedy when he denied Christ. He paid no attention to Christ's words of warning concerning Peter's own spiritual weakness. After that third cock crow, " Peter remembered *the word* of the Lord , *how* he had said unto him..." (Lk. 22:61; " how" may refer to the physical manner in which Christ spoke to Peter, as well as to the content of his words).

- When he received a vision he didn't understand, Peter " doubted in himself what this vision... should mean...while Peter thought on the vision..." (Acts 10:17,19). His seal for understanding was rewarded. Perhaps the revelation was made to him first because the others were not sufficiently sensitive to the word to accept it?

- When the Angel told Peter " Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals...and follow me" (Acts 12:8), he was alluding back to the Lord's words to Peter, that when

he would be old, others would gird him and carry him to his death (Jn. 21:18). The Angel was therefore saying that the time of Peter's death had not yet come. The lesson is, that the amount of comfort and reassurance Peter took from the Angels' words would have been proportionate to the degree to which he had meditated on his Lord's prophecy. And so with us.

Now this Peter, our example of faith, was a working man. He freely recognized this, yet (in later life) he was unafraid to rebuke the high flying intellectuals who were wrecking the first century ecclesia. He likens his rebuke of them to the "dumb ass speaking with man's voice" which rebuked Balaam (2 Pet. 2:16). This was what he chose to identify himself with; that inspired donkey. There was no great trained intellect in Peter; yet his zeal for God's word puts us to shame. As the time of the end progresses, it seems that more and more of Christ's church (in the Western world) are educated people. In this I see a tremendous danger. A man who could probably not read, who probably wrote his inspired letters by dictation because he couldn't write himself, had a zeal for understanding which puts us to shame. Paul correctly made the point (and who more aware that his intellectuality could run away with him than Paul) that God has chosen the weak things to confound the mighty; He has chosen the simple of this world to confound the wise (1 Cor. 1 and 2). I get some kind of intuitive feeling that Paul had Peter at the back of his mind as he wrote this letter to working class Corinth (1 Cor. 1:26). The deep mutual respect between theologian Paul and fisherman Peter is a real working model for our ecclesias.

So Peter is a sure encouragement to all those who feel that Bible study is beyond them. If we have a true love of Christ, we will have a love of His words, because He is to be identified with His words. Likewise God is His word (Jn. 1:1); to love God is to love His word. If we love Christ, we will keep His words (Jn. 14:15,21; 15:10). This is evidently alluding to the many Old Testament passages which say that Israel's love for God would be shown through their keeping of His commands (Ex. 20:6; Dt. 5:10; 7:9; 11:1,13,22; 30:16; Josh. 22:5). Israel were also told that God's commands were *all* related to showing love (Dt. 11:13; 19:9). So there is a logical circuit here: We love God by keeping His commands, therefore His commands are fundamentally about love. Thus love is the fulfilling of the law of God; both under the Old and New covenants (Rom. 13:10). It is all too easy to see our relationship with God and Christ as a question of obedience to their words, as if this is somehow a test of our spirituality. This is to humanize God too far, to see God as if He were a fallible man; for if we were God, we would institute some kind of written test for our creatures: 'Do this, and if you don't, then I know you don't love me'. The God of glory is beyond this kind of thing. He is His word. If we love Him, we will be eager to know His words, we will dwell upon them, we will live them out in our daily experience as far as we can. In our seeking to know an infinite God, we will of course fail to see or appreciate the spirit of all His words. But

He appreciates this. Yet in a sense our attitude to His word is an indication of our state of 'in-loviness' with God. Reading His word will not be a chore, a mountain to be grimly climbed and achieved each day; it will be a vital and natural part of our daily life, as natural and spontaneous as our desire to eat; and even *more so* (cp. Job 23:12). Now there's a challenge; not to relate to God's word *as* we do to daily physical food, but even *more so* .

## 7 Walking On Water

The Lord's teaching style continually revolved around posing explicit and implicit questions to His hearers. John's Gospel contains a total of 161 questions<sup>(1)</sup> ; and one brief passage in Mark (Mk. 8:14-21) records how the Lord asked seven questions in quick succession. In this sense, the Lord Jesus intended to be intrusive into human life; He penetrates the depths of our being. His call to pick up a cross and follow Him was radical- so radical, that His hearers both then and now tended to [even unconsciously] negate the totally radical import of His demands.

### The Challenge Of The Cross

The rich young man would fain have followed Jesus. But he was told that he must sell all that he had, give to the poor, and take up the cross to follow Christ (Mk. 10:21). Notice how the ideas of following Christ and taking up the cross are linked. The man went away, unable to carry that cross, that sacrifice of those material things that were dearest to him. Peter responds with the strong implication that he *had* done all these things, he was following the Master, and by implication he felt he was carrying the cross. Notice the parallels between the Lord's demand of the young man, and Peter's comment (Lk. 18:22 cp. 28; Mk. 10:21 cp. 28):

“Sell all that thou hast and distribute to the poor      “We have left all

...and come, take up the cross      [no comment by Peter]

and follow me”      ...and have followed thee”

Peter seems to have subconsciously bypassed the thing about taking up the cross. But he was sure that he was really following the Lord. He blinded himself to the inevitable link between following Christ and self-crucifixion; for the path of the man Jesus lead to Golgotha. We have this same tendency, in that we can break bread week after week, read the records of the crucifixion at least

eight times / year, and yet not let ourselves grasp the most basic message: that we as followers of this man must likewise follow in our self-sacrifice to that same end.

The Gospel records, Luke especially, often record how the Lord turned and spoke to His followers- as if He was in the habit of walking ahead of them, with them following (Lk. 7:9,44,55; 10:23; 14:25; 23:28; Mt. 9:22; Jn. 1:38). As we saw above, Peter thought that following the Lord was not so hard, because he was literally following Jesus around first century Israel, and identifying himself with His cause. But he simply failed to make the connection between following and cross carrying. And we too can agree to follow the Lord without realizing that it means laying down our lives. The Lord brought Peter to face this with a jolt in Mt. 16:22-25. Peter was following Jesus, after He had predicted His crucifixion (for Jesus “turned, and said unto Peter”). He thought he was following Jesus. But he was told: “Get thee *behind me*...if any man will come *after me* (s.w. ‘behind me’), let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and *follow me* (s.w.)”. The italicized words are all the same in the original. Peter didn’t want the Lord to die by crucifixion at Jerusalem, because he saw that as a follower of Jesus this required that he too must die a like death. Peter needed to get behind Jesus in reality and really follow, in the sense of following to the cross, although he was there physically behind Jesus, physically following at that time. The Lord was saying: ‘Don’t think of trying to stop me dying. I will, of course. But concentrate instead on *really* getting behind me in the sense of carrying my cross’. John’s record stresses that the key to following Jesus to the cross is to hear His word, which beckons us onwards (Jn. 10:4,27). All our Bible study must lead us onwards in the life of self-sacrifice. But Peter loved the Lord’s words; yet, as pointed out to him at the transfiguration, he didn’t hear those words of Christ deeply. And so he missed the call to the cross. He had just stated that Jesus was Messiah; but soon afterwards he is recorded as saying that it was intrinsic within Jesus’ Messiahship that He *mustn’t* die or suffer. The confession of Messiahship and this incident of trying to stop the Lord dying are juxtaposed in Mark’s Gospel, which seems to be Mark’s transcript of the Gospel account Peter usually preached [note, e.g., how Peter defines the termini of the Lord’s life in Acts 1:21,22; 10:36-42- just as Mark does in his gospel]. Surely Peter is saying that yes, he had grasped the theory that Jesus of Nazareth was Messiah; but the import of Messiahship was totally lost upon him. For he had utterly failed to see the connection between Messianic kingship and suffering the death of the cross. The Lord’s comment ‘Get behind me’ was exactly the same phrase He had earlier used to the ‘satan’ in the wilderness when the same temptation to take the Kingdom without the cross had been suggested.

All this explains why we find it so hard to stop our mind from wandering at the breaking of bread. It explains why we struggle with the records of the

crucifixion, which we read several times / year. Who He was there, what He was there, is a powerful imperative to us to do and be likewise. For we are brethren in Christ, in Him, the crucified Christ. In our deep subconscious, it seems to me, we know how we ought to live in Him. We don't respond so well to merely being told how we ought to live by well meaning brethren. The final motivation must be a real person we know, a man, a human, a more than man, a hero who inspires. And in the cross we have just that Man.

## The Radical Life

In the account of Peter walking on water, we have a cameo of what it means to walk out of our comfort zone. Peter asked the man on the water to invite him to walk on the water; for Peter knew that only Jesus would be that demanding (2). He's a demanding Lord for us too. Peter didn't have to get out of the boat. But He realized that following the Lord Jesus involves this stepping out of our comfort zone. For us, it may be making a radical donation of our money, our time, a donation that really hurts, that is significant, not a giving that is well within our comfort zone. Or it may be a radical forgiveness, a radical refusal to answer slander, to not fight back, to day after day after day live amidst provocation. This may be our walking out on the water. Picture Peter as he stood by the side of the boat, wind blowing his hair back and forth, rain driving into his forehead, his brethren muttering "You're absolutely *crazy*, there's no need for this...we're only going to have to save you ourselves". He must have felt so alone. There was no human encouragement. Probably his thoughts went back to the wife and kids he had left behind on the other side of the lake, in that humble home in that quaint fishing village. But his focus was upon one Man, the same Lord and Master whom we look out to from the sides of our ships.

The sheer bravery of Peter's walking on water stands out. Was he afraid to walk on water? Of course he was. But he focused all his faith into the word of Jesus: "Come!". He overcame his fear to the point that he climbed over the sides of the boat. Picture him there, with one leg over the side and on the water, and the other still in the boat. He couldn't stay like that. He had to go only forward. The only thing that kept him back was fear. And it is basically *fear* which holds us within our comfort zones. Fear, fear, fear...that's all it is. To know 'truth' in its experiential sense should free us from fear; for fear is related to the unknown. God appeals to Israel: "Of whom has thou been afraid or feared, that thou hast lied?" (Is. 57:11). Fear leads to our abdicating from the responsibility of making choices; and this is why humanity has such a dearth of truly creative imagination, and why genuinely new ideas are so rare. But the true life in Christ is a life of repeatedly overcoming that fear, the fear which paralyzes, which holds you back. Let the widow woman of 1 Kings 17:13 be our heroine; she had totally nothing, just some flour; and she was hunting around in a parched land for two sticks with which to make a fire to bake it and eat her last



meal, then to lie down in the dust of death. She must have been literally on her last legs. But then God through Elijah asked her to give Him even what terribly little she had. And Elijah encourages the frightened, wide-eyed woman: "Fear not!". And she went forward in faith and gave him her very last hope of life. Living at such an animal level would have made her very self-centred; but she stepped out of it in response to the Lord's challenge.

Fear is, to my mind, the greatest single barrier to faith and true spirituality. It is fear alone which stops us from keeping commitments, from not entering into covenant relationship as deeply as we are bidden. This is why people shy away from covenant relationships, be they with the Father through baptism, or to another person through marriage or having children. Fear holds us back. We fear even ourselves, our own spiritual capacity, our standing before the Father. Our inner anxieties, our unconscious inner conflicts as we stand with Peter on the edge of the boat, contemplating what walking on water concretely meant, often lead us to criticize others or to speak and act with a hypocritical bravado. Yet true faith asks us to risk. As a psychotherapist friend of mine once jotted to me:

"We are asked to risk all we believe ourselves to be, we may find we're not what we thought ourselves to be, our constructs of the self will be pushed to the limit and we're afraid of what we may find of ourselves, that we may not be what we imagine ourselves to be in the construct upon which we have built our theories of the self. Obeying rules, staying within the construct, is much easier, much safer. We may have never tested ourselves in the real world. To launch off into the unknown, into a future that contains or may contain unknown risk, where our worst fears are realised, the greatest fear may be that we are failures....most of us, it would seem, don't have enough faith in there even being a God to risk even getting out of the boat let alone walking on the water".

### **The Power Of Fear**

Don't underestimate the power of fear when it comes to walking on water. Nor let us fail to appreciate that the fearful are listed alongside the unrepentant whores and idolaters who shall remain outside the city of God (Rev. 21:8). Our thirst for love, our fear of death and spiritual failure before a perfect God, the fear of displeasing or misunderstanding the infinite God...these fears should all be taken away for the man or woman who is truly clothed with the imputed righteousness of Christ. Yet they have a way of persisting in our weakness of faith. And so there develops a conflict between our true conscience and the false suggestions of our faithless fears. All this can lead to neurotic behaviour and a repression of conscience. The only way out of this is to boldly step forward as Peter did, albeit bricking ourselves as we do so.

Murderers often reveal that their psychological motivation was not merely hatred, but often fear- fear of what that person might do, or who they might show them up to be. Fear, therefore, is at the root of all lack of love and respect for our brethren. We fear the poor image of ourselves which they reveal by their actions or examples; and so slander and hatred of them in the heart [Biblical murder] develops. If only we can cast away this kind of fear, then love will take its place; for perfect love comes when fear has been cast out (1 Jn. 4:18). The Greek for 'drive out' is that used in Mt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30 to describe how the wicked are driven out into darkness at the last day. If we now in this life can cast out or condemn our own fear of rejection, then we will not live in fear...because fear has, or is, its own condemnation (1 Jn. 4:18 Gk.). If we are still consumed by fear, in whatever way, in this life- then this, according to John's logic, appears to be a sign that we will not be accepted in the last day. Fear as a purely nervous reaction is not what he is speaking of. Rather is it the crippling moral fear of which we have spoken in this study.

Do not fear *but* believe (Lk. 8:50) shows this power of fear- it is fear which stops faith, fear is the opposite of faith. If we know the love that casts out fear, then a whole new style of relationships becomes possible. In so many relationships there is a balance of power which is more realistically a balance of fear- a fear of losing, of being made to look small, a fighting back with self-affirmation against the fear of being subsumed by the other. Be it parents and kids, teachers and students, pastor and flock, so often both sides fear the other. Yet if we are truly affirmed in Christ, no longer seeking victory because we have found victory in Him, His victories become ours... then our whole positioning in relationships becomes so different. For example, our fear of rejection becomes less significant if we believe firmly in our acceptance in the eyes of the Lord, the only one whose judgment has ultimate value. If we can say with Paul that for us the judgment of others has very little value, because we only have one judge... then we will no longer worrying about acting in such a way as to impress others. No longer will it be so important to not express our inner thoughts about people or situations for fear of not using the constant 'nicespeak' which results in judgment from others unless it's used. There will be a congruence between what we feel and think within us, and what we actually show. And thus we will avoid the dysfunction which is so apparent in so many, as they forever struggle to control their outward expressions, hiding their real self, with the real self and the external self struggling against each other in a painful dis-ease.

It seems to me that we have over intellectualized our 'faith', until we almost obsessively seek to *understand* at every point what God's plan is for us. But the life of faith is an abandoning of ourselves to the Lord, asking Him to guide us and invite us, as Peter did. It is our fear which leads us to 'chose not to chose any more', to resign responsibility for our choices. Human beings tend to allow

themselves to be carried along by their instincts, desires and fears. Perhaps this, for some, is rooted in a childhood background where they never knew the carefree life of a child, but had to calculate in detail the result of every detail of behaviour. Even if this were happily not the case with us, society has groomed us to do just this in later life. And this militates against the life of true choice, which is the life of faith- choosing to walk out of our comfort zones into the challenge of the Lord's protection and grace. It is in this that Peter's climbing over the sides of the boat sets us such an inspirational example.

Living a life that has come out and ongoingly comes out of the comfort zone is not the same as making occasional forays out of it. There is a tendency in all of us to make such temporary, ultimately insignificant forays out. To write a cheque for an amount well within our total wealth. To occasionally rise up to the challenge of forgiving others. We are in those moments like the Moslem who occasionally glances over an internet site about Jesus, gets a little bit interested, and then runs back into the safety of tradition. Like the well behaved, submissive adolescent who occasionally does something just a little bit 'naughty'. Yet the call of Christ is far more radical than that. It is a call to live permanently on the edge, permanently risking ourselves, and stepping out of line with all that seems humanly sensible and safe. Decent living, nice habits, occasional kindness, doing no harm to our neighbour...all these things can be seen in the lives of some who make no claim to Christianity. Personal, real repentance, the shattering personal encounter with the real Jesus and His real demands...this is a life of an altogether different order.

### **Walking On Water: God Manifestation**

So how exactly was Peter motivated to walk on water? We want to know, because it's the motivation that we so urgently need. We read that the Lord "passed by". This is the very language used in the Old Testament concerning theophanies, i.e. those times when God 'passed by' before His people, accompanied by earthquake, rain, wind, fire etc. These ideas all recur here in the account of Jesus 'passing by' before the fearful disciples. In Mt. 14:27 the Lord tells them: "It is I". This was a reference to the "I am" of the Yahweh Name. Peter knew that it was Yahweh who walks upon the waves of the sea (Job 9:8), and so he asks that if Jesus is really "I am", God manifest in flesh, then He will bid Peter also walk on the water. It was Yahweh whose way was *upon* the sea (Ps. 77:19 Heb.; Ps. 29:3). Indeed, the whole incident on the lake is almost prophesied in Ps. 107. The people are hungry in desolate places (:4,5), they are filled by Yahweh with good things, as the Lord Jesus fed the multitude (:9); some go down to the sea in ships (:23); a storm arises, sent from God (:25); they are troubled and cry out (:27,28); and then Yahweh delivers them, bringing them to their desired haven (:28-30). Peter, I think, perceived all this.

He saw that this Man from Nazareth was indeed manifesting Yahweh, and he is asking that he too will be a part of God's manifestation; he perceived that what was true of Jesus really could be true for us. If Jesus, manifesting Yahweh, walked upon the sea, then so could Peter. When Peter asks Jesus to "bid me come unto thee", the Greek word translated "come" is also translated "to accompany". He wanted to walk with Jesus on the water. He wanted to do what Jesus was doing. This of itself explains how the fact Jesus did what God did [e.g. walk on waves] doesn't mean He is "very God of very gods"- for Peter realized that he too could have a part in that manifestation. If Jesus was a man of our nature and yet God manifest, then, Peter reasoned, I too can manifest the Father. And the same is true for us, today. The reality of God's manifestation in the human Jesus should inspire us too to leave our comfort zones and enter the adventure of living Godly- living like God- in this present world.

Peter "came down" out of the ship to go walking on water (Mt. 14:29). He is described as "coming down" [s.w.] in Acts 10:21, where he came down from the roof top and said: "Behold I am he whom ye seek; what is the cause wherefore ye are come?". "I am he" uses the same two Greek words as in Mt. 14:27, when the Lord says "It is I". Three Greek words occurring together like this is surely not incidental. Peter recalls when he 'came down' out of the ship- and now, he really is Christ-manifest. He speaks as Jesus did; and further, "I am he whom ye seek" and "wherefore [are ye] come" are the very phrases of Jesus in Gethsemane. The record is showing us that consciously or subconsciously, Peter is Christ-manifest now. The words and person of Jesus have all had such impact upon him that now for him, "to live is Christ". To 'come down' and manifest Him is what life is all about; Peter's coming down out of the ship is a cameo of a life lived like this, time and again manifesting Him, overcoming the fear, the cowardice of our brethren, the distractions of the life and world which surrounds us...to walk out unto Him.

The Lord "stretched forth his hand" to save Peter (Mt. 14:31); and this is the very phrase used by Peter in Acts 4:30, speaking of how the Lord's hand is "stretched forth to heal". Peter saw himself on the lake as typical of all whom the Lord saves. Yet, it was *Peter*, not the Lord Himself, who stretched forth his hand to do the Lord's healing work on the lame man (Acts 3:7). Again, Peter is thinking back to the incident on the lake and perceiving that he is now Christ manifest as he had intended to be then. Thus it was the principle of God manifestation which inspired Peter to reach out of his comfort zone so dramatically; and properly appreciated, it can motivate us likewise.

When Peter was sinking, he was living out the picture we have of condemnation at the last day. Mt. 14:30 says that he began to "sink" into the sea of Galilee. This is exactly the image we find in Mt. 18:6, where the Lord says, in response to the question 'Who will be the greatest?', that he who

offends one of the little ones will be drowned [s.w. “sink”] in the midst of the sea- and his audience would have immediately associated this with the midst of the sea of Galilee, just where the storm had occurred. Peter seems to have realized that this warning was pertinent to him, for it is he who then interrupts the Lord to ask how often he should forgive his brother (Mt. 18:21). Peter sinking into Galilee, giving up swimming but desperately throwing up his hand to the Lord [you don’t swim with a hand outstretched], is the position of each person who truly comes to Christ. This is the extent of our desperation; baptism, conversion to Him, is most definitely not a painless living out of parental expectations. Note how they were “tossed” or ‘tormented’ (Gk.) by the raging waves (Mt. 14:24)- the very same word is used about how the rejected will be “tormented” in condemnation (Rev. 14:10; 20:10). Peter’s salvation by the hand of the Lord was representative of us all. As he drowned there in the lake, he was effectively living out the condemnation of the last day. But he appealed urgently to the Lord: “Save me!”. Later, Peter was to use the same words in his preaching, when he appealed to his nation to “save [themselves]” by calling on the name of the Lord, just as he had done on the lake (Acts 2:40). He saw that those people were in just the position which he had been in on the lake.

And thus we come to a gripping piece of logic. Peter is set up as our example. All who will be saved will have called desperately upon the name of the Lord. They will have stepped out of their comfort zones. For all true conversion to Him involves a stepping out of the boat and walking to Him over the waves. If we didn’t go through this at our baptism, be assured that you will. For there are various stages to conversion; hence the Lord could tell the already-converted Peter: “When you are converted, strengthen your brethren”. My own community has been deeply shocked at the fact that some of our young converts in Iran and Afghanistan have recently been murdered for their faith; others have been tortured and imprisoned. We find it shocking and disturbing. And yet when I have commended those who endure these things with such devotion and joy, their response is basically: “But this is what we signed up for in baptism. We agreed to share in the death and resurrection of Jesus. We expect no less”. And we should all have this attitude; that we have been called to give, to sacrifice, to give out, to risk, called to the life of bravery in the face of loss, suffering and death- the life and living which characterized that of the Lord Jesus.

### **Life On The Water**

Try to imagine how Peter felt as he walked on the water. It must have been an exhilarating life to lead, for those seconds or minutes that he lived life just as his Lord would have him live it. Mark’s account of this incident omits all reference to Peter walking on the water (Mk. 6:45-51). Yet there is good reason

to think that Mark is really Peter's gospel; in characteristic humility, he emphasizes his failures and downplays his achievements in his Gospel record. Hence this omission of any reference to Peter's bravery may indicate that this incident places Peter in a positive light; it was a tremendous achievement, and he humbly declines to mention it. Peter walking on the water is how we each can live life, walking with Jesus amidst every discouragement and distraction. This life of excitement, of adventure, of continual risk, living outside the comfort zone, this is the life which there is in Christ. We don't need to live under Islamic persecution to live this life. In suburban Sydney or central Riga or rural Zimbabwe, the call to this radical life is just as clear- if only we will perceive it. We may die in our beds, cared for in a loving Christian old peoples' home until our last breath, but this doesn't mean that we aren't living the life of risk, the brave life, the dangerous life, with all the loneliness and creativity that arises from a life outside the comfort zone.

### **Following A Demanding Lord**

At Peter's initial conversion, he had also been in his ship on the sea of Galilee, and had seen Jesus walking [s.w.] near the sea shore (Mt. 4:18). He left his boat, and responded to the call to follow Jesus. Now it's the same basic scene, but this time Jesus is walking not "by" the sea but "on" the sea. The similarity is perhaps to teach Peter that the Lord's real call may be repeated throughout our lives; the initial response may be relatively painless, but through the storms of life, the Lord teaches us as He did Peter how radical is the response required. To follow Him meant not merely walking away from the cares of this life, the boat, the nets, the fishing...but if Jesus walks on water, then those who follow Him must do likewise. And Peter, to his immense credit, perceived this; he saw his Lord walking on water as an imperative that demanded he do likewise. For him, Jesus wasn't just a Saviour on whose back he could ride to salvation in God's Kingdom. Yes, He is of course our saviour wherein we sink and drown in our weaknesses. But He is more than that; He is an inspiring example. His offer to walk on water wasn't motivated, therefore, by any form of inquisitiveness or daredevilery; the offer to walk on the water was rooted in his grasp that if this is where the Lord walks, then axiomatically, we must do likewise. When the Lord walked "by" the sea, Peter had come out of the boat and followed Him; now the Lord walks "on" the sea, Peter perceives that he must follow Him even there. For "he that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, as he walked" (1 Jn. 2:6- the same word is used as in the record of Peter's walking on water with Jesus, making it possible that John is upholding Peter's example for us all). For many, our conversions were relatively painless; indeed, for those raised in the faith, it may have been easier to get baptized than to walk away from it. But the essentially radical invitation to follow Jesus is repeated in later life; and the validity of our earlier choice to follow is put to the test by our later response to the same invitation.

2 Cor. 5:7 further applies the lesson of Peter to us all: “we walk by faith not by sight”. It was when Peter “saw the wind”, when he took his mental and physical focus off the Lord Jesus and looked to something else which was being blown by the wind, that he faltered. When he walked upon the water initially, he was walking by faith. When he walked by sight, he started to drown. And the lesson for us is clear- our focus must be upon the man Christ Jesus. Weighing up the costs, looking around at how strong the wind is, all this is taking our attention away from the One upon whom it must be focused. Believe Him. Take Jesus at His word. The Lord’s mini-parable suggests that we should totally surrender to His word rather than count the cost of building the tower, or weigh up the chances of defeating the oncoming army. There are opportunities galore in these last days to walk out of your comfort zone, not counting the cost, into the real life as God intended. I and many others are trying to do this, very falteringly. You’re surrounded by your brethren who in ways great and small, private and public, are living this life. Come out and join us.

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### Notes

(1) Listed in John Wijngaards, *The Gospel Of John* (Wilmington: Glazier, 1986) pp. 35-46.

(2) But consider too: Peter's request to be bidden walk on the water was (typically) both full of faith and yet also tinged by an element of unspirituality. His words as recorded in Mt. 14:28 ("If it is you, bid me come unto you on the water") appear strikingly similar to the LXX of 2 Kings 5:13, where a spiritually limited Naaman is rebuked for expecting to be asked to do something "demanding"- also connected with going into water!

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