Acts - Commentaries by William Kelly

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 9:36-43

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Another circumstance of like kind at a different place gave occasion for the power of God to display itself by Peter still more wonderfully.

“Now, in Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which, being interpreted is called Dorcas (Gazelle). She was full of good works and alms-deeds which she did. And it came to pass in those days that she fell sick and died: and, having washed, they laid her in an 1upper room. And as Lydda was near to Joppa, the disciples hearing that Peter was there sent two men unto him, beseeching, Delay2 not to come on to us. And Peter rose up and went unto them; whom, on his arrival, they brought up into the upper room; and all the widows stood by him weeping and showing the coats and cloaks which Dorcas used to make while she was with them. But Peter, putting them all forth and kneeling down, prayed; and, turning onto the body, he said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and, seeing Peter, she sat up. And, giving her a hand, he raised her up, and, calling the saints and the widows, he presented her alive. And it became known throughout the whole of Joppa, and many believed on the Lord; and it came to pass that he remained many days in Joppa with one Simon a tanner” (ver. 36-43).

Will it be believed that a professed and not unlearned translator of the New Testament dared thus to render the opening verse, “Moreover, there was among the disciples at Joppa a woman named Tabitha, who was always doing good works and giving alms”? I cite from Gilbert Wakefield's second edition, ii. 27, though I cannot say (not having its predecessor) whether this is one of its alleged “improvements” or a mere reproduction of the first. It is the note (375) which is so offensive— “I have left out the impertinent explanation in this verse, because, even if no interpolation, it must be either ridiculous or unintelligible in a translation.” It is the more shameless from one who allows himself no such audacity in his rendering, as among many like passages, of John 1:39, 42, 43, with all three of which he deals fairly. Now what is the fact in our case? It is the true Aramaic form of that time and country: so Gamaliel's maid was called; and Josephus (B. J. iv. iii. 5) gives as Luke does the same corresponding Greek same to the mother of a certain truculent John, as the English reader can see in Dr. Train's Tr. ii. 64. The Hebrew word that answers to it means “beauty,” but it is commonly used of a “gazelle,” “hart,” or “roe,” as in Deut.; 2 Samuel; Song of Solomon. So in our own tongue men and woman are called Buck, Doe, Roe, Stag, &c. In Lucret. iv. it occurs only as a term of endearment. Where is the “impertinence” of such an explanation? Only in the empty, presumptuous, and profane mind of Mr. Wakefield. I take the trouble of refuting it, as a caution to the misinformed not to be imposed on by the unconscious impiety of such as believe not the inspired character of Holy Writ. Whenever they assail that word, it would be easy to expose their self-sufficient folly.

Tabitha, or Dorcas, then, is described as a disciple at Joppa, who was a doer of the word and not a hearer only; for her pure and undefiled service before her God and Father was to remember the widows in their affliction, keeping herself unspotted from the world. She was as full of good works and alms-deeds as of faith. Now in those days she sickened and died. Now if washed in the usual way, she was laid in an upper room, a suitable place to await the arrival of the apostle. For it seems not obscurely implied that the disciples looked for more than consolation, in sending messengers for the apostle just at that moment and admitting of no delay;3 as he on his part promptly met their entreaty. As usual the scene is livingly before us, though it is with Peter for the central figure, not Paul of whom Luke was the cherished companion. But what mattered this or that if the Spirit inspired him to give us the truth to Christ's praise? He certainly had it all before Him as it was, though Luke was not there: and no jealousy for his leader tarnished one word of his narrative. There they were in the upper chamber; and all the widows stood by Peter, not in tears only but displaying the work of Dorcas' loving hands, the clothes inner and outer which she used to make while she was with them.

But Peter had not come for condolence only nor chiefly, but for the glory of God that Jesus the Son of God might be glorified in her who was gone. So, putting them all out and kneeling down, he prayed. He sought not to display the great work about to be done; he sought the Lord only, and with that grave reverence which became one who walked in presence of the Unseen who alone could avail. Here again how vividly graphic is the recital! yet no eye of man was on Peter and the body of the disciple. He who wrought in power through one servant has told us it through another. Some of old in east and west and south have ventured to add “In the name of [our Lord] Jesus Christ."4 If they meant honor, they were guilty of a heinous wrong. “Add thou not unto His words.” The inspiring Spirit has given us the truth perfectly. Enough to know that Peter knelt down and prayed, and turning to the body said, Tabitha, arise. Spoil not the word of God, O man, unworthy of the name of a believer, unworthy of the task of a translator, or of an expositor, by thy unallowed glosses. His prayer proved to whom he looked and on whom he leaned; but we may not take from His words in chap. 3:6, nor add to them in 9:40, nor assimilate either one or other to ix. 34. Let us be assured that each is as God wrote it, and therefore as each should be: our place is to receive humbly, believe confidingly, and enjoy to the uttermost.

The power of the Lord was there, according to His servant's prayer, not to heal as before, but to raise the dead. “And she opened her eyes, and, seeing Peter, sat up. And, giving her a hand, he raised her up; and calling the saints [who had the deepest and least interested feelings] and the widows, he presented her alive. And it became known to the whole of Joppa.”

Yet it is to be remarked that the moral or spiritual effect is not to be measured by the comparative character or measure of the power displayed. When the paralyzed AEneas was healed, all who inhabited Lydda turned to the Lord; when the far greater wonder was wrought of raising up the deceased Dorcas in Joppa, no such wide or large effect followed, but “many believed on the Lord “: a blessed result for these souls, and to His glory assuredly, but, as far as we may gather from Scripture, by no means so comprehensive now as then. After all it is the word which is the true and right means of conversion to Him, whatever may be the means used to draw attention to His word. For His grace is sovereign, and refuses the plausible reasoning of men.

There, is another word which the Spirit adds at the close, and not without its importance. “And it came to pass that he remained many days in Joppa with one Simon a tanner.” The veil drops over the recollections of Dorcas if she had any about her recent experience, as in the case of Lazarus and all others raised from the dead. But of the great apostle of the circumcision, through whom pseudo-apostles claimed succession over the uncircumcision as well as a monarch's patrimony, we are told that he staid a good many days in Joppa at the house of a certain tanner who bore his own name of Simon. Has this no voice to those who easily believe that they too stand “first” in the church of God in our day? No true apostle according to Scripture ever sought, ever possessed, wealth or rank in virtue of his office. Alas! it is not only power that is departed, but, what is far more serious, the spirit of obedience and the simplicity of faith, which last invests the least thing on earth, which Christ gives or sanctions, with the halo of heaven.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 9:32-35

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Having given us the peaceful and prosperous condition of the church throughout Palestine, the Spirit of God now turns to speak of Peter. He that wrought effectually in him, the great apostle of the circumcision, had just shown us the mighty vessel of His grace called to do work among the Gentiles. But Saul of Tarsus is dropped for the present and we have the familiar figure of Peter brought before us, not in Jerusalem, nor yet in Samaria as once with John, but alone on a visitation of Judaea. If there was peace for the church, there was no less power than at the first in him who was behind none since Pentecost.

“Now it came to pass that Peter going through all [parts] came down also to the saints inhabiting Lydda. And there he found a certain man named AEneas, for eight years lying on a couch, who was paralyzed. And Peter said to him, AEneas, Jesus [the]1 Christ healeth thee: arise up and make thy couch. And immediately he rose up. And all that inhabited Lydda and the2 Sharon saw him, who also turned to the Lord” (ver. 32-35).

Grace thus used the apostle, not merely for the edification of the saints, but for winning fresh souls to God. Lydda or Lod was at this time a considerable town—as Joseph—us informs us, not behind a city in size. And there God wrought a miracle, to arrest unbelievers, in the person of AEneas. It does not appear that he was a believer, being described as “a certain man.” Indeed, as the rule, believers were not objects of miraculous power, however often they may have been its instruments. Timothy is exhorted by the apostle to use ordinary means. “Be no longer a water-drinker but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities.” Epaphroditus drew out in his sickness deep exercises in Paul's heart; and Trophimus, the apostle left at Miletus sick, instead of healing him. The Lord has His special dealings with such: not even an apostle would interfere. But as tongues were for a sign to unbelievers, so on such power was free to act to God's glory, and the cure of the long-palsied. AEneas became a striking testimony to all the dwellers around.

The manner of Peter's action and his words are remarkable. “AEneas, Jesus [the] Christ healeth thee: rise up and make thy couch.” And so it was straightway: power to help himself as well as to rise up. The power of God was exercised in a serious case of one palsied for eight years, through the true but rejected Christ. Jehovah-Jesus was the healer of disease. It was but a testimony now. What He did on a small scale during this present evil age is only a sample of the world or age to come. Then He will prove Himself the forgiver of all Israel's iniquities and the healer of all their diseases, according to Psa. 103 when His kingdom ruleth over all.

Meanwhile the word of God acts; the gospel is blessed; for “all who inhabited Lydda and the Sharon saw him, who also turned to the Lord.” Their souls were impressed, so that they gave heed to the truth and turned to the Lord. It was a real work of the Spirit of God, and not mere astonishment at a miracle. But it had also the peculiarity of being very extensive and all-embracing! Whole communities were brought in. Nor was it only that they professed, or were baptized: of this the Holy Spirit says nothing. All in those parts saw the paralyzed man who was on the spot healed in the name of Jesus; and they turned to the Lord. Some who seem disposed to doubt the work of grace in “households” and anxious to reduce it to a mere intellectual recognition of the Lord if even so much as this, might profitably consider the great work done at Lydda, consequent on the healing of AEneas. The language here is wholly inconsistent with a sponsorial profession; it was a wide but real action of divine grace, the external sign which no doubt followed as a conferred privilege, being not even named.

It may be added that Kuhnol has as utterly failed in the grammar as in the exegesis, when he would have this last passage to mean merely that all the Christians (i.e. all those who had turned to the Lord) saw AEneas restored to health. For though the aorist may occasionally bear or require a pluperfect force in English, in the sentence before us such a rendering is not only uncalled for but destroys the power and dignity of the narrative; whereas the ordinary meaning in the simplest way maintains all that could be desired, crowning the miracle wrought, with a worthy and blessed spiritual result, instead of a close so frigid and feeble as to sink below not scripture only but any writing whatever. Grammatically too the indef. relative is just the word proper to introduce the statement of a moral nature or character.

But it may interest some to know that Lydda in the New Testament is no other than the Lod of 1 Chron. 8:12; Ezra 2:33: Neh. 7:37; 11:35, called Ludd or Lidi to this day, scarcely so “miserable a village” as Messrs. Webster and Wilkinson think, if we are to credit the popular report of Dr. Thomson, who represents it as a flourishing community of two thousand persons, evidently thriving and industrious, embosomed in noble orchards of olive, fig, pomegranate mulberry, sycamore and other trees, and surrounded every way by a fertile neighborhood. One, Hadid, and Neballat, of old associated with Lod, have still their representatives distinctly enough under their modern disguise.

Further, though Calvin lays it down confidently that the Sharon (or Assaron,3 as he calls it) was a city hard by, and slights Jerome's thought that thereby is meant the plain lying between Caesarea and Joppa, there is no good reason to doubt that the early translator is right, not the reformer. And the minute accuracy of the Greek text affords a striking evidence to the reader in the article prefixed to “Sharon,” not to Lydda. So invariably is it in the Hebrew, where the same district is referred to (1 Chron. 27:29; Cant. ii. 1; Isa. 33:9; 35:2; 65:10); whereas the article is dropt where the same name is applied to a different locality on the other side of Jordan and not improbably a town of the Gadites. “The Sharon” lay north of another district, “the Sephelah,” which in our Version has fared worse than “the Sharon” in having been quite stripped of its character as a proper name and reduced to “the vale,” &c.

Here then it was that the energy of the Spirit was pleased to win glory to the Lord Jesus and to bless souls by Peter, at the very time when sovereign grace was preparing another and yet more favored servant of Christ, not only to proclaim the gospel in the whole creation, but to complete the word of God, the mystery that had been hid from ages and from generations. Yet another and greater exertion of divine power was soon to follow, and a more distinct testimony of grace to the Gentiles through Peter himself, as we shall see in the immediate sequel and according to a wisdom that never failed. But one may not anticipate more at this time. Grace would ere long work more profoundly as well as indiscriminately; the heavenly side of the gospel must shine out more distinctly and suitably to Him who sits, the glorified Man, at the right hand of God. But it was from no lack of zealous testimony on Peter's part; nor was it that power from above failed in his ministry to put honor on the name of Jesus, or to shed blessing on the souls that believed. But all the divine counsels must be duly revealed as well as accomplished in their season; and God has His fitting ways no less than His counsels. And we do well to take heed to His word which reveals all this and more, that we may be completely furnished to every good work.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 9:28-31

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Adequate testimony then to the call of divine grace is the true ground of reception: and the peculiar antecedents of Saul brought it out in high relief. There are very different circumstances now where the world in these lands calls itself Christian. But the principle abides, though profession in an easy-going estate, where corruptions (moral, ecclesiastical, and doctrinal) abound, is as far as possible from calling on the name of the Lord in the face of opposed nature and persecution private or public. It is of the deepest moment that all for each soul should turn on that Name, the only passport which ought to be demanded as thus directly magnifying Him, the best of all safeguards against the world, the flesh, and the devil; for His name is the death-knell of all evil, whatever its varying form. To that Name the highest of earth must bow and be indebted for recognition where every tongue confesses Him Lord to the glory of God the Father; but the same Name introduces the most down-trodden slave into the fullness of grace now with living hope of heavenly and everlasting glory. And though His name solemnly summons every one that names it, to stand aloof from unrighteousness, against none here and at once does it threaten such scathing judgment as when men (no matter what their fame, credit, or pretensions) bring not the doctrine of Christ.

But the assembly, profoundly engaged to care for the common interests of that Name, looks for trustworthy testimony as to each soul that names it. This gives the fullest scope to faith and love in the saints already within, who, seeking the glory of the Lord in those that confess Him, are according to their measure reliable witnesses, whether for receiving a Saul of Tarsus, or for rejecting a Simon Magus. For if all have communion as saints in what is done, and are free, yea bound, to satisfy themselves, the evidence on which they judge practically rests with such as, enjoying the confidence of all, have love enough to ascertain the truth. The church acts on witnesses it believes. So it is shown in the striking instance before us, that we might be guided aright in our own duty, even where the outward features are as unlike as possible. But, the church being a divine institution, and not a mere voluntary society even of saints, there is a holy and wise principle which governs, or at least it ought, and will if done rightly, bringing out the Lord's glory, as in Saul's case. Active love, animated by a single eye to Christ, will see clearly and judge aright.

“And he was with them going in and going out at 1 Jerusalem,2 preaching boldly in the name of the Lord3; and he was speaking and discussing with the Hellenists4; but they had in hand to kill him. And when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him off unto Tarsus” (ver. 2830).

Liberty was thus enjoyed whether for fellowship or for testimony. It is indeed essential to Christianity and in contrast with the law which genders bondage. “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty;” or as He Himself testified, “I am the door; by Me if any one enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and shall go out, and shall find pasture.” Salvation, liberty, and food are assured by His grace: and so Saul was proving at this time even in Jerusalem. What could be sweeter than to taste it for his soul, where tradition had so lately blinded his eyes, and zeal for the law led him to persecute the way of divine grace unto death, binding and delivering into prison both men and women?

But there was more than this, bold utterance in the name of the Lord, which well becomes the object of grace. If “this day is a day of good tidings,” and assuredly it is beyond all that ever dawned, how hold our peace? Not so did the four leprous men, when famine pressed the city of Samaria, and they found the deserted camp of the Syrians fall of every good thing for those that were otherwise perishing with hunger. And who in Jerusalem more than Saul, its late emissary of bonds or death for all that called on the name of the Lord, could with godly assurance proclaim His name by faith in it to strengthen the weak and release the captives, to give life to the dead and liberty to the oppressed, or (as he said in a later day) to open their eyes, that they might tarn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, receiving remission of sins and inheritance among those that are sanctified by faith in Christ? For free and bold testimony in His name is the fruit of His grace, no less than liberty for one's own soul; and in this order too. We need to be set free from every hindrance and weight and doubt and question, we need the liberty wherewith Christ sets free, before the mouth can open boldly to make known His grace and glory to others. It is not to angels that God subjected the habitable earth to come but to Christ who will give His saints to reign with Him. It is not to angels that He gives the gospel commission but to His servants who were once children of wrath even as others. How soon even Christians forgot His ways and returned to the yoke of bondage, and to fleshly successional order, the rudiments of the world, which played their fatal parts in crucifying the Lord, now to find themselves, if God be believed, set aside and condemned to death in His cross!

But Saul, as he lets us know, when called by grace to have God's Son revealed in him that he might preach Him among the Gentiles, immediately conferred not with flesh and blood, but went into Arabia and returned again to Damascus. Even when he did go up to Jerusalem, it was “to see (or visit) Peter,” not to take holy orders, any more than to go through a theological curriculum, for “he abode with him fifteen days,” seeing none other of the apostles save James the Lord's brother. And on this he speaks with impressive urgency, as a matter of the deepest moment for God's glory that the truth of his independent mission should be established forever and beyond question, bound up as it is with the gospel revealed by him in a fullness and height beyond all others. In Jerusalem too we see his full liberty and his bold testimony to the Lord's name. All was ordered that the truth of the gospel might continue with the Gentiles; but with the Jews also he maintains the same principle and conduct. Alas! it was ill appreciated. For on the one hand, the Gentiles have not continued in God's goodness but throughout

Christendom have turned back like a dog to its own vomit; judaizing so egregiously as to give people the impression that the gospel is a sort of half-improved, half-mitigated, law, instead of being the perfect expression of God's grace in justifying ungodly sinners by the faith of Christ in virtue of His death and resurrection. On the other hand, when he turned to the Hellenists, or Greek-speaking Jews, with the loving zeal of one of themselves to impart the truth which had set himself free, seeking not theirs but them, they betrayed how little those are subject to God's law who despise and refuse His gospel, for they went about to kill him They were but Abraham's seed, not his children (John 8): if they had been his children, they would have done the works of Abraham. They had really the devil for their father, a murderer and a liar from the beginning; and his works they did.

It is needless to dwell on the error whether of old MS. or of ancient version, which makes the apostle speak and dispute at this early day with the “Greeks” in Jerusalem. In fact it was with the same class which furnished “the seven” who had been set over the daily ministration; of whom Stephen and Philip had been so highly honored also in the word. Saul was drawn out the more toward them, as being himself a Hellenist, and one who had not only consented to Stephen's death, but had been the prime and most energetic leader in the persecution that followed. Now he himself is exposed to their deadly hatred; “and when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him off to Tarsus.” It seems clear that this was not C. Philippi, but rather the seat of the Roman governor, whence he readily went by sea. Nor is Gal. 1:21 any real difficulty; for it only intimates that he then came to the regions of Syria and Cilicia, which was easy by ship; and the following verse intimates that he was still unknown by face to the churches of Judea which were in Christ.

“The assembly5 then, throughout the whole of Judea and Galilee and Samaria, had6 peace, being edified7; and walking8 in the fear of the Lord9 and the comfort of the Holy Spirit, was multiplied” 10(ver. 31).

There seems no good ground to make this verse the concluding sentence of the paragraph, as the state of the church throughout these districts is not meant to be connected with Saul one way or another, It is rather, while attending to their past trial, an introduction to the account of Peter's visit which immediately succeeds, and it can thereon well stand by itself.

NOTE.

A reformer who seemingly never saw the unity of the assembly in a city &c. (the uniform fact observable in God's word, and the habitual practice of all saints who really in faith hold the assembly to be one) has availed himself of the better reading in this verse to defend what is indefensible. What ground does he take then? Scouting any such unity of action in a city, he upholds the independent action of a single meeting, when avowedly acting for itself, and expressly not pretending to bind others at the time. The statement is as far from fact as the deduction from the critical reading is illegitimate and valueless. For it was perfectly open for any meeting if it had a positive duty, and absence of previous bias which must destroy confidence, to propose what it, after careful examination before God, judged to be due to truth and righteousness among all the saints gathered to the Lord's name in the city. Had this been done in godly order about a matter of fundamental moment and their special duty, it would have fairly and holily tested all in unity and left those who were assured that the course proposed was of God to decide together as one, such as could not in conscience join in it going without and being declared so after loving remonstrance. But those meeting at Nymphas (Col. 4:15) were not entitled, if we bow to the word, to bind all the gathered saints in Laodicea. The assembly of Laodiceans, (ver. 16) must join in the decision of the Lord to give it validity everywhere. It is to the assembly in a place that He attaches His promise. It the matter in question were in no way of deep and urgent importance, to press it when it was known that very many godly men differed could only spring from the desire for division; for seasonable and satisfactory measure short of this could readily have been taken, had the honest wish prevailed to heal rather than divide. Had there been a momentous question demanding its solution in proper sphere and after a scriptural fashion, “without partiality and without hypocrisy,” why avoid or abandon the due proposal to all? Be it known that as a fact all were then together, and there was no break up whatever, till afterward through the attempt, to force on all, similar independency, or the acceptance of what was only a single meeting's decision for itself in a city where were many others. If will and haste and influence had not misguided, there was nothing to hinder the only order ever allowed to be divine, united action among all the saints in a city gathered to Christ's name. Beyond controversy united action in the city was being carried out at that very moment about every other assembly matter, why was it not dune about that on which hung issues so serious for the Lord's name, so heart-breaking for all the gathered saints on earth? Let those who believe that order to be of God, and would have a good conscience, search and see why them only they departed from it. The defense of the departure from truth and even common consistency comes naturally, but from one who abjures the unity, which nevertheless governs what in his present position he must own and does walk with now as before. One is thankful to add that such special pleading does not satisfy but repel and pain intelligent brethren, even those whose practical independency it seeks to support. Our reformer sees that on these principles they are involved in “invincible contradiction.” I admire more those who condemn themselves rather than give up the truth; yet, how can they go on as they are? Nor is this all. For notoriously they did try over and over what was already tried and decided elsewhere. And it is quite true that there is “no unity within.” Never was there grosser confusion, never mere shameless trampling on divine principle. For both a single meeting decided for itself only; and many of the others tried the case over again, both in town and in country. For those who did so, for all going with it, was it not the destruction of practical unity? Unquestionably in my judgment.

Is it not a strange, not to say disgraceful thing, in a time of crisis like the present, to find laborers in France, Germany, Holland, Switzerland, and America, yea, in Great Britain, asserting this notion of the competency of one meeting in a city to decide for all, so as to destroy common action as a constant duty there? Yet all the while these brethren abide in fellowship with what they in heart reject as a mere tradition, while the more trusted chiefs and the mass of saints accept it as of God. It would seem more upright for such innovators to retire, neither demoralizing their own consciences nor destroying united testimony in the truth which recent circumstances have shown to be so important. They are in this really at one with Loose-Brethrenism, their natural home. To denounce what they are actually walking with is not to the honor of the Lord, of their brethren, or of themselves. And why was it put to, yea, forced on, the assemblies as the general rule all over the land, and here and there over the earth? No doubt it was “a false step” in total opposition to all our usual practice and all that Scripture attests. Every unbiased man of spiritual or even honest judgment must allow that the beat and exigency of forming a party can alone account for this and other errors, especially the demand that “individuals” even should accept what is thus really made a test. It is in vain to say that the foundation of the church was in danger. It was the pettiest sectarianism, as ever, more jealous of its own will and honor than of Christ's glory. Even Popery would scarcely descend so low as to scatter confusion everywhere for a local breach where the doctrine of Christ was not concerned but at most discipline. Every cue acquainted with facts and adhering to unity, as we have all professed and practiced, must allow that a decision avowedly of a single meeting, and not even proposed for the acceptance of the rest of the gathered saints in the same city, is

ecclesiastically false; and that the word and Spirit of God call for its rejection, not its acceptance.

But the critical reading entirely falls in with other scriptural truths. Had it been “the assembly in [ἐν] Judea and Galilee and Samaria,” there would be some appearance of a dilemma; and the adversaries of unity might urge that consistency demands a central meeting for the saints therein to have joint action. But as it is, there is no shadow of a plea for a result so absurd. The right reading does not touch and therefore cannot weaken all the saints in a city taking common action as God's assembly in that place. The assembly throughout [κατὰ] the whole of Judaea &c. definitely by the preposition points to a wholly different fact which has nothing to do with the assembly in a city and its responsible unity. We are simply told here of the peace and progress of the church all over these districts. No scholar ought to confound phraseology so palpably distinct; no believer intelligent in the word could mistake the different truths conveyed, or dare to employ one to neutralize another. “The church” is often introduced in the most general form without any preposition either to restrict or generalize; what would be thought of the argument from an unrestricted phrase that consistency would demand a central meeting for all the gathered saints on earth? It is not really sounder logic so to reason from the verse in question. Nobody believes that Scripture calls for united action beyond (at the most) the limits of a city. It attaches strictly to the assembly in a place: the mere English reader if he adhere to scripture, even if ignorant of one word of Greek, ought to have been preserved from this strange confusion, and real fighting against the truth, as well as obvious antagonism to the prevalent order of his own party. For the Authorized and Revised Versions agree in giving “throughout,” as the true force of the preposition here peculiarly employed; and so all exact translations. But even if any were so loose as to say “in,” no man of sound mind and adequate learning could attach the least importance to it as bearing on working local unity, which is implied in the preposition iv as used in this connection.

It has elsewhere been simply shown that the effort to limit “gathered together into one place” into four walls or a circular building is mere inattention to scriptural usage, which perfectly admits of all the gathered saints meeting here and there in a city: the sole foundation for the unbelieving slur that in that case the assembly never assembles, and practically never exists.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 9:23-27

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

So sudden, surprising, and profound, a conversion as that of Saul (by nature, character, attainments, and position the most zealous of Jewish adversaries), could not but make the deepest impression on all observers, especially of the circumcision. How confirmatory to the disciples at Damascus! How impressive in the synagogues to hear him proclaim Jesus as the Son of God! How suited to confound those who denied Jesus to be the Christ! God's grace displayed in it was such as to amaze all that heard. The very opposition of the restless enemy was for the moment paralyzed.

“And when many days were fulfilled, the Jews consulted together to kill him; but their plot became known to Saul. And they were watching the gates also1 day and night that they might kill him; but the2 disciples took him by night and let him down through the wall, lowering him in a basket.

And when he arrived at Jerusalem, he essayed to join himself to the disciples; and all were afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took and brought him unto the apostles, and declared to them how he saw the Lord in the way and that He spoke to him, and how in Damascus he preached boldly in the name of Jesus” (ver. 23-27).

The Spirit of God appears to comprehend in the first verses the space of three years which the apostle spent in Arabia, a fact of great significance as following on his conversion and used powerfully in the Epistle to the Galatians (1:17) to prove how little man, even the twelve, had to do with it. His call was in no way from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father that raised Him from among the dead; even as the gospel he preached was not according to man, nor yet did he receive it from man, nor was he taught it but by revelation of Jesus Christ. It was expressly meant of God to be independent of Jerusalem and the twelve, but derived (call, apostolate, and gospel he preached) immediately from the prime source of grace, truth, and authority, the risen Head, and God Himself. Thus was secured what was all-important, not only for the Gentile saints then, and indeed thenceforward for the due intelligence of the body of Christ, but for our special profit now, so menaced at the end of the age with the revival of the early Judaizing which opposed the full gospel at the beginning, the heavenly as well as independent character of Paul's office and testimony.

Otherwise it seemed even more extraordinary for Saul than for Moses to go to Arabia. But as there was of old divine wisdom in the long shelter there given to the future leader of Israel, so the break with the flesh was complete in the briefer sojourn of the apostle of the Gentiles, where none on earth could imagine he was winning for himself a good degree either in the humanities or in divinity. Such was God's ordering manifestly and wholly distinct from man's ways. He took no counsel with flesh and blood. He went not up to Jerusalem to those that were apostles before him, as all would else have thought most proper if not absolutely requisite. It was designedly on God's part death to the Jewish system in its best shape, and to all successional order, that Saul should go to Arabia, and again return to Damascus; and then after three years should go up to Jerusalem, not to receive office at apostolic hands, but to make acquaintance with Peter, there remaining but fifteen days, and seeing none other of the apostles save James the brother of the Lord. For his ministry was to be the true and fullest pattern of that which according to the will of God was to follow when the temporary Jerusalem order should pass away, and the Holy Spirit would bring out all the blessed and governing principles of a heavenly Christ for the church His one body on earth, as well as for His servants individually: a ministry of holy liberty, the expression of God's grace in the first communication of His truth, centering in the divine and glorified person of Christ, to the utter denial of man's will and the world's pride.

But the world, as the Lord had previously warned His disciples, hates those identified with Christ as it had hated Himself, and according to His word would persecute them as Him. And so Saul now proves at the hand of his old co-religionists, ever the most bitter. The Jews were plotting to make away with him. “Yet, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God-service. And these things they do because they have not known the Father nor Me.” How evidently and deeply true! Nor did any more strikingly and continually verify their

truth than Saul of Tarsus. The sword of the Spirit was too incisive in his hands, no matter how great his love and lowliness, not to rouse the unquenchable resentment and deadly enmity of Satan. And when the Jews went so far as even to watch the gates of Damascus both night and day that they might dispatch him, the disciples, much as they appreciated his ardent love of Christ and zeal for man's blessing, took him by night and let him down through the wall, lowering him in a basket. Miracle there was none, but an escape ordinary enough, if not ignominious for those who would surround the great apostle with a perpetual halo. How little they know of the cross, of God, and His ways!

This escape from murderous hands at Damascus he relates in the wonderful sketch of his devoted labors and sufferings which he recounts to the ease-loving Corinthians when set against the blessed apostle by the deceitful workers there fashioning themselves into apostles of Christ. How admirably suited only to shame those who took care to work and suffer the least possible, but to kindle into burning love the feeblest spark in the true servants of Christ from that day to this! At the close of that list of trials which he gives as in foolishness in his confidence of glorying, if others gloried after the flesh, before he says a word of the man in Christ he knows—himself of course, but purposely so put—caught up even to the third heaven, he winds all up with this very incident, in a singularly isolated way, so as to bring into juxtaposition his being let down through a window in a basket by the wall with his being caught up into Paradise for exceedingly great revelations. Strange conjunction, but how instructive withal, the same one lowered from a window in a city wall, and caught up to heaven to hear unspeakable words! Who but Paul had even thought of thus glorying in the things that concerned his weakness; and, if he did mention his most singular honor as a living man, of taking care to tell us how, to counteract all self-exaltation, there was given him thenceforth a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet him?

It may be well to note that in 2 Cor. 11 there is the additional information that the hostility he encountered was not confined to the synagogue but shared by the ethnarch of the then king, no doubt to do the Jews a favor, as others in somewhat the like position did afterward. “In Damascus the governor under Aretas the king was guarding the city of Damascus, wishing to take me; and through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped his hands.” This I cite, not to confirm the truth of Luke's account as if the divinely inspired word could be inaccurate or needed support for a believer, but to give a fresh instance of the moral purpose which reigns in all scripture, the true key to that peculiar method of God, which is as perfect for His own glory and the growth of His children, as it furnishes occasion to the unbelief of man who judges all in the self-confidence of his own intellectual powers, at the utmost very limited, great as they may be. Information, important as it is in its place, is one of the least objects in the word of God which lets the faithful into the communion of His mind and love.

But a new and very different lesson now opens in the city of solemnities, where not long since great grace was upon all, and the word of God increased, and the number of the disciples multiplied exceedingly and a great crowd of even the priests were obedient to the faith. For Saul, having arrived at Jerusalem, essayed to join himself to the disciples, and all were afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple. How painful on the one hand for that vessel full of divine affections, that channel even then overflowing with a testimony of Christ beyond these doubting brethren whose grace was really so small as to question the largest measure that had ever crossed their eyes! But how helpful on the other hand for us and all saints, who have to learn that no one is to be received on his own responsibility, but on adequate testimony from others! A man unknown, or only known by circumstances calculated to alarm, must ordinarily have a wonderful opinion of himself or be surprisingly blind to the duties of others, if he expect to be welcomed within the holy bounds of Christ on the good account he gives of himself. And God's children must be exceedingly rash or indifferent to His glory who hold the door open without a commendatory letter, or (if this through circumstances failed) its equivalent in some satisfactory degree. He who can not present something of the kind ought rather to praise the care for the Lord's glory in His own, even if it call for a little patience or delay on his part; and never was there a time when such vigilance was more due in the interests of Christ and the church than in its present state. Let the saints only bear in mind that here too as everywhere it is a question not of letter but of spirit. Proof of reality Christward is and ought to be all that is wanted; while indifference to Him, and yielding all to the mere profession of His name, when nothing is so cheap, is the most offensive and guilty looseness. Legality is not well, where all should be grace; but it is at least far less indecent than laxity. And “letter” too could be most readily forged, as we should not forget, by an unscrupulous person.

Even if saints be ignorant or prejudiced, the Lord never fails and soon raises up an instrument to remove the difficulty. For Barnabas “took him and brought him to the apostles,” (no more we have seen than Peter and James,) “and declared to them how he saw the Lord in the way, and that He spoke to him, and how at Damascus he preached boldly in the name of Jesus” (ver. 27).

That this course on the part of Barnabas was owing to previous acquaintance with Saul! that they two had studied together at Tarsus! where both knew nothing of the Lord Jesus, and that either, even if true, could be a ground to satisfy the disciples, is just a sample of human guesswork—not to say of false principle—which disgraces those who cultivate such a style in the interpretation of scripture. But Christendom's hanger after all that tends to exalt the first Adam, as it demands such pabulum, is sure to find the supply where truth is neither trusted nor valued as displayed in Christ to God's glory. Is not the real key furnished by the sacred historian in a subsequent glimpse at Barnabas in ch. 11:23, 24? When he saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted accordingly; for he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith. Nor was it in Antioch only or first that grace wrought mightily in him; for in far earlier days than either he had been singled out for what God had produced in him, in contrast with Ananias and Sapphira who had agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord (Acts 4 v). How much one gracious heart can effect, and how little it matters what the circumstances may be through which it seeks to please the Lord and help those that are tried! Yet how often, when such a character is formed and proved, a crisis arises too strong for all but the present guidance of the Lord above all that is of man; and grace in all its fullness must control, graciousness quite breaking down! And so Barnabas proved at a later day. How little any then could have anticipated that Saul would be the one to reprove Peter as well as Barnabas for the allowance of flesh or law to the jeopardy of the truth of the gospel! Yet so we know it was; and scripture has set it out in glowing and imperishable words to preserve us in our weakness from like error. How thankful should we be, for the condescending mercy of our God who would thus turn to our account the mistakes even of the most honored, instead of hiding or palliating all in the genuine spirit of party to the dishonor of the Lord and the irreparable injury of our own souls.

It may be well to note that this visit to Jerusalem (ver. 26, et segq.) is not to be regarded as immediately consequent, being named here in order to complete the history of Saul thus far by the account of his first introduction to the saints there.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 9:19-22

Thus simply is brought before us the call and conversion of the great apostle, containing within the account itself the germ of that which was to be unfolded in his Epistles and called out by the demands of the work which mostly gave occasion to the Epistles.

It may be noticed that to bear Christ's name before Gentiles has the first place, the sons of Israel being put last, with “kings” placed between them. He was to be “apostle of Gentiles” (Rom. 11). For this, the call of the Lord from heaven was most appropriate. On earth He had sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. When He sends from heaven, Israel ceases to have any such place. All mankind, before this, had joined and been lost in one common guilt. The Jews had even led the Gentiles to crucify Him. Israel's superiority after the flesh was therefore clean gone. Sovereign grace alone governs henceforth; and therefore, if any are to be prominently named, it is rather those who are most needy. Of such Saul was characteristically apostle.

“And he1 was certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus. And immediately in the synagogues he preached Jesus2, that He is the Son of God. And all that heard him were amazed and said, Is not this he, that in Jerusalem made havoc of those that called on this name, and had come hither for this thing, that he might bring them bound before the chief priests? But Saul increased the more in power and confounded the3 Jews that dwelt in Damascus, proving that this is the Christ” (ver. 19-22).

Here we have a new departure of at least equal importance. From the very first Saul proclaimed Jesus to be the Son of God. This gave a new and higher character to the preaching.

The other apostles knew it but are not said to have preached it. Peter had long ago confessed the great truth with singular strength; and the Lord had pronounced him thereon blessed; for flesh and blood had not revealed it to him but His Father, that is in heaven. Yet do we never find Peter preaching or proclaiming the Lord thus at Pentecost and afterward. He sets forth the crucified Jesus, as having been made both Lord and Christ. He dwells on His death, resurrection, and ascension. He represents Him as from heaven pouring forth the Holy Ghost, having received of the Father that promised gift. The greatest prominence is given to Jesus as the now glorified Servant of the God of Israel, exalted by God's right hand as Leader and Savior to give repentance to Israel and remission of sins. Peter preached Him thus fully, but only as the Messiah, whom His people had rejected, whom God had raised from the dead and would send from heaven in. due time, to bring down all promised blessing. Beyond this he does not preach Christ, so far as the book of Acts teaches.

Stephen went beyond this at any rate in his last discourse. “Behold I see the heavens opened and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.” Any one familiar with the Psalms and the Prophets ought to have discovered, at least by the light of the New Testament, the import of this new title. It opens out assuredly a far larger glory for the Lord than the realm of Israel. The Son of man is set over, not all mankind only, but all creation, He only being excepted (which shows its immense range) who set all things under Him. In Psa. 8 it is intimated that His humiliation unto death was the ground and way whereby the Lord passed into this glorious supremacy; and that we Christians see Him already crowned with glory and honor in consequence, though not yet do we see all things subjected to Him. Dan. 7 shows Him coming with the clouds of heaven in this same glory to the Ancient of days, and receiving dominion, glory, and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages, should serve Him—an everlasting dominion withal, which shall not pass away neither shall His kingdom be destroyed, as that of all others had been. In this glory, however, before He comes to judge the quick and the dead, Stephen beholds Him through the opened heavens at the right hand of God. No doubt this was a sight miraculously vouchsafed to the proto-martyr; but what he then witnessed on high is revealed for us to know and profit by, even now in the Spirit.

Saul of Tarsus brings us an immense step beyond, for he proclaims Jesus in His proper and, divine glory as the Son of God; whilst it was reserved for John, the apostle, to give His most admirable record of the Lord in this self-same way and to show how the intrinsic glory of His person superseded every object hitherto precious in the eyes of Israel; a divine glory, which could not be hid though veiled in flesh, and which manifested itself on departing by sending down from heaven the other Paraclete, though (not less than Himself) a divine person, the Spirit of truth, not only to glorify Him, but that we might have fellowship with those who most of all enjoyed His presence here below; “and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.”

It is well to notice that Saul thus preached Jesus “immediately” and “in the synagogues.” Hence we may see how powerfully, and the more so because indirectly, the account of Luke confirms his own explicit statement to the Galatians, that he did not receive the gospel he preached from man, nor was he taught it but by revelation of Jesus Christ. How strikingly too all this, so different from what learned and pious men say or think about it, falls in with the character of his preaching so distinct from all before him: the same Jesus, but His glory viewed, neither as connected with Israel, nor conferred because of His sufferings, but higher up and divinely personal. That he was formed in his peculiar line by Ananias is more worthy of a Corinthian than of a Reformer, though natural in those who lay exaggerated and unscriptural stress on human elements for the training of Christ's servants. God is sovereign in this as elsewhere. The Lord had His own aims in calling Saul and Luke, as in the differing cases of Peter and James. He can call from learning and science, whether to pour contempt on human pride in such fields or to use them as He pleases; He can call from the land or sea those who have never known the schools to prove Himself superior to that which the vain world inordinately values. But Saul preached “immediately,” and “in the synagogues.” What a testimony to conscience that he should preach Jesus, and preach Him as the Son of God!

The reader will observe that for “Christ” in the Authorized Version after the Text. Rec. of ver. 20 is here substituted “Jesus,” as it stands in the best authorities, followed by the Revised Version and others founded on carefully drawn up editions. It is not improbable that the later copies which introduced the error may have been swayed by ignorant considerations of a quasi-Christian sort, unless it were a mere slip of memory which crept in and got perpetuated among those who understood not the difficulties and wants of such Jews as were addressed. To preach to them “the Christ” or Messiah, as the Son of God, would have served no adequate purpose and met with little if any opposition. They would have all allowed it in terms, even if none really entered into its full import. But the momentous truth Saul affirmed was as to Jesus, Jesus of Nazareth; and that He is the Son of God. What could be graver to a Jew? To accept it as of God was to condemn the people, and especially the religious, and find himself in the dust before the Crucified (now risen and on high) for whom this divine title was claimed in the highest

and most exclusive sense. It became the turning-point not for time only but for eternity.

The signal change in the preacher also told powerfully. “All that heard were astonished and said, Is not this he that in Jerusalem made havoc of those that called on this name and had come hither for this thing, that he might bring them bound before the chief priests?” Such a conversion, coupled with his actual zeal for the truth, could not but be most impressive, as grace which had wrought intended it to be. “But Saul kept growing more in power and confounding the Jews that dwelt in Damascus, proving that this is the Christ.” Here “Jesus” would he quite out of place, and the Messiah is the truth meant; for advance in truth received and learned from God does not cast a slight on a lower level which is equally of God. And breadth of mind in taking into consideration an immense sweep of varied truth and harmonizing all in the Lord Jesus to God's glory is one of the marked traits of His most remarkable servant. The Messiah, ship of Jesus must ever be a capital matter in dealing with Jews. Higher glories there are, as we have seen, of surpassing interest and importance; and none ever rose higher, in principle at least, than Saul did from his first testimony as we were told. But the lowest point of view had for its urgent and indefatigable advocate the same devoted man who was the earliest to proclaim the highest. None of Christ's servants has ever shown equal largeness of heart. We may perhaps say of him, in a deeper as well as more heavenly sphere, what God says of king Solomon to whom He gave wisdom and understanding exceeding much, that God distinguished him by “largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea shore.” (1 Kings 4:29). The question of a Christian woman's wearing her hair long, or her bead duly covered, was to him connected with and answered by the vast scope of creation, the theater of God's purpose in Christ, which put the man and woman in their true relative place, and brought, in the very angels as spectators meant to act on the spirit of such as walk by faith, not by sight. But who, save Saul of Tarsus, to settle a detail in conduct apparently so small, would ever have thought of such a scope in application of God's order and ways to maintain His moral glory? His waxing powerful does not mean that he overcame his adversaries in disputation, but that the Spirit so strengthened him by the deepening of his soul in the divine word, which no doubt did bear down more and more the puny arms of such as opposed themselves. Whatever might have been his vast natural ability, whatever his providential training under Gamaliel, it was in practical dealing with souls in the synagogues or individually that the new nature in the Spirit's power found its true field of unremitting exercise.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 9:10-19

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Thus was brought to pass a conversion of the highest character and the deepest interest, pregnant with widespread results never to pass away. The miracle found its justification, not only in the moral principles of the case or in the dispensational display at that point in God's ways, but especially in the all-importance of such a heavenly revelation of His Son. Nevertheless Saul, when converted, though designated to a ministry which transcends that of every other man, enters the sphere of Christian confession by the same lowly portal as any other.

“Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias—and the Lord said to him in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold I [am here], Lord. And the Lord [said] unto him, Rise up, and go to the lane that is called Straight, and seek in Judas' house one of Tarsus named Saul; for behold he prayeth and hath seen in a vision1 a man named Ananias coming in and laying his hands2 on him, so that he might receive his sight. And Ananias answered, Lord, I heard3 from many of this man, how much evil he did to the saints at Jerusalem; and here he hath authority from the high priests to bind all that call on thy name. But the Lord said unto him, Go, for he is a vessel of election to me, to bear my name before both4. Gentiles and kings and sons of Israel; for I will show him how many things he must suffer for my name's sake. And Ananias went and entered into the house; and laying his hands upon him he said, Brother Saul, the Lord, Jesus that appeared to thee in the way which thou earnest, hath sent me, so that thou mightest receive sight and be filled with [the] Holy Spirit. And immediately there fell from his eyes as it were scales, and he received sight5; and rising up he was baptized; and he took food and was strengthened” (ver. 10-19).

There is much to learn from the connection of Ananias with the new convert, total strangers to each other as they had been, save that the former well knew by public rumor of the latter's fierce enmity to all who called on the name of the Lord. He was himself a devout man according to the law, of unimpeachably good report among the Israelites of Damascus (Acts 22:12). Such was the man who had a vision of the Lord about Saul, as Saul had about, Ananias: both corroborative, in the most simple and important way, of the miracle put forth on the occasion of Semi's conversion. If we see sometimes an economy of divine power, here the dullest cannot but own a striking affluence; as indeed the end in view was most worthy. For in the testimony of the fresh witness were laid the great foundations of grace and truth, of the gospel and of the church, of individual Christianity and of corporate blessedness, of the deepest truth for man's soul, of the fullest vindication of divine righteousness, of past wisdom in God's ways displayed, of future counsels of glory for heaven and earth and eternity to the praise of God and His Son—the foundations of all this and more were laid, as they had never been before and never need to be again. Who, acquainted with God's ways in His word, can wonder at the special pains taken to furnish outward vouchers of unusual fullness and of unquestionable force, so as to preclude all reasonable imputation of delusion on the one hand or of collusion on the other? The Lord has here seen to this remarkably: let us not overlook it.

Ananias had communications from the Lord (ver. 10-12), which even in vision drew out the expression of his extreme surprise. Nor can there be conceived a more exquisite unfolding of the free intercourse which grace has now opened between the heart of the Master in heaven and that of the servant on earth. Ananias on one side ventures respectfully even to the verge of remonstrance (ver. 13, 14), after being told to seek Saul at Judas' house and recover his sight; as the Lord on the other over-rules all reluctance by the assurance not only of His own abounding grace, but of Saul's genuine repentance to fit him for the wonderful work to which he was henceforth called (ver. 15, 16). How entirely then may we not pour out our exercises of heart into His bosom, how implicitly count on His loving interest, who has all things at His disposal, and interests Himself in our history from first to last! For His eye of love is on the praying at such a house in such a street, no less than on the vast sweep of Christian life and service from Arabia to Damascus, from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum, yea to Rome if not Spain, where His own name would be borne before both nations and kings and sons of Israel, and the many doings of Saul over the world of that day would be less than his many sufferings for Christ's name. Truly he was a vessel of election to the Lord, in labors of love most abundant, in sufferings for Christ yet more unparalleled.

Ananias promptly obeys, goes to the house where Saul lodged, and, laying his hands on him, told out the errand on which he was sent, not only to restore Saul's sight but that he should be filled with the Spirit. The force of the message lay in this that the Lord, Jesus, who appeared to Saul in the way, now sent Ananias supernaturally to convey His blessing. How evident that God was at work, and that the Lord Jesus was the revealer of His mind and the medium of His mercy, as He is the effulgence of His glory, and the very image of His subsistence; not more surely man than God, and now the man glorified at His right hand who searches the reins and hearts, and controlled Ananias no less than Saul. If the vanity of man in his best estate was manifest to Saul's conscience (and no man had such reason as he to know this experimentally), the grace of God in the Lord Jesus was equally evident. “And immediately there fell from his eyes as it were scales, and he received sight, and rising up he was baptized, and he took food and was strengthened.” Saul submitted to baptism like any other. He was baptized by a simple disciple; and he himself subsequently taught others to lay no stress on his own baptizing anyone. “I thank God I baptized none of you but Crispus and Gains” (he wrote to the vain Corinthians), “lest any should say that I had baptized in my own name. And I baptized also the household of Stephanas; besides I know not whether I baptized any other. For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel.” The proclamation of the truth is far beyond the administration of its sign. So we shall see that Peter preached at Caesarea, but consigned to others the baptizing of Cornelius with his kinsmen and his near friends. Indeed the same thing appears here; for nothing would have been easier than to have employed an official, at least a “deacon,” if this had been desirable in God's sight, who surely has no pleasure in breaking down His own order. A “disciple” baptizes the great apostle of the Gentiles.

But the most striking fact in all the transaction is the gift of the Spirit through Ananias: so decidedly did the wisdom of God in Saul's case break through the ordinary method of conferring the Spirit through the hands of an apostle, if, for special reasons, hands were employed at all. Here the utmost care was taken to mark God laying all human pretensions in the dust. The employment of a disciple like Ananias lays the ax to the root of official pride; and this where the Lord was calling out the most honored servant He ever deigned to use.

There is another remark to note of still more general importance, which the history of Saul's conversion brings into evidence. We must not confound, as popular preachers do, the reception of life and salvation. Life is always given immediately; not so salvation. Saul was quickened the moment he believed in the Lord Jesus. But this is quite distinct from what scripture calls “salvation;” and hence we see, in the state of Saul, during the intermediate three days, a plain testimony to this important difference. What searchings of heart!6 What deep questions were discussed in his soul during those days and nights, when he neither eat nor drank! Yet divine life was there all the while as truly as afterward, faith too in the word of God, and in His glory who had smitten hint down and revealed Himself to him and in him. But was this peace with God? Was it rest? Was he delivered consciously from all condemnation? Salvation is found in believing the gospel which presents the work of Christ in all its fullness, as God's answer to every difficulty of the conscience and heart. It is not, therefore, a mere confiding in the Lord for ultimate safety, but present deliverance enjoyed by the soul. Into this Saul was now brought. It is a great mistake therefore to talk of “salvation in a moment,” “deliverance on the spot,” or any other of the stock phrases of superficial revivalism, which ignore the word of God and spring from the confusion of life with salvation. After truly looking to the person of Christ with its soul-subduing power, a deep process habitually goes on in renewed souls, who are not satisfied with “life for a look,” but face the overwhelming discovery of not only all they have done, but all they are in its evil and enmity against God and His Son. Self is thus judged in the light and humiliation is produced, without which there can be no solid and settled peace. In the style of preaching referred to, this is slurred over to the danger and injury of souls, quite as much as to the slighting of the full truth so due to Christ's glory.

And therein also is seen the practical importance of distinguishing the new birth of the Spirit from the gift of the Spirit, as we have repeatedly pointed out in expounding this book. The one goes with believing on the Lord, when first arrested by God's word in the midst of open sins or proud self-righteousness; the other is, when the soul (plowed up by the word and learning its hopeless evil before God, humbled as well as troubled, yet not without hope, for Christ is believed in) finds in His all-efficacious work who for him died and rose, that his evil is all gone, root and branch and fruit, and that he is in Christ, a child of God and joint-heir with Christ, yea, dead and risen with Him, and so freed from all that can be against him, that he might live unto God. Of this, burial with Christ is the instituted symbol to which every Christian submits; salvation is the expression of its standing privilege. Hence in his First Epistle (3:21) Peter brings in the comparison with Noah's Ark, and passing through the waters of death as the way of salvation; so Christ did personally and efficaciously for our sins, as we in spirit when baptized. The apostle carefully distinguishes between the mere outward effect of the water, and points to the true power in Christ's death and resurrection, of which baptism is the figure. Expressly however it is a figure, not of life, but of salvation, present salvation of souls; as we await the coming of the Lord for the salvation of our bodies when we shall be like Him even outwardly, seeing Him as He is.

Calvin will have it that Ananias laid hands on Paul, partly to consecrate him to God [from the context one gathers, ministerially], partly to obtain for him the gifts of the Spirit. It would not be worth noticing in general, for both are absolutely wrong; but the errors of great and good men are proportionately dangerous. The blessed man says of himself, “Paul, apostle not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him up from among the dead.” Nor can we too vigilantly reject the error that confounds the gift (δωρεά) of the Spirit, or, we may add, the being filled with the Holy Spirit, with “the gifts” (χαρίσματα). Nor does it appear afterward by the narrative that Ananias was also commanded to teach him, any more than this was implied in his subsequently baptizing him. How readily even the excellent of the earth let slip, or add to, and so spoil the holy deposit of the truth! It would rather appear that Ananias laid hands on Saul to cure his blindness, before he was baptized; after which he was filled with the Holy Spirit, without a hint of any such act subsequent to baptism.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 9:1-9

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The conversion of Saul of Tarsus follows in beautiful development of the ways of God. For on the one hand his murderous unflagging zeal against the Lord Jesus and His saints made him, (arrested by sovereign grace and heavenly glory, in the person of Christ shining into his heart from on high), to be so much the more conspicuous witness of the gospel; on the other his call immediately thereon, to go as His apostle to the Gentiles, was a new and distinct departure of ministry to the praise of divine mercy. For the blood of Stephen, far from quenching the raging enthusiasm of the young zealot “consenting to his death,” had only stimulated him to dare unsparing violence against

all men and women who called on the Lord's name; and now his unsatisfied zeal against “the way” induced him to chase the fleeing scattered saints outside the land.

“But Saul, still breathing threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked of him letters unto Damascus to the synagogues; so that, if he found any belonging to the way, both men and women, he might bring [them] bound unto Jerusalem. And as he was journeying, it came to pass that he drew near to Damascus, and suddenly there shone round him a light out of heaven, and falling upon the earth he heard a voice saying to him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And he1 [said], I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest2; but arise and enter into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do. And the men that journeyed with him were standing speechless, hearing the sound but seeing no one. And Saul arose from the earth, and when his eyes were opened, he saw nothing3; but leading by the hand they brought him into Damascus; and he was three days without seeing, and did neither eat nor drink” (ver. 1-9).

Thus wonderfully was the chief persecutor called, not as saint only but as apostle also. The conversion of the dying robber was a signal display of suited though sovereign grace; that of the living pursuer of the saints to prison or death was higher far. And if Peter followed the rejected Christ from Galilee to His ascension and heavenly glory, Saul began with His call out of heaven till, himself ever afterward a partaker of His sufferings, he finished his course in becoming conformed to His death. He was apostle, not through the living Messiah on earth, but through Him glorified after God the Father raised Him from the dead. He began his witness where Peter ended it on his part.

Saul's was an unprecedented starting-point, which gave another and heavenly character to his service. There was a complete breach with Israel after the flesh, no longer a question of the earth or earthly hopes. Man risen from among the dead and gone on high has no connection with one nation more than another. The cross broke off all possible claims of those who had the law; but therein also was laid the righteous ground for the forgiveness of all trespasses, for taking out of the way the hostile bond written in ordinances. Heavenly associations with Christ glorified were now revealed as a present fact for faith to apprehend, enjoy, and make manifest practically on earth; and of this, both individually and corporately, Saul was chosen to be witness as none other ever had been before; and therein none followed, for the case admitted of no succession.

This was the man who, brimful of deadly hatred, desired the highest religious sanction for war to the death against all men or women that called on the Lord Jesus. Armed with the high priest's letter he approached Damascus, when suddenly light out of heaven flashed round him; and fallen to the earth he heard a voice charging him with persecuting Him whom he could not but own to be the Lord; and the astonished Saul learns to his utter confusion before God that it was Jesus, Jesus persecuted in His own, who were one with Him. Overwhelming discoveries for any soul! For the light, “the glory of that light,” the power, the voice even to him were unmistakable altogether; and the more so, for one like Saul confidently and conscientiously embittered against His name, thinking he was doing good service if he captured or even killed His disciples: so stout certainly his will, so ardent his zeal, so unsuspecting his malice, through blinding religious prejudice.

Never was a conversion so stamped with heavenly glory (2 Cor. 4) and this from the person of Christ speaking thence (Heb. 12). It was emphatically the saving “grace of God” that appeared to him, in total and manifest overthrow of the highest earthly tradition, though it was also the “glad tidings (or gospel) of Christ's glory,” as not another even of the apostles could say like himself. Hence he speaks of “my” gospel, and so when joining others of his companions, “our” gospel. It was not as if there was any object or any saving means before the soul but the one Savior and Lord; but so it was from heavenly character, as well as the fullness and sovereignty of grace, therein manifested beyond all.

Besides, in Christ's words, from that first revelation, lay the germ of the doctrine of the assembly as one with Christ, His body, which the apostle was called to expound and enforce by his Epistles, as by his ministerial work and life, in a way and measure that surpassed “the twelve,” however honored in their place. And this peculiar manner, as well as heavenly development of the truth, of which the Lord makes him the pre-eminent witness, brought on him unparalleled trial and suffering, from not only without but even within, as his own writings and others abundantly prove.

Saul was not disobedient to the heavenly vision. Judaism and the world were to his soul judged and abandoned forever by the certainty of saving grace and heavenly glory in Christ on high; who now manifestly exercised divine power and authority, and at one glance pointed out the new and only true path of patient suffering for the witnesses, in word and deed, of grace and truth, according to His own matchless way on earth, till He come and take us to Himself where He is. On the one hand, not only the Gentiles (Romans, Greeks, and all others) were fighting against God, but yet more keenly the chosen nation, the Jews; on the other hand, the simplest disciple now is one with Christ on the throne of God, and to persecute them is to persecute Him. This and far more such a mind as Saul's read in the revelation outside Damascus—a revelation to go forth in due time over all the earth, and have its power only in faith and love forming a Christ-like life to Christ's glory, but not without notable effects even where it was ever so hollowly professed. It may be drowned in blood or obscured with clouds of creature error and presumption, Jewish or Gentile or worse than either when both combine to deny the Father and the Son, but none the less in its objects will rise in heaven with ever durable and unfading glory around Christ, ere He shall be revealed from heaven with angels of His might in flaming fire, taking vengeance on those that know not God and those that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ in that day, when He shall come to be glorified in His saints and wondered at in all that believed, as well as to be alike the Blesser, and the Blessing, to all the families of the earth according to promise.

It will be noticed that the first effect on his believing and repentant soul was the spirit of obedience. Life was there through faith; and this as ever instantly shows its true character by obedience, which the Lord saw. It is assumed in the latter half of the Text Rec. which forms the whole of ver. 6: “But rise up and enter into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.” He lets us know in his own account to the Jews (chap. xxii.) that he had said, What shall I do, Lord? This the inspired historian does not cite here, though he gives it later where it was of importance. But in any case the Lord counts on obedience, even before Saul could be supposed to appreciate dogmatically, and to rest in peace on, the sprinkling of His blood. The new nature lives in obedience, such as Christ's in the consciousness and affections of sonship; and that blood cleanseth from every sin of which the old man was guilty. Even before the new-born soul knows clearance from all guilt, the heart is made up to obey, not through fear of penalty like a Jew with death before his eyes, but attracted by sovereign goodness and submission to God's word. Obedience is the only right place and attitude of the renewed mind, in contrast with the independence of God natural to man

shapen in iniquity and conceived in sin. Power comes in the gift of the Holy Ghost, when the believer rests on redemption and knows all his evilness before God. But even an apostle must be told, not discover himself, what he must do.

“The men that journeyed with Saul were standing speechless, hearing the sound but beholding no one” (ver. 7). The word often means “voice,” as it is rightly translated in ver. 4, where Saul clearly heard what the Lord said to him. Here his companions did not hear one word articulately, as we are distinctly told in chap. xxii. 9. Yet they did hear that something was being uttered. Hence “sound” appears to be a more accurate representation of the fact intended by the expression. And this is confirmed by a nice difference in the form of the Greek phrase; for the genitive (expressive of partition) is used where the effect was incomplete, the accusative where the words were sent home in power. This distinctness may not seem always preserved, as in John 10; but it cannot be denied in the case before us.

On rising up Saul proved to be without power to see, blinded, we may well say, with excessive light. So they led him by the hand into Damascus (ver. 8); and for three days without seeing he did neither eat nor drink (ver. 9). A deep work thus went on in a soul capable of feeling grace and truth as profoundly as he could judge himself according to the light of God, which had exposed the vain wickedness of religion in its best shape, and brought down the most zealous missionary armed with inquisitorial power, where Job of old was brought—to abhor self and dust and ashes.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 8:26-40

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

We have now the history of Philip's evangelistic service resumed; and full of interest and instruction it is.

“But an angel of [the] Lord spoke to Philip, saying, Arise, go southward unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza; this is desert. And he arose and wont. And behold a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch in power under Candace, queen of [the] Ethiopians, who was over all her treasure,1 had come to worship at Jerusalem; and he was returning and, as he sat in his chariot,2 was reading the prophet Isaiah. And the Spirit said to Philip, Approach and join thyself to this chariot. And Philip running up heard him reading the prophet Isaiah,3 and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I unless some one shall guide4 me? And he besought Philip to come up and sit with him. Now the passage of the scripture which he was reading was this—

As a sheep He was led to the slaughter;

And as a lamb dumb before His shearers,

So He opened not His mouth.

In His5 humiliation His judgment was taken away.

His6 generation who shall declare?

For His life was taken away from the earth.

And the eunuch answering Philip said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? Of himself or of some other? And Philip opened his mouth, and, beginning from this scripture, preached to him Jesus. And as they went on the way, they came unto a certain water; and the eunuch said, Behold, water: what hindereth me to be baptized? And he commanded the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, both Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him.7 But when they came up out of the water, [the] Spirit of [the] Lord caught away Philip, and the eunuch saw him no more, for he went on his way rejoicing. But Philip was found at Azotus, and passing through he evangelized all the cities till he came unto Caesarea” (ver. 26-40).

A fresh step is taken by Philip. Jehovah's angel directs him; for there were two roads, and an evangelist would not have chosen the one that was a desert.8. But the object of God's grace was traveling by this one; and an angel is employed as ever in God's providence, here objectively that we might not forget the truth or take account only of thoughts and feelings. “Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth for service on account of those that inherit salvation?” The ready servant of God's will, Philip leaves the rejoicing multitude to whom he had been blessed in Samaria, and goes promptly, though he only knows the seemingly strange direction of his journey, not as yet its aim. It was a proselyte returning from Jerusalem, unsatisfied but wistful and groping his way in the prophetic word. The blessing is not now in the city of solemnities; the blessed had been driven away. Samaria is rejoicing in the Savior of the world. The Ethiopian is soon to stretch out his hands to God, not in prayer only but in praise and conscious blessedness; though Ethiopia must wait till He comes who is already ascended on high and has led captivity captive. But here it is not an angel but “the Spirit” that said to Philip, Approach and join thyself to this chariot. Angels have to do with circumstances, the Spirit leads as to souls. So we saw in chap. v.; and so we may see yet more clearly in comparing chap. 12 with 13. The reality is as true now as ever, though it was then manifested and is written in God's word that we be not faithless but believing.

With alacrity the evangelist answers to the Spirit's call, and runs to Candace's treasurer as he sat in the chariot reading Isaiah, and puts the searching question, Understandest thou what thou readest? Alas! it was then as now in Christendom. The vision of Him who came to make God known, otherwise unknowable, is handed about from learned to unlearned, as if the divine solution of all riddles were itself the one insoluble riddle. The learned man, when asked to read, says, I cannot; for it is sealed; and on the same appeal the unlearned excuses himself, I am not learned. Faith alone can understand: so it is, and so it ought to be. So it was now that grace took up the returning stranger; for the passage was Isa. 53:7, 8; and when the answer betrayed his sheer ignorance of the gospel, Philip let him hear the glad tidings of Jesus.

It was not without God that the then passage of Isaiah set out the holy suffering Messiah. Other parts of this very strain, both before and after, bear witness to His exaltation; but here it is sufferings simply—the main difficulty to a Jew, who thought exclusively of His glorious

kingdom. Hence the propriety of the name of “Jesus in Philip's application of the prophecy (ver. 35): the more striking because the inspiring Spirit had said (ver. 5) that Philip proclaimed “the Christ” or Messiah to the Samaritans. Ignorance, learned or unlearned, slights these distinctions, censures those who point them out as refining on Scripture, and thus really loses the force of the truth. For God has not written one word in vain; and spiritual intelligence gleans its sweetest fruit in that too neglected field. The Samaritans needed to hear that the Christ was come; the Ethiopian to know that the despised and suffering Jesus was beyond doubt the Messiah, whom the prophet introduced with a trumpet note as lofty in Isa. 52:13, as that which closed the passage in ch. 53:12. Everywhere are bound together His sufferings and His glories after these; but nowhere more than here do we find His meek submission to the wanton cruelty of His guilty people. Now “Jesus” was the right word for this; for on the one hand it expresses what He became in manhood, so as to be the object of contempt to rebellious creatures, and on the other it tells out His intrinsic glory who for us stooped so low. He was Jehovah the Savior.

The difference in the language from the Old Testament in our hands is due to the Septuagint, or Greek Version, then in common use, and especially among the Egyptians, &c. The sense remains substantially the same. But we are not to infer that Philip confined himself to this scripture: that he “began” from it more justly implies and warrants that he did not end there but expounded others also, But this was of extreme importance to one in the state of soul which the whole preceding account gives us to see in the treasurer; and it was blessed to the letting in of a flood of divine light into his heart!

Yet the scripture which detected the darkness of the Ethiopian's mind, before Philip sounded the glad tidings of Jesus in his ears that he by faith might ever after be a child of light in the Lord, has fared ill, not merely at the hands of the fathers of old, but hardly Jess with Calvin and the like in Reformation times and since. For the great French commentator (to dwell on no others) will have these verses to teach that our Lord was so broken that He appears like a man dejected beyond hope, as is evident, but also that He comes out of the depth of death as a conqueror, and out of hell itself as the author of eternal life. But to draw this last sense from the words cited in ver. 33 (or from the original in Isa. 53:8) is quite unfounded. The prophet is as far as possible from here saying that Christ should be lifted up from His great straits by the hand of the Father. This is in no way taught by His judgment being taken away. The new beginning of unlooked-for glory is found elsewhere, but not here. Nor does the exclamation of the prophet in, the following clause ("His generation who shall declare?") import that His victory shall go beyond all number of years, instead of lasting only a little while. Sundry old interpreters were not justified in proving hereby the eternal generation of the Word, any more than others who understood it of His miraculous Incarnation. But no perversion seems worse than the deduction from such words as these, that Christ's life shall endure forever; for the entire passage refers exclusively to His humiliation. The first clause of 33 appears to express the mockery of all righteousness in His judgment; the second, the unspeakable wickedness of that generation; the third, the violent end of His life on earth to which He bowed, which is its proof. Were it a question of Phil. 2 or of the whole section (52:13-53), and not of these two verses only, Calvin would have been right as now he is demonstrably wrong. And this is confirmed by the Hebrew, which here no more admits of a thought of exaltation than does the Greek. The suffering Messiah is seen only in Jesus, at all cost to Himself the Savior of the sinful man who believes in Him, let His own people gainsay as they may the blessed report of the faithful.

Baptism follows the hearing of faith. And so, when they come upon a certain water, the stranger asks what hinders his being baptized, and has the privilege conferred on the spot; as Peter asked, in Cornelius' house, if any one could forbid it, when the Gentiles had received the Holy Spirit, even as the believing Jews before them. For the outer mark, worse than worthless without the heart's subjection to the Lord and His grace, has its importance in ways neither few nor small; as the loss of the truth represented is as manifest in those that despise as in those that idolize it. They fail to see that life is never attributed to baptism: but salvation is set forth in it, the washing away of sins and death to sin, the blessed portion to which the gospel bears witness, in Christ dead and risen, for the believer. Life the Old Testament saints had, when there was no such thing as Christian baptism. Abel and Abram had it, no less than the Christian; but the Christian by virtue of Christ's accomplished work has soul-salvation, as he waits for his body to be saved and changed at Christ's coming. Of this salvation meanwhile, which no Old Testament saint could have, baptism is the sign, to which therefore the believer now submits, as a confession not only that Jesus is Lord, but of deliverance through His death and resurrection. Those who make all subjective, like the Friends, or who make all objective like the Catholics, suffer the consequences of their errors. Neither one nor other owns dogmatically the true present privilege of the Christian as in Christ delivered from all condemnation, freed from the law of sin and death, perfected forever by the one offering of Christ. This truth to the Quaker and the Papist is dangerous doctrine, both holding, though on different grounds, that whoever is justified is sanctified, and that, as far as he is sanctified, he is so far justified, and no farther. Both therefore slight the word of God, and preaching, and faith; as both are wholly ignorant of the gift of the Spirit sealing the believer to the day of redemption, the one crying up ordinances and priesthood to the glorification of the church, the other resting for all on what he calls the inward light, which he contends is given to every man. Jew or heathen, Mahommedan or Christian, whose destiny for over turns on the use he makes of it. Neither allows eternal life in Christ to faith; neither sees, founded on Christ's work, that quittance of our old state as children of Adam, and entrance into the new state of the Second Man, of which baptism is not the channel but the emblem. Hence they ignore, if they do not falsify even in quotation, such scriptures as Col. 1:12, 13. They are striving to be made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light; they are hoping to be translated into the kingdom of the Son of His love. Had they read baptism aright, they would be rejoicing in the sense of a present and everlasting deliverance to the praise of Him in whom they believe.

If true, they are certainly feeble, believers. With the Ethiopian all was simple and assured. For they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him (ver. 38). There was no thought of going before the assembly in Samaria. Baptism is individual, no matter how many souls might be baptized. The church has nothing to do with it. The Lord directed His servants (not the church as such) to baptize; and for this they are responsible to Him, as they are for the preaching of the word. The church does not baptize, any more than preach or teach. The evangelist does, though he may ask another to do it for him, as Peter when he directed Cornelius and the rest to be baptized in the name of the Lord on a later day.

“And when they came up out of the water, [the] Spirit of [the] Lord caught away Philip, and the eunuch saw him no more, for he went on his way rejoicing” (ver. 39). The miracle only established the new convert's faith, as doubtless it was wrought of God to do; for there is not a hint that Philip wished it, still less sought it in prayer. It was God for the honor of His Son in virtue of that Spirit's power which was working on earth; but surely not without a wise and gracious intent for the witness of it (and he was not alone) returning to his native land with the gospel of salvation. Abyssinia was thus to have the glad tidings of God concerning His Son; as Philip transported to Azotus (or Ashdod) abides the same simple-hearted indefatigable preacher of divine grace (ver. 40). For passing through he was evangelizing all the cities till he came to Caesarea. It is there the inspired history shows him to have lived, and his four daughters, long afterward.

Thus were the Samaritans sealed of the Holy Spirit and made members of Christ in full possession of the church's privileges, no less than the saints at Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost.

The sight of the blessing brought out the true condition of Simon. He was amazed, before the two apostles entered the scene, as he beheld the signs and great deeds of power wrought by Philip. Now that others from among the Samaritans received like power, Satan prompted his unrenewed mind to evil.

“Now Simon, when he saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, offered them money, saying, Give me also this power that, on whomsoever I lay my hands, he may receive [the] Holy Ghost. But Peter said to him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou thoughtest to obtain the gift of God through money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter; for thy heart is not right before God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and beseech the Lord if so be the thought of thy heart shall be forgiven thee, for I see that thou art in gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity. And Simon said in answer, Beseech ye for me with the Lord that none of the things which ye have spoken come upon me” (ver. 18-24).

Undoubtedly there was somewhat to be “seen;” but this does not hinder the truth that the Spirit was being given inwardly, and not merely “gifts,” still less only what men call the miraculous gifts of the Spirit. They however point to the fact that this was through the imposition of the hands of the apostles. But why should not God give the Spirit thus if He please? It is for Him to judge His own best methods; and God, who gave the Spirit at Pentecost without the laying on of hands, was pleased now to honor the apostles as the channel. It is a question of His wisdom as well as sovereignty. For mere bishops to imitate the form without the power is without any basis of truth, and real presumption. Simon saw, in the fact, a means of self-exaltation, perhaps also of gain. Certainly he offered them money, saying, “Give me also this power that, on whomsoever I lay my hands, he may receive the Holy Spirit.” What an insult to God! What is bought with money may naturally be sold for money. But this divine gift, was it to be a matter of traffic among men?

It is a mistake to suppose that Simon wanted the gift for himself. He wished to buy the power of conferring the Holy Spirit upon others. It is very possible, however, that he may not have received the outward gift even for himself; assuredly he was not sealed of the Holy Ghost, which, as we have seen, implies the new birth previously. And Simon manifests not a thought or a feeling in communion with God. He was just a natural man, and a man even debased by all his former ways and character, especially those which profanely abused the name of God. The truth he had heard could never have judged his conscience or reached his heart. It was rather stupefaction in presence of transcendent power, and the keen desire to appropriate this power to his own selfish purposes. He judged, as man habitually does, from himself: not, as the believer does, from God. As money is the great means among men, he supposed it must be so with the apostles. Christ was nothing in his eyes; the power that eclipsed his own was desirable to obtain at any price. This was all that he conceived of the Holy Spirit; and it proved, in the most conclusive manner, where his own soul was.

Simon's offer filled Peter with indignation, who said to him, “Thy money perish with thee, because thou thoughtest to obtain the gift of God through money.” Christ alone is the procuring cause, and they alone who rest on His blood by faith, receive it. The word of Simon betrayed his ruin. He was, as yet, a lost man. There was no real faith and consequently no salvation in his case. Baptism is an admirable sign where there is life and faith; without these, it is a most solemn aggravation of man's natural guilt and ruin. It is to perish with a Savior in sight, with sin and God's judgment slighted as well as the Savior. Simon had no share nor lot in this matter, for his heart was not right before God. This does not mean, in my judgment, a lack of share or lot in the sign-gifts but in the Savior: the gospel was nothing to him. Had the word of truth reached him, his heart would have been purified by faith, for the grace of God is adequate to save the vilest. But no heart visited by grace could have thought of offering money in order to obtain the power of giving the Holy Spirit. Simon was self-convicted of total strangership to God and His grace. The heart of man, though a baptized man, was as perverse as ever, and had broken out into a more daring sin than was possible before. Outward nearness to grace is of all things the most fatal to him who is not subject to the truth of God.

Yet, as he had taken the place of professing the name of the Lord, Peter calls on him to “repent.” Repentance is the clear duty and imperative call of God for a sinful man. It was always an obligation since the fall; but the gospel, as it sheds a brighter light upon the need, so furnishes the mightiest motives to act upon the heart. “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” The highest of duties, then, is to own and honor the Son of God, confessing one's own sins, which brought Him, in divine love, to the cross. On the other hand, he that believes in the Son has everlasting life; whilst he that disobeys the Son, not subject to Him now fully revealed, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.

Hence the apostle adds, “Repent therefore of this thy wickedness and beseech the Lord if so be the thought of thy heart shall be forgiven thee, for I see that thou art in gall of bitterness and in bond of iniquity.” That there is grace in God and efficacy in the blood of Christ to meet any wickedness of man is certain. Peter would have never thus exhorted him had pardon been an impossibility. But the answer of Simon clearly shows that, though alarmed for the moment, there was no sense in his soul of his shameless sin against God and especially against the Holy Spirit; no real reckoning upon grace in God, according to the revelation of Himself in the death of His Son. Peter did not say, “Beseech” God but “the Lord,” for in Him and by Him only can God deliver a guilty soul; and now that He has sent His Son, the only sure and adequate way of honoring the Father is in honoring the Son. “He that confesseth the Son hath the Father also.” Confessing the Father only, not the Son, neither saves the sinner nor glorifies God. So here Peter calls on him to beseech the Lord, who is the “way, the truth, and the life.” But there was no faith any more than repentance in Simon, who said in answer, “beseech ye (it is emphatic) for me with the Lord, that none of the things which ye have spoken come upon me.”

There was confidence, if we can so say, in the channels of power. He who had no faith in Christ, confesses his faith in Peter; as millions since have done in saints, angels, or the virgin Mary. This, however, is not really faith but credulity and superstition; for it has no ground, either in

the nature of the persons, or in the word of God. Faith in the Lord Jesus has alone a divine resting-place; for God sent Him, His only-begotten Son, into the world that we might live through Him—through none other but Him. “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as propitiation for our sins.” To all this truly divine and infinite salvation Simon was insensible. But he saw in Peter an instrument of power, without faith in the word he and Philip had preached; and so he entreats the apostles to pray to the Lord for him so that none of the things spoken might befall him. It was future consequences he dreaded, not his present state of ruin and guilt that he felt. Thenceforward, according to scripture he disappears from our sight; and none could wonder if the worst evil came on the impenitent man. But the reticence of Luke did not suit the ecclesiastical historians who to their own shame, detail for their readers, accounts which bear the stamp of fable in honor of Peter. And where is the Lord in all this? Wounded, we may say, as so often, in the house of His friends.

But we have a brief word added as to the two apostles. “They therefore, when they had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, returned1 to Jerusalem and evangelized2 many villages of the Samaritans” (ver. 25). It was not a mere transient act, as the common text has it, but a continuous work. Their hearts were toward the Lord, who had created in them a right and fervent spirit, and needed no entreaty to spread among small and great the glad tidings of His redemption. The villages of the Samaritans, and many of them, were not beneath the detailed and repeated labors of the apostles.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 8:14-17

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

The tidings of God's gracious work in Samaria could not but make a powerful impression on all saints; and of these none would estimate its importance so deeply as the personal companions and most honored servants of the Lord in Jerusalem. His will and glory, as well as love to the objects of His grace that they might be blessed more abundantly, drew their hearts to the spot where God had wrought so manifestly. Indeed the Lord risen (Acts 1:8) had specially named Samaria as a scene of future testimony for the disciples. What a contrast with Jews having no intercourse with Samaritans!

“Now when the apostles that were in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John, the which, on coming down, prayed for them that they might receive [the] Holy Spirit; for as yet he had fallen upon none of them: only they had got baptized unto the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands upon them, and they received [the] Holy Spirit” (ver. 14-17).

Some important principles of truth are illustrated here.

The independency of congregationalism is shown to be as far as possible from the will of God. There was no holding aloof on the part of the chiefs in Jerusalem, though we hear of no request for their intervention on the part of the Samaritans. The apostles felt as members of the one body of Christ for the fresh objects of divine grace; and yet the chosen future exponent of that great mystery was still in his sins and unbelief.

Nor was there the smallest jealousy in Philip, because other servants of Christ came whose place in the assembly was so much higher than his own. The “way of surpassing excellence” as yet prevailed; and as the members generally had the same care one for another, in none did this appear so conspicuously as in those whom God set in the church first: for Christ's sake and according to His word they were in the midst of them serving as bond-men. Nothing was farther from the heart of the chiefs who ruled, than on the one hand to be called Rabbi, Father, and Master, or on the other to affect the lordly patronizing of the Gentiles. It was on all sides the power of the life of Christ.

Again, it will be noticed that the apostles send two of their number, not James (son of Alphaeus) and Thaddaeus, nor Simon Can. and Matthias, but their unquestionably choicest pair, Peter and John. Can any believer be so dull as to conceive that this had no far-reaching purpose in the mind of Him who dwells in the assembly and knows the end from the beginning and would give the sure light of His word to such as look to Him for guidance? Not even Satan, I am bold to think, yet indulged in the dream of an exclusive1 chair for Peter's direction of the church as a whole; still less of a present throne in command of the powers that be, with a triple crown of pretensions over heaven, earth, and hell. On the contrary, without a thought of these vanities of ecclesiastical ambition and most profane assumption, the apostles in love and wisdom send, to those that had received the word of God in Samaria, Peter and John. Who better qualified, were it needed, to judge and report truly? or who could be the bearer of better blessings from on high? or who in fine be more jealous for the glory of the “one Shepherd,” in dealing with these “other sheep” which were not of the Jewish “fold?”

And what could more become servants of Christ when they did come down? They “prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit.” God had hitherto withheld this, the great and characteristic privilege of the Christian. But the apostles in Jerusalem were in the current of His will and ways. And Peter and John on the spot perceived the lack and spread it out before God, not out of doubtful mind, but reckoning on His faithfulness to make good the promise of the Spirit. Even at Pentecost Peter was led to look beyond the Jews and their children to all that were afar off, as many as the Lord their God might call to Him. “For as yet He was fallen upon none of them: only they had got baptized unto the name of the Lord Jesus.”

So plainly then is the situation laid before us, that doubt is inexcusable. On the one hand these Samaritans believed the word, as they were also thereon baptized; on the other hand not one of them had as yet been sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, which the Jewish saints had at once received on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem. Yet from the days of the so-called fathers down to the Reformers, and hence till our own day, not merely the superstitious but men beyond most for godliness, ability and learning, as to this seem at sea, as if they had no chart. It is indeed one of those deep blanks in traditional theology (Catholic or Protestant, Arminian or Calvinist, being here almost equally at fault) which involves incalculable loss practically as well as in spiritual intelligence, and is nowhere more felt than in the worship of God. The soul's entrance into the truth has commensurate blessing in its train, as those know who have made the transition from ignorance of this truth into the enjoyment of it.

Thus Chrysostom (Cramer's Cat. Pat. iii. 136) and Cecumenius speak of the Samaritan converts receiving the Spirit for remission! but not for signs: a manifest departure from Scripture, which never designates the first vital work of the Spirit in the soul as “the gift of the Spirit,” nor consequently as a question of “reception” (compare Acts 2:38; 19:2).

But, leaving the Fathers, one must content the reader with J. Calvin's remarks as well as J. Light-foot's as a sufficient sample. The former are purposely cited from Beveridge's edition of the early English Version given in the series of the Calvin Translation Society (Acts i. 338, 9). “But here ariseth a question, for he saith that they were only baptized into the name of Christ, and that therefore they had not as yet received the Holy Ghost; but baptism must either be in vain and without grace, or else it must have all the force which it hath from the Holy Chest. In baptism we are washed from our sins; Paul teaches that our washing is the work of the Holy Ghost (Titus 3:5). The water used in baptism is a sign of the blood of Christ; but Peter saith that it is the Spirit by whom we are washed with the blood of Christ (1 Peter 1:2). Our old man is crucified in baptism that we may be raised up in newness of life (Rom. 6:6); and whence cometh all this save only from the sanctification of the Spirit? And finally what shall remain in baptism of it be separate from the Spirit (Gal. 3:27)? Therefore we must not deny but that the Samaritans, who had put on Christ indeed in baptism, had also His Spirit given them (!); and surely Luke speaks not in this place of the common grace of the Spirit whereby God doth regenerate us, that we may be His children, but of these singular gifts wherewith God would have certain endued at the beginning of the gospel to beautify Christ's Kingdom. Thus must the words of John be understood, that the disciples had not the Spirit given them as yet, for as much as Christ was yet conversant in the world; not that they were altogether destitute of the Spirit, seeing that they had from the same both faith and godly desire to follow Christ; but because they were not furnished with these excellent gifts wherein appeared afterward greater glory of Christ's kingdom. To conclude, forasmuch as the Samaritans were already endued with the Spirit of adoption, the excellent graces of the Spirit are heaped upon them, in which God showed to His church, for a time as it were, the visible presence of His Spirit, that He might establish forever the authority of His gospel, and also testify that His Spirit shall be always the governor and director of the faithful.”

This is enough to show where pious and enlightened men are in general as to the truth of the Spirit and indeed of redemption also. They are not aware that the gift (δωρεά) of the Spirit, whilst over and above that communication of life which is common to all saints in Old and New Testament days, is at the same time quite distinct from the gifts (χαρόσματα,) and more especially from powers and tongues, the sign-gifts which the Spirit distributed in honor of the risen Lord Jesus when inaugurating that new thing, the church the body of Christ, here below. Nor is Christian baptism a sign of life, but rather of sins washed away and of death to sin with Christ. That is, it is a sign of salvation, the demand before God of a good conscience by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, the present clearance of a Christian, and not merely what the heir had in his nonage under law. Then it was a perfectly sure promise, now full accomplishment for the soul (1 Peter 1:9) which baptism expresses as a figure. But this is quite distinct from the Spirit, given to the believer as the seal of redemption and earnest of the inheritance; and this distinction in particular the great French Reformer ignored, as people do to this day. Hence in his great anxiety to guard against sacramentalism (though even here his language is unsafe and has been used for evil by men of that school), he lowers the reception of the Spirit to transient displays of energy and thus involves himself in hopeless antagonism to scripture. The words of John (xiv.-xvi.) go far beyond miracles, healings, or kinds of tongues. They are to be understood of the far different presence of the Paraclete Himself, who was to dwell with the disciples and be in them; and this is not “for a time as it were” but to abide forever.

The Samaritan believers were saints then, and children of God; but as yet they were not endued with the Spirit like the Old Testament saints who, though born of the Spirit, never received that great gift, which was not and could not he till redemption, when God sent forth the Spirit of His Son into hearts already renewed, crying, Abba, Father. No doubt sensible gifts then and for awhile accompanied the Spirit's presence thus vouchsafed; but we err greatly, if we either confound the gift with the gifts, or deny the new and abiding privilege with what all saints had before redemption.

A brief extract from what our learned Dr. Lightfoot says (viii. 125-128, Pitman's edition) will suffice. “The Holy Ghost thus given meaneth not his ordinary work of sanctification, and confirming grace; but His extraordinary gift of tongues, prophesying, and the like. And this is evident, by the meaning of that phrase, the Holy Ghost in the scriptures when it denoteth not exactly the person of the Holy-Ghost or the third person in the Trinity.” Here again we have the same confusion of God's new and distinctive endowment of the church, the ever abiding gift of the Holy Ghost, with the gifts, some of which took a visible form and others not. It is admitted that what is called “sanctification of the Spirit” (1 Peter 1:2) is different and previous; as it is that vital work of separating a soul to God which takes place in conversion or quickening, and therefore has always been and always must be, as long as God in His grace calls sinners to Himself from among men. This typically is what answered to the washing of the unclean in the Levitical figure: then followed the application of the blood of sacrifice; and lastly the anointing oil, which only is what the New Testament designates the reception of the Spirit, wholly distinct from the new birth (which answers to the water), the blood intermediately being the token of being brought under redemption. The gifts, however important in their place, were quite subordinate, and might be some of them but temporary, though all of course were in fall force when the Spirit was given at Pentecost.

Are Christians then grown wiser in our day? Let Dean Alford bear witness (The Greek Test., ii. 88, 89, fifth edit.), who like the rest, takes advantage of the accompanying gifts, which might be seen, to ignore the incomparably more momentous unseen gift of the Holy Ghost. Further, he cites the very remarks of Calvin as “too important to be omitted,” which we have seen to be a heap of confusion, that might with justice be exposed more unsparingly still, were this the task in hand. They all agree in the great error of reducing the gift of the Holy Spirit to the outward “miraculous gifts,” instead of seeing along with these the unprecedented and transcendent privilege of Himself given to he the portion of the saints forever. It is the more inconsistent (and error is apt to be inconsistent) in Dean Alford, inasmuch as he owns in his note on John 16:7, “that the gift of the Spirit at and since Pentecost was and is something TOTALLY DISTINCT from anything before that time: a new and loftier dispensation.” His own emphasis is given as it is.

One of these objections is that the imposition of hands preceded that gift here as well as in ch. xix., where the apostle Paul laid his hands for a like purpose and with a like result on the twelve disciples at Ephesus. But why should this offend them? They may not like the ritualistic effort to base confirmation on a scripture which gives no real countenance to that ceremony; they may feel grieved at or ashamed of a mare form without power; they may justly censure R. Nelson (or any. citing him) for untruly referring to Calvin as if he thought confirmation was instituted by the apostles. For in fact in the Institutes (iv. ch. xix. 76) he disproves the very thought attributed to him. But to deny that it was the Holy Spirit Himself, that was communicated at Samaria and Ephesus by imposition of apostolic hands, is to fly in the face of God's words; to construe it into the gifts, and not the gift, of the Spirit, is to prepare the way for the most withering unbelief and the loss of the spring of all

true power. For what is the church without the personal presence of the Holy Ghost? and what is the Christian without His indwelling? That which baptizes into unity does not exist otherwise; there is no power adequate to constitute the believer a member of Christ; for both depend on the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Let it be observed that the two main occasions of that gift were to the Jewish believers (Acts 2) and to the Gentiles (Acts 10), on neither of which is there a word expressed or implied about laying on of hands. Indeed one has only to weigh both accounts (Pentecost being of course the fullest and chief) to gather that there could be nothing of the sort on either day. The peculiar cases of Samaria and Ephesus, which some would unintelligently erect into a rule to supersede those more general, were but ancillary as events, though the blessing conferred was of course, as far as it went, the same; and on each of these, where the laying on of hands occurred, the principle was, it would seem, to guard against rivalry, to bind the work of God together, and to put the most solemn sign of divine honor, first on the Jewish apostles, and next on the apostle to the uncircumcision. This was of moment to mark; but we do not find it repeated, save for special reasons and with other features, on Timothy personally (1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6). But God had taken care at an early day to anticipate and cut off possible misuse by employing a disciple, not the apostle; in the very conspicuous instance of the great apostle himself (Acts 9:17), as if to break beyond dispute all thought of a successional chain.

It may be well also to say that the effort to make the anarthrous form mean no more than a special gift or particular operation of the Holy Spirit is not borne out by scriptural usage. For we find πν. ἁγ. employed with and without the article, so as to demonstrate that this expression in no way excludes His blessed personality, but only falls under the usual principles of the language. Where it is intended to present Him as a distinct object before the mind, the article appears; where it only characterizes, the phrase is as ever anarthrous. Here; to go no farther, we have πν. ἁγ. in ver. 15, 17; but in, 18 τὸ πν. Were it merely previous mention, we should have had the article in 17 as well as 18. The true solution however is not here contextual, but the intention is not to present objectively. Where this is not so, the accusative of a transitive verb is regularly without the article, as being only the complement of the notion expressed by the verb; where it is sought to present the governed word as an object before the mind, the article is added. The usage therefore is thoroughly exact. So in Acts 19:2 we have twice πν ἁγ. without the article, but in 6 the article in its emphatic duplication; where it seems vain to contend that the Holy Spirit is not meant in all those cases. Is there then not a difference? Unquestionably; but the difference lies, not in the contrast of a special gift with His general influence, as men say, or even with His person, but in the questioned character of what was received in the one case, with the definite object before the mind in the other most suitably accompanying such a phrase as “came” upon the men described.

This is the true key to Acts 1:2, 5 not the mere circumstance of the preposition (strangely supposed by some to be exceptional) which serves to define; as the phrase in ver. 8, brings the Spirit into an objective point of view. But it is the self-same Spirit in each case; and could a mistake be greater than to allow that Christ only gave injunctions by a particular gift, and that the disciples enjoyed Him in all His fullness? Compare also Acts 10:38, with 44. So, on the eventful day when the promise of the Father was fulfilled, we find in Acts 2:4 the Spirit both without and with the article, and there according to the principle enunciated: when used to characterize what filled all, it is designedly anarthrous; when the phrase presents a distinctively objective cast of thought, the article is as correctly inserted. The presence or the absence of the article leaves the Holy Spirit untouched and only affects the aspect meant—person or power. Compare ver. 17, 18, 33, 38; 4:8, 31 (a very remarkable expression in the text of the oldest codices); 5:3; 6:5; 7:55; 8:29, 39; 9:17, 31; 10:38, 44, 45, 47; 11:15, 16, 24, 28; 13:2, 4, 9, 52; 15:28; 16:6, 7. The Epistles would only add and confirm, were this needed.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 8:5-13

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Among the great host of those that were scattered publishing the word of the Lord one is singled out by the Spirit of God, who achieved a signal victory for grace where law had utterly failed as always. Samaria was won by the gospel to the name of Jesus; and the good soldier who fought was Philip He was one of the seven chosen by the saints and appointed by the apostles to do diaconal work in Jerusalem. But the ascended Lord had given him as an evangelist, we may learn expressly from Acts 21:8; and here we find him in Samaria engaged in this work for which he had the gift, not in that office to which he had been ordained, now that the dispersion of the saints from Jerusalem no longer admitted of its functions. But as gift is in the unity of Christ's body (Eph. 4), so its exercise is above passing circumstances and has ample scope, where a local charge were out of place, as our chapter abundantly testifies. It is the free action of the Holy Spirit exemplified in the details of an individual, as we have already seen it generally in the dispersed.

“And Philip went down to a city of Samaria and preached to them the Christ. And the crowd with one accord gave heed to the things spoken by Philip, when they heard, and saw the signs which he did. For [as to] many1 that had unclean spirits, they went out crying with a loud voice, and many palsied and lame were healed. And there was great 2 joy in that city” (ver. 5-8).

The worthlessness of tradition is made manifest, though unintentionally, by Eusebius (H.E. iii. 31; ed. Heinichen, i. 261-3), who cites a letter of Polycrates, bishop of Ephesus, to Victor, bishop of Rome, before the end of the second century, speaking of Philip as “one of the twelve apostles,” “and his daughter.” But what could be expected of a man who could in the same letter interlard the scriptural description of John with “who became priest bearing as he did the miter” or high-priest's plate? See also Ens. H. E. v. 24. So rapid was the loss of Christ's truth, so inexcusable in presence of plain scriptural facts before all readers. They may ridicule Papias, but what of one bishop who reports the fable, and of another (among the most learned in his day) who uses it more than once in his History of the Church? Such are very early Christian fathers, ignorant of scripture to the last degree, yet idolized by superstitions men who profess to receive the Scriptures as inspired of God.

It is interesting to note that the city in question was the same where the Son of God had made Himself known to not a few Samaritans who confessed Him to be the Savior of the world.

Now the Christ is preached there by one of whom it could be said in all truth—that after serving well as a deacon, he was gaining to himself a good standing, or step in advance, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus. It was meet that both should be rather in Sychar

(afterward Neapolis and Nablous), ancient Shechem and Sichem at the foot of Gerizim, the mountain that vainly sought to rival Jerusalem, rather than in the city of Samaria, lately rebuilt or enlarged by Herod the Great, and named Sebaste in honor of Augustus.3 There the Lord deigned to abide two days, deepening the impression produced by the sinful woman saved from death, and giving them to hear Him themselves and to know the truth in Himself.

The enemy seemed now in possession like a flood; but the Spirit of the Lord lifts up a standard against him in the preaching of Philip, confirmed by the signs which he wrought before their eyes. No miracle was needed there when the Lord visited the place and wrought as the great and acknowledged Prophet, though in truth the central object and glorious sum of all prophecy. It was the Father seeking true worshippers through the Son, who declared Him in a fullness of grace and truth which surmounted the trammels of Judaism; and the word went home in power though not without the Holy Ghost which the Son gives as a divine spring of unfailing enjoyment. But now Satan had sought to efface the truth and set up a rival in sorcery, ever apt to seduce, interest, and alarm those who know not the true God. And the time was also come for God to bear witness in men, the servants of Christ on earth, to His victory over Satan and glorification on high, as we have seen in previous chapters of this book. Here the energy of the Spirit was at work in Samaria in a free herald of the gospel, after the testimony had been refused with an enmity up to death in Jerusalem. On the one hand, the crowds gave heed with one accord to the things spoken by Philip; on the other, from many that were possessed unclean spirits came out with loud outcries, and many palsied and lame were healed. Can we wonder that “there was much joy in that city"? But with Luke 8:13 before me I could not affirm so absolutely as J. Calvin that the joy must be the fruit of faith. (Opera vi. 71.) At least the “faith” may not be of God, as we see in the flagrant case which the Holy Spirit brings here before us. Indeed not a few remarks in his Comment seem rash.

Yea, such was the power at work that even the main instrument of Satan fell under the general influence of the multitudes he had so long seduced to his lies. “But a certain man, Simon by name, was before in the city preaching magic and amazing the nation of Samaria, saying that himself was some great one: to whom they all gave heed from small to great, saying, He is the power of God that is called4 Great. And they gave heed to him, because a long time he had amazed them with his magic arts. But when they believed Philip evangelizing5 about the kingdom of God and the name of6 Jesus Christ, they were baptized both men and women. And Simon also himself believed; and being baptized he continued with Philip, and, beholding signs 7 and great works of power as they were done, was amazed” (ver. 9-13).

This is the only reliable account of one who prominently figures in the early ecclesiastical writers as a heresiarch most hostile to the truth, but with so much fable surrounding him as to prove how little we can trust their statements. Some object to his being classed with the leaders of heresy, on the ground that he was not a Christian. He certainly was “baptized,” as he is said to have “believed,” and thus had a better title (as far as profession goes) than his Samaritan master Dositheus, who is said to have been a disciple of John the Baptist but eclipsed in his leadership subsequently by Simon. Even Justin Martyr who had the double advantage of being a native of Flavia Neapolis which arose out of the ruins of Sychar, and of being born not a century after, seems to have fallen into the blunder of confounding the Sabine deity, Semo Sancus, who had a statue erected to his honor, with Simon M. Dr. E. Burton in a note to his Bampton Lectures (Oxford, 1829) endeavors to show the impossibility of such a mistake on the part of Justin, and has put together from various learned men what can be said in favor of Simon's deification at Rome. If it were so, it is of small consequence. The alleged contests between him and the apostle Peter, whether at Caesarea or at Rome, are too absurd to notice, being evidently legends grafted on the inspired history by the unhallowed hands of men whose mind and conscience were alike defiled. Destitute of the truth they betook themselves to marvels of the imagination, which after all rather detract from the solemn effect of sacred history, and add nothing to the dignity of the apostle's exposure or to the blind self-condemnatory turpitude of the unhappy man himself.

Whatever the mischievous result of Simon's sorcery and falsehoods leading to his own blasphemous pretensions, and we are here told of his misleading all around small and great, (for what avail rank or education to guard from error?) all vanished like smoke before the light of the gospel. “The kingdom of God” and “the name of Jesus” annihilated the vain jugglery and impious frauds of the Samaritan. But it is instructive to notice that there is a difference in the language of ver. 12 as compared with 13, and a difference in favor of the men and women in the former as against the latter. They are said simply to have believed the testimony and to have been baptized; the same is said of Simon with the important addition that he attended closely to Philip, and, while beholding the signs and great works of power as they were done, was amazed. This was what transported him, not the love of God, not the truth of Christ, nor the grace of the gospel even to such a guilty deceitful wretch as himself, but the wondrous power which wrought before his eyes. Its overwhelming reality struck none so deeply as Simon. Others had their eyes drawn to the kingdom, and its holy glories; others in spirit fell down and clasped the feet of their unseen Savior and Lord Jesus Christ, lost in wonder, love, and praise. Simon was in ecstasies, beholding the signs and great deeds of power, the character of which was discerned by none more clearly than himself He yielded to evidence and believed what approved itself to his mind irrefragably. Not a word implies self-judgment before God; not a word of any gracious action on his heart. Conscience was not plowed up; nor did the affections flow under the sense of God's immeasurable grace in Christ to save him from his sins. On the other hand it is not said of the men and women in the verses before that they were “amazed,” as Simon was in his close attendance on Philip, not to hear the truth more folly and grow in grace and the knowledge of the Lord Jesus, but “beholding the signs and great deeds of power as they came to pass.”

The Spirit of God thus lays bare to us in this description, it seems to me, the merely natural source of Simon's faith as distinguished from others. And such is all faith which is founded on “evidences,” which the mind judges and accepts accordingly. It may not be in the least insincere, and those who so believe may be the readiest to do battle if it seem necessary for their creed. But there is no life, as there is no repentance; no link with Christ formed by the Holy Spirit through the reception of the word, because it is God's word, discovering God to the guilty conscience and delivering withal through Christ dead and risen.

Still Simon may have fully credited himself with honest conviction of the truth; and, in the warmth and haste of so mighty a work in so short a time, not even Philip saw reason to question his confession. In fact, where it is the mind without conscience, progress is much more rapid; and all outwardly looks promising for a little where a soul thus easily passes into the ranks of Christ. We have not long to wait for the circumstances which betrayed unmistakably the unrenewed condition of Simon's soul, delivered the saints from what had else been a constant incubus, and gave himself the most solemn warning that his heart was not right with God.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 8:1-4

Outwardly also the death of Stephen was the epoch when the murderous spirit, provoked by his solemn and fearless testimony, burst out against all who bore the name of the Lord.

“And there arose on that day a great persecution against the assembly that was in Jerusalem; and1 they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria except the apostles. And devout men buried Stephen and made great wailing over him. But Saul was ravaging the assembly, entering throughout the houses, and dragging men and women was delivering [them] to prison. They therefore that were scattered abroad went about evangelizing the word."2 (Ver. 1-4)

Blinded by religions pride and jealousy the Jews were but sealing their guilt irrecoverably. Those who despised the Messiah in humiliation on earth were now rebelling against Him glorified in heaven, rejecting withal the Holy Spirit whom He had sent down to render a divine testimony to His glory. Man in his best estate is not only vanity but enmity against the God of love. They had sent, as one said, the spirit of the martyr and witness to Jesus on high with the message, We will not have this Man to reign over us. So had the Lord once figured the hatred of “the citizens” in the parable of the Pounds (or Minas); and thus were His words punctually verified. That generation has not passed away; nor will it, as He has apprised us, till all things He predicted shall have taken place; and the most tremendous of these things await the end of the age which He terminates by His appearing in glory.

But the rage then in Jerusalem was so intense and widespread against the assembly there that they were all scattered abroad except the apostles. It was in accordance with the word of the Lord that the testimony of the gospel of grace did begin “at Jerusalem,” and so it did. It was necessary that the word of God should first be spoken to the Jews; and so it was. This salvation of God must be sent unto the Gentiles, and they will also hear; but it must go fully to the Jews first, and this was now being done; and the Jews rejected it with a persecuting obstinacy as yet beyond all example on earth. It was reserved for Popery to outdo that day in unrelenting, opposition to the word of God and in sanguinary hatred of His saints. “They were all scattered abroad “throughout the neighboring regions “except the apostles:” a persecution as remarkable for its success in dispersing the objects of its fury, as for the exception specified; for those who staid would naturally be the most obnoxious of all. It is the more striking because the charge in Matt. 10:23 ("when they persecute you in this city, flee into the next”) was primarily to the twelve; so strange it seems, Canon Humphrey should take our chapter as a fulfillment of that command of our Lord, though the closing words point rather to a future testimony in the land before the end of the age. Nor is Calvin more happy who will have it that the apostles remained behind as good pastors for the safety of the flock; for it is evident that the sheep were all gone. Still less tolerable is Bp. Pearson's idea (Lect. in Acta App. iv. x. p. 62, Opera Posth. 4to. Lond. 1688) that the tradition of the second century, mentioned by Clemens Alex. and Eusehius (H. E.), accounts for it; namely, that our Lord forbade the apostles leaving Jerusalem for twelve years! This very chapter later on disproves it. He bade them go and disciple all the nations, yea, go into the world and preach the gospel to all the creation. Remission of sins was to be preached in His name to all the nations, beginning with Jerusalem. They were to tarry in the city, but it was expressly till they were clothed with power from on high, without a thought of twelve years.

But for the present, in face of that great persecution, the apostles abide. Divine wisdom ordered all aright. They remain there together unmoved by the storm which dispersed all others, for important purposes which afterward appear; and the spread of the glad tidings falls under the good hand of the Lord to His scattered saints. No man beforehand could have foreseen such a result of such an ebullition, God rejected not alone in His unity as of old but also in His Son and now in His Spirit. His truth was counted a lie, His saints as sheep for the slaughter. But if the apostles abode, the dispersed brethren went in all directions announcing the glad tidings of the word. It is the just action of the Holy Spirit in the gospel which we see as God's answer to His people's full and final rejection of His grace; and this was secured in the best and most unmistakable way by the apostles remaining, while all the rest were scattered, with no other external impulse, and have the last degree of human evidence from unbelieving rebellious Israel in the city of solemnities itself.

Meanwhile “pious men buried Stephen, and made great wailing over him” (ver. 2). There is nothing in the epithet to necessitate our regarding these as disciples. They were rather God-fearing Jews whose conscience revolted against the lawless end of a trial that began with the form of Jewish law and was carried on with the corruption of suborned testimony which then characterized the chosen nation. Calvin has missed the point of the account by the assumption that it is for us a lesson of the faithful, even in the heat of persecution, not discouraged but zealous in the discharge of these duties which pertain to godliness. Still farther did he err in making Luke also commend their profession of godliness and faith in their lamentation, as if they identified themselves with Stephen's life and death, and testified withal what great loss the church of God had suffered by his decease. The force of this history lies in the raising up decent burial and exceeding lamentation on the part of Jews who were not of the assembly, when those on whom it should have devolved were not there to pay the last offices of love. There is no need with Meyer to render the particle which introduces the account as an adversative. The writer was inspired to give it as an additional feature of the scene, not without interest and profit to the believer who sees and values the gracious care of God even in such circumstances. A Gamaliel stands up for righteous wisdom at the right moment, and pious men bury the martyr with great wailing when it could be least expected.

The true opposition is in what is next told us of his fanatical and bitter zeal who was afterward to be the most devoted servant of our Lord, who had also to experience what it is in the church to be less loved, the more abundantly he loved, spending and spent out most gladly for the souls of men. “But Saul was ravaging the assembly, entering the houses throughout, and, dragging both men and women, delivered [them] to prison” (ver. 3). Religious rage is of all the most unrelenting; and fresh victims do not satiate but whet its cruel appetite, sex and age being alike disregarded.

It may be well here to remark that εὐαγγλίζεσθαι to denounce the glad tidings is ministry of the gospel no less than κηρύσσειν to proclaim, or preach, in ver. 5. Mr. Brewster in his Lectures on this book after Dr. Hammond gives no valid reason for laying stress on the difference, in order to support what he calls “regular commission.” First the former word is used of our Lord Himself (Matt. 11:5;
Luke 4:18, 43; 7:22; 8:1; 20:1), as it is of the apostles (Luke 9:6; Acts 5:42; 13:32; 14:7, 15, 21; 15:35; 16:10; 17:18; Rom. 1:15; 10:20; 1 Cor. 1:17; 9:16, 18; 16:2; 2 Cor. 10:16; 11:7: Gal. 1:8, 11, 16, 23; 4:13; Eph. 3:8), which is more than enough to refute the mean or vague use to

which he would confine it. Secondly, the latter word is so little restricted to an official class, that it is applied to the healed leper and demoniac in their proclaiming what the Lord had done for each of them (Mark 1:45; 5:20), and so to those who published the cure of the deaf and dumb (Mark 7:36). Again it stands side by side with the former word in Luke 4:18, 19, 44; 8:1; 9:2; Rom. 10:15; 1 Cor. 1. 9. 15; 2 Cor. 11. Further, the latter, not the former word is used of those at Rome who during the apostle's imprisonment preached Christ, some even of envy and strife, thinking to raise up affliction for him in his bonds. Were there an atom of truth in the alleged distinction, there would be just the occasion to employ this supposed expression for mere speaking or irregular work. But it is not so; the Apostle describes the preaching of the heartless as well as the true workmen by the term (κηρ.) which Mr. B. will have to be distinctive of the truly commissioned official. The notion is therefore wholly unscriptural. Difference of course no one denies, for the one means to announce glad tidings, the other to proclaim or publish; but this is wholly independent of the desired confinement of preaching to those ordained for the purpose, an idea purely imaginary and opposed to all the evidence of scripture. Those who had the gift were not free but bound to exercise it in responsibility to Christ the Lord. Elders were chosen by apostles or apostolic envoys, and deacons by the multitude but for other objects; nor did they ever preach in virtue of their proper office: they might be evangelists like Philip. Otherwise they were no more authorized than the rest of them, like the dispersed before us. Rules and order even in earthly things are of moment, but quite distinct from preaching or teaching for which ordination is unknown to God's word.

But Dr. Guyse represents another class which limit “all” scattered abroad to “preachers!” This he does by misinterpreting ver. 2 of “Stephen's religious friends,” and those ravaged by Saul in ver. 3, so as to deny the general preaching by the turning it into “the remainder of the 120 that was called the Apostles' own company” (Acts 4:23), and perhaps including several other later converts that had received the gift of the Holy Ghost and went about as evangelists to preach the gospel! How sad these evasions of the truth on the part of godly men. Power makes itself felt; and gifted men should be the last to silence any Christian who can evangelize. For it is a question, not of divine qualification, but of human sanction; which is really a restraint on the Holy Spirit, a slight of Christ's grace, and a hindrance, so far as man can be a hindrance, of sinners' salvation. How blessed the grace of God, who, without design on the apostles' part or even a hint from any, turned the world's dispersion of the assembly into scattering far and wide the seeds of gospel truth.

(Note: Much truer to the word is Doddridge's note— “There is no room to inquire, where these poor refugees had their orders. They were endowed with miraculous gift; if they had not been so, the extraordinary call they had to spread the knowledge of Christ wherever they came, among those who were ignorant of Him, would abundantly justify them in what they did.” Fam. Expos. iii. 105, 100, Tenth Ed.)

Stephen: The Christian Proto Martyr, Stephen the Christian Protomartyr: 9. The Christian's Death Under Man

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

the Christian's Death Under Man's Hatred. Acts 7:57-60

None so recklessly cruel as those who have the highest religious prestige, and reject the testimony of God which is their guilt and His rejection of their claims. So it was then in the great council of Jerusalem. They like their ancestors always resisted the Holy Spirit; Stephen, “full of the Holy Spirit,” not only rebuked their present state (however decent in appearance) as worse than all the past, but testified such grace and glory in Jesus on high as never had been announced by God before. With eyes fixed on heaven he saw by the Spirit's power not only God's glory but Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and said (as already given) “Lo, I behold the Son of man standing at God's right hand.”

This drove them to mad fury. “And they cried out with a loud voice, and held their ears and rushed upon him with one accord; and having cast [him] out of the city they stoned [him] And the witnesses laid aside their clothes at the feet of a young man called Saul. And they stoned Stephen praying and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my Spirit. And kneeling down he cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge; and having said this he fell asleep” (vers. 57-60).

It is to be noted that Stephen spoke of the Lord as “the Son of man.” So the Lord spoke of Himself, as the rejection of His Messianic dignity came out more and more. If the Jews refused Him as Jehovah's anointed Son of David, He, bowing to the deep humiliation, comes as the Son of man to seek and to save that which is lost. But He also shall be seen sitting on the right hand of power and coming on the clouds of heaven. Stephen told them that he beheld the Son of man standing at God's right hand. It was an important step forward in promulgating the truth. Peter presented the heavens receiving the exalted Messiah until times of restoration of all things of which God spoke by mouth of His holy prophets since time began; and he therefore urged on the men of Israel to repent and be converted for the blotting out of their sins, so that seasons of refreshment should come from the Lord's presence, and Jesus be sent to bring them in. And this awaits Israel's conversion. Meanwhile the heavens are opened for the believer on earth; though he be not given to behold it like Stephen, it is no less his portion by faith. And the Lord Jesus receives on spirits above on death as surely as He did Stephen's.

Circumstances may differ; but the inspired record of Stephen's death is ours now to appropriate fully. We too are exhorted to be filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18); and it is our shortcoming and shame not to be so. We too are entitled to fix our eyes on heaven, and we lose much if we do not. There is no veil to hinder us now more than then. For the Christian, for the church, the veil is forever rent, and the heavens opened. As is the heavenly One, so are also the heavenly ones. It is the Christians' part with Christ before they are translated there at Christ's coming again; when we shall bear the image of the heavenly One, as we have borne and still bear the image of the dusty man Adam.

The Lord could say, Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit; and we with Stephen can say, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.

No doubt timid unbelief of the gospel (which alas! often accompanies faith in Christ's person) may follow the ancient corruption of the truth, and dream of an intermediate chamber of dimness at the least till the dawn of our resurrection. But this is utterly false and anti-scriptural. Paradise is no prison nor dark abode. The paradise of God is not in heaven merely; but as man's paradise in Eden was the choicest spot for unfallen Adam, so God's paradise is the choicest domain above. There Jesus went after He accomplished redemption and glorified God even

as to sin—the hardest task He ever undertook. Thither too the crucified but believing robber followed Him that very day, the unimpeachable witness that His blood cleanses from every sin. Therein all that overcome shall be in the day of glory, and eat of the tree of life when there is no tree of responsibility more to test, or threaten death (Rev. 2:7). Stephen bears a direct and full witness to the Christian, not of the future change for the body, but of departure to be with Christ, which, as says the apostle Paul, is “very much better” than remaining as we are, absent from the Lord.

Whilst this was the first thought of Stephen's heart, how precious the grace that shone next in his kneeling, and crying “with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.” He does not say now as the Lord did before He died, “for they know not what they do.” The Twelve, he himself, to speak of chiefs only, had laid that sin fully on their conscience. It was the practical grace of a Christian, doing well, suffering for it, and taking it patiently with earnest intercession that the evil-doing Jews might be forgiven. O what a contrast with the Latin and Greek cursing communities, as well as with the poor Jews themselves!

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Stephen: The Christian Proto Martyr, Stephen the Christian Protomartyr: 8. The Fury of the Jews and His Si Jesus on High

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

The Fury of the Jews, and His Sight of Jesus on High. Acts 7:54-56

Intense exasperation followed Stephen's appeal; and the words he added redoubled their fury to madness and murder.

“And as they heard these things, they were cut to the heart and gnashed their teeth upon him. But, being full of the Holy Spirit, he looked steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and said, Lo, I behold the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God.”

Impossible to conceive a more solemn issue on the testimony of Stephen, or a more awful proof of the Jews' hatred of the truth in direct antagonism to the Holy Spirit. His sketch of their history was indisputably true. Their recent behavior and their present truculence were due to the same in heritance of alienation from God and His word which had already entailed woe upon woe. And darker clouds would gather round them, and still darker await them in the consummation of the age when at length another godly remnant shall be raised up by grace, not to form part of the church as now, but to be the nucleus of the generation to come. Of these Micah (5:3) speaks as the residue of His brethren, when the Ruler in Israel is about to stand and feed in the strength of Jehovah, in the majesty of the name of Jehovah His God. And they shall abide (or trust), with the unbelieving mass devoted to destruction; “for now shall He be great even to the ends of the earth,” instead of being hid in God as now, the Head of the church, and they, instead of being merged in the church, “shall return unto the children of Israel:” the work which divine mercy and power will accomplish in that day.

But Stephen, like ourselves, had to withstand in the evil day, while the Lord is rejected on earth and crowned with glory in heaven. He was one of those whom the Lord before His prophecy on Mount Olivet had prepared His adversaries to expect. “Therefore, behold, I send unto you prophets and wise men and scribes; and of them ye will kill and crucify, and of them ye will scourge in your synagogues, and will persecute from city to city; so that all the righteous blood shed upon the earth should come upon you, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zachariah, son of Berachiah, whom ye slew between the sanctuary and the altar. Verily I say unto you, All these things, shall come upon this generation.” Stephen's words penetrated their hearts, and their visage betrayed their murderous intent without giving the sham trial they gave His Master. No defiance met their fierce gaze. But being full of the Holy Spirit he looked steadfastly into heaven, where grace gave him to see God's glory. It was a miraculous vision without doubt, admirably fitted to comfort the spirit of the faithful servant, who was as full of compassion for his brethren after the flesh as of zeal for the Lord.

But how pointed the contrast! they always resisting the Holy Spirit; he full of the Holy Spirit.

He was given to see another sight still nearer to his heart, “Jesus standing at God's right hand.” This opened his lips to confess His name in the most direct terms, and in the concentrated power of all he had testified. “Lo, I behold the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at God's right hand.”

There had been a transitional testimony up to this. The Messiah was rejected on earth, and the Jews were the most extreme in urging the deepest shame and ignominy for Him who was born King of the Jews. Thus they in their blindness fulfilled the scriptures that so it must be, if even privileged man be as wicked as God is good. But as Peter preached, God raised Him up and made the very Jesus whom His people crucified both Lord and Christ. No apostle exceeded this till now. In Acts 3:13 and 4:27 it is still the Messianic title of “servant” (not” Son”). Stephen, on the utter refusal of Israel to bow his stiff neck, testifies to His being “the Son of man:” an enlarged and judicial title of His glory, well known even in the O.T. in the Psalms and Prophets, as the Lord had pointed out its force from the time that rejection began decidedly. So that Stephen was quite in keeping with the truth; for the Jew stood in dead opposition to the glorified Messiah, no less than to the Messiah in humiliation. Jesus was still standing at God's right hand. But the Judge was at the door. So he saw Him on high and proclaimed Him as the Son of man, who will surely come in the clouds of heaven, judging Israel and all the nations.

Nor should we overlook that, as he said, Lo, I behold the heavens opened.” To him it was a literal sight, as none should doubt who believe in God's power and grace. It is recorded for our comfort in faith. For it is meant to be as real in its spiritual significance to the Christian, as it was in every way to him who saw and bore witness. As for us the veil is ever rent, so the heavens are always open. Jesus is there, the Son of God, sent that we might live through Him, and that He might die for us as propitiation for our sins. He is there now for us, man entered into the glory of God, and Savior of all who believe, the fore-runner for such there. And the heavens which were opened on Him, heaven's object, are

open for us, that we may be at home in spirit there, before He comes to fetch us. Here we are unknown; our citizenship is there where He is. It is our joy and privilege to be heavenly, and not of the world as He is not. We are already delivered by His grace from that judgment which the Name imports for Israel and the nations; for we belong to Him, no longer to them. We say it, not of pride but of faith, being not even our own but bought with a price, and what a price!

Stephen: The Christian Proto Martyr, Stephen the Christian Protomartyr: 6. Moses in the Wilderness

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

Moses In The Wilderness. Acts 7:36-43.

In the last forty years of Moses the evidence adduced is no less striking both morally and typically to convict the Jews from age to age of the same unbelief and rebellion, and to display the ways of God in Christ, notwithstanding their self-will and blindness. “Who [is] a God like unto Thee that pardoneth iniquity and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He retaineth not His anger forever, because He delighteth [in] mercy. He will turn again, He will have compassion upon us; He will subdue our iniquities, and Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea. Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, the mercy to Abraham, which Thou hast sworn to our fathers from the days of old” (Mic. 7:18-20).

Here the scene lies mainly in the desert, after Israel's redemption through Moses' power in Egypt. “He led them out, having wrought wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red Sea, and in the wilderness, forty years. This is the Moses who said to the sons of Israel, A prophet shall God raise up to you out of your brethren like me. This is he that was in the assembly (or, congregation) in the wilderness, with the angel that spoke to him in the mount Sinai, and with our fathers; who received living oracles to give us, to whom our fathers would not be subject, but thrust [him] aside, and turned back in their hearts unto Egypt, saying to Aaron, Make us gods who shall go before us; for this Moses, who brought us out of the land of Egypt—we know not what is become of him. And they made a calf in those days, and offered a sacrifice to the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their hands. But God turned and delivered them up to serve the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the prophets, Did ye offer me victims and sacrifices forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? And ye took up the tent of Moloch and the star of the god Raiphan, the figures which ye made to worship them; and I will transport you beyond Babylon” (vers. 36-43).

When things are at their worst for the Jews, not only the apostasy but the lawless one, the antichrist revealed, and the godless of Christendom and of Judaism worshipping the man of sin and Satan as the true God in His temple, a greater than Moses shall appear to the destruction of His adversaries and the deliverance of an afflicted and poor remnant who, small though it be, shall become a strong nation, as He will hasten it in His time. Not only will He redeem Israel from the hand of the enemy, but gather them out of the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south. Wonders and signs shall be, not in one land only, but for all the world, “signs in sun and moon and stars, and upon the earth distress of nations in perplexity at the sea roaring and billows, men swooning from fear and expectation of what is coming on the inhabited earth; for the powers of the heavens shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming with power and great glory.” “And the Redeemer will come to Zion, and unto those that turn from transgression in Jacob;” and Jehovah's covenant with them, being of His own grace after their manifest and utter ruin, will be from henceforth and forever. So Jehovah says: what matters that which others say?

Now professing Christians are not entitled to prophesy smooth things for themselves, but to learn that they happened to Israel, and were written for our admonition as to whom the ends of the ages are met. For are the saints waiting in patience for Christ, dependent and subject to Him who is gone on high? Do they not act as if they wot not what is become of Him? and instead of being led by His word and Spirit, have they not set up calves of gold idols to go before them, rejoicing in the works of their own hands? And has not God delivered by far the majority to worship images, pictures, crucifixes, dead men's relics, angels, saints, and the Virgin Mary, like Israel serving the host of heaven as madly as any heathen?

Consider the serious lesson in what Stephen quoted from the Greek Version of Amos 5:25-27. When the Spirit of prophecy set forth their coming captivity, He goes back, not to the wicked kings of Israel, nor to shameless sons of David who ruled Judah, but to the idolatry in the wilderness at the very time when they outwardly honored the tabernacle of Jehovah and the priesthood of Aaron. But God saw all the while the hollowness of their victims and sacrifices in His name; for in their hearts and secretly, they took up the tent of Moloch and the star of the god Raiphan (or, Romphan), the forms which they made to worship them. However God may wait in His admirable patience, it is the early unjudged sin that decides, though the execution of judgment may not come for many centuries afterward. The writings of the earliest uninspired men of the Christian era prove the fallen state which undermined and destroyed the apostolic teaching; whilst the centuries that followed kept ever growing worse and worse, till the highest arrogance sat enthroned on the ruins of the church's heavenly association with Christ in entire separation from the world.

If it was rebellion against Jehovah for “our fathers,” as Stephen pointed out, to renounce subjection to Moses and thrust him away, and turn in their hearts unto Egypt, how much more heinous is the guilt of those who read but reject the Lord's ways in worship and service for their own pandering to the world and man's will in divine things! Is not the Holy Spirit now sent from heaven to be in and with us forever in glorifying the Lord and His written will? The true question for the saint is, not comparing the evils of this or that denomination in order to choose the least offensive, but to cleave to Him with purpose, obedient to His word, and counting on the Holy Spirit's readiness to help, guard, and guide to God's glory.

Stephen: The Christian Proto Martyr, Stephen the Christian Protomartyr: 5. Moses in Midian

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

Moses in Midian. Acts 7:29-35

Moses then was rejected like the Messiah, rejected by his own people, God's people, for whose sake he had given up his earthly ease, honor, and prospects. His faith was thoroughly of and in God, yet to be vindicated in due time. But the energy that slew the Egyptian evil-doer was before the season, and gave occasion to the heartless Israelite to repel his gracious intervention and expose him to the vengeance of the oppressor. Moses must flee from his beloved but unworthy brethren, and wait on God's time and word in a strange land. He could not yet say, like the perfect Messiah, “Waiting I waited for Jehovah.”

“And Moses fled at this saying, and became a sojourner in the land of Midian where he begat two sons. And when forty years were fulfilled, an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of mount Sinai, in the flame of fire of a bush. And Moses as he saw wondered at the vision; and as he went up to consider, there came Jehovah's voice, I [am] the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob. And Moses, all a trembling, durst not consider. And Jehovah said to him, Loose the sandal of thy feet, for the place on which thou standest is holy ground. I surely saw the ill-usage of my people that [is] in Egypt, and heard their groaning, and came down to take them out. And now come, I will send thee unto Egypt. This Moses whom they refused, saying, Who established thee a ruler and judge? him God sent a ruler and a deliverer (or, redeemer) with the angel's hand that appeared to him in the bush” (vers. 29-35).

The second period of forty years is full of spiritual instruction for us. Moses must learn the nothingness for God of that long span of his early life when trained in all wisdom of the Egyptians. Might in his words and deeds of that sort had no worth in his eyes, that no flesh should boast before God; that according as it is written, He that boasteth, let him boast in Jehovah. It is what answers to the Christian principle, My grace sufficeth thee; for power is perfected in weakness, as its exercise must take its start from the word of the Lord, as one is guided by the Spirit. Thus is it obedience, without which is nothing that glorifies God. This is all the more striking, because in Egypt it was during the earlier period that we read of that distinctive faith, which, as it flowed from God, also delighted Him, of which, we have the record in Heb. 11:24-26. Yet the spiritual dealing that follows is as invaluable for the soul in His service, as the blessing that lays the foundation for it is indispensable. Natural energy, which is man's glory, must be judged in and by the saint to God's glory. Then ensues true practical dependence on God, and the felt need of His direction. Even thus, when the call comes to act for God, what hesitation, and even shrinking, and sense of difficulty to the verge of unbelief! What a contrast with his self-confidence in the earlier days!

But it was not only the wilderness as the scene of continuous trial, nor the quiet seclusion with God which the lowly life of a shepherd furnished, to unlearn as it were what Egypt had taught, nor the long daily proof to humble and prove what was in the heart (so blessed to Moses who bowed, and so fatal afterward to Israel who did not bow). Moses had God's manifestation in the way most suited to the work given Him to do, in a flame of fire out of a bush that burned but was not being consumed. It was holy ground: Moses was told to unloose his sandals from off his feet, and heard the divine voice say, I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob. It was for the fathers' sakes to whom He had pledged His promise and whose God He was. But He had also heard His people's cry under bitter oppression, and came down to deliver them. They then groaned and sighed by reason of the bondage; but they had not the faith to cry to Him. Yet their cry came up to God; and God heard their groaning, and remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob, which they had forgotten, long sunk in the darkness and idolatries of their cruel masters. But God looked on the sons of Israel and acknowledged them, and called His servant Moses, at this point of their depression, to the great work of crushing the pride of Egypt, and pouring contempt on their gods in the redemption of His people.

But more we may note in passing: observe the force of his quoting the call to unloose his sandal. Holy ground is where God manifests Himself. It was not merely Jerusalem. So Jehovah decided with Moses in Midian; so afterward with Joshua when he crossed the Jordan. Their idolizing the courts of the sanctuary was out of season. But religious pride is like other pride, and often lifts its head higher in abject poverty. And the case of the Jews who charged Stephen falsely with blasphemous words against the holy place was yet more desperate and unfounded. For they had rejected their own Messiah, and God had raised Him from the dead and set Him at His own right hand, far above every principality and authority and power and lordship, and every name named not only in this age but also in that to come, and subjected all things under His feet, and gave Him as Head over all things to the church. Hence the center of divine glory and attraction is no longer on earth but in heaven. What had holiness relatively once has lost it by unbelieving contempt of the Lord of glory, whom both the Jews and the world's princes crucified. The only holy place God owns now, or faith too accepts, is above where Christ is. But though Stephen does not argue here but simply cites the scripture they all acknowledged, they are thus each way shown without excuse in their petty and malevolent jealousy. God's words exposed and refuted any such charge of blasphemy.

Jehovah must take the initiative. It must be manifestly His work, as Moses had learned. And he became a type of a greater than Moses, as Joseph too before him, in being rejected by and separated from his brethren so dear to him, before God used him to become their ruler and deliverer. In very deed for this was the cruelest and haughtiest of Pharaohs raised up to show him His power, and that Jehovah's name might be declared in all the earth. Instead of energy to go forward, Moses was hesitating and diffident in the extreme, and the people hearkened not for anguish of spirit and from hard service. It was Jehovah that set out in tender words and with all assurance His undertaking Israel's cause, not only to deliver them from their sorrow under Egypt's oppression, but to bring them up out of that land. unto a good and spacious land, unto a land flowing with milk and honey.

No doubt another reason was before His all-embracing mind Gross evil enveloped that goodly land: abominable idolatry with its debasing immorality. Jehovah would judge the iniquity of the Amorites, while he made Israel to take possession of the land, which had been so plainly marked out from Abraham's day for his descendants. But the O.T. yields ample evidence that Joseph and Moses were but types, and that all that Israel have yet enjoyed is but provisional, and, as far as the people and kings were concerned, an utter short-coming till He come who, fulfilling these types and many more, will bring in the blessing for Israel, no less than accomplish the judgment on their enemies. Then too shall be the higher glories of the heavenly things, and the vaster reconciliation of all things, over which Christ is the appointed Head, who will share all with the glorified heirs of God and joint-heirs with Himself.

Appeal To Moses Next. Acts 7:17-28.

Still more prolonged is the use made of this even fuller type of Messiah. This we may examine according to the three divisions of his life; each of forty years, in Egypt, in Midian, and in the wilderness.

“But as the time of the promise drew near which God assured to Abraham, the people increased and multiplied in Egypt, until there arose a different king over Egypt who knew not Joseph. He dealt subtly with our race, and evil-entreated the fathers, to make their babes outcast that they might not live. At which season Moses was born and was fair exceedingly [unto God]; and he was nourished three months in his father's house. And when he was cast out; the daughter of Pharaoh took him up and nourished him for her own son. And Moses was instructed in every wisdom of Egyptians; and he was mighty in his words and works. And when a space of forty years was being filled to him, it came up on his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel. And seeing one wronged. he defended and avenged him that was oppressed, smiting the Egyptian. And he thought that his brethren would understand that God by his hand was giving them deliverance; but they understood not. And the next day he appeared to them when contending, and urged them unto peace, saying, Ye are brethren: why do ye wrong one another? But he that did his neighbor wrong thrust him away, saying, Who established thee ruler and judge over us? Dost thou wish to kill me, as thou killedst the Egyptian yesterday?” (Vers. 17-28.)

The time of promised deliverance drew near, but it was not yet come. A different king over Egypt arose, who knew not Joseph, and looked askance at the growth and rapid increase of the Israelites. The providence of God raised up a fitting instrument for His merciful purpose. But even Moses must learn dependence on Him, and that neither the advantage of his person, nor the training in Egypt's wisdom, nor the court influence of Pharaoh's daughter, could avail to effect that purpose to His glory. Yet who was ever more strikingly marked out by divine providence, and who had better human means and opportunities? Though an outcast for death, he nevertheless was nourished by the princess royal as her own son. Not only instructed in all that Egypt could teach, but mighty in his words and works, who so proper as he by the favor of the king to lead God's people peacefully, out of Egypt and their frontier sojourn to the promised land? But no: this would have been man's method and the world's wisdom to the praise of Moses' genius and prudence, and in no way a foreshadow of Christ.

Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ: as Joseph was a witness of it even in Canaan, so was Moses now in Egypt. “By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be evil-entreated with the people of God than have temporary enjoyment of sin, accounting the reproach of the Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he looked off unto the recompence” (Heb. 11:24-26). Thus grace wrought in practical righteousness; it ought ever to do so in the believer, as it perfectly and ever shone in Christ. It was in Moses the eminent proof of his faith, relinquishing advisedly every gain which providence had given him of a circumstantial kind, that no flesh should glory, but that he who glories might glory in Jehovah. Nor was it only that he turned his back on the world's power, splendor, and pleasures, for Jehovah, leaving any charge of ingratitude to the royal preserver and munificent patron of his life up to mature manhood. He chose to suffer affliction with the people of God, His poor faulty people in their present low and degraded estate, rather than enjoy what was sinful and ungodly. He appreciated the actual bond of God to His people, and unreservedly acted on it in faith. Grace enabled him not only to see but to do the truth.

The reasoning of prudence would have kept him where providence cast his lot without will of his own. Faith pierces through all such pleas or excuses, because it follows God's love to His own, even in their abasement; as Christ did thoroughly, who never yielded to premature energy, but waited in patience, suffering meanwhile to the uttermost. Any other principle however it be disguised is worldliness; and Moses is a blessed sample of fidelity, whatever mistake may have mixed up with it. The word to the Christian is plain: “not minding high things, but going along with the lowly.” It is the very reverse of “condescending” to them; for this retains pride of place while affording countenance. Compare our Lord's words in Matt. 20:25-28. “Not so shall it be among you: but whosoever would become great among you shall be your servant; and whosoever would be first among you shall be your slave; even as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

Thus holiness to God is ever separateness from evil, but also identification in heart and way with His people. But faith is now tried, and its path never long runs smooth. And here we are shown that Moses, when about forty years old, had it on his heart to visit his brethren the sons of Israel; and seeing one wronged, he defended and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian. Hating unrighteousness, he punished the oppressor of his brother, heedless of the consequence. But the following day his love met a rude repulse, and this not from an Egyptian but from an Israelite, whose wrong was now worse; for he rejected the intervention of Moses to make peace, when he spoke to their heart of their unworthy contention. He that did the wrong to his neighbor—it is ever so—resented the love that sought their good, and thrust Moses away. He did worse still. “Who,” said he, “made thee a ruler and a judge over us? Wilt thou kill me, as thou killedst the Egyptian yesterday?”

The time of deliverance was not yet. Moses so far was mistaken. He had not yet fully judged himself; he unconsciously was off his guard in using his might in words and deeds. The people must be brought down lower must cry to God under their bitter burdens, the Egyptians be forced to wish Israel good, and proud Pharaoh be crushed to nothing under God's mighty hand. Moses thought that his brethren would understand that God by his hand was giving them deliverance. But they understood not. And this is a far more searching trial than any fear of Egyptian anger. The Lord, who never failed, as Moses and others, suffered incomparably more than all for His people's unbelief, yea from His apostles' inability to understand Him, till He died and rose and sent His Spirit from heaven to lead them into all the truth. Man despised Him, and the nation abhorred. “We hid as it were our faces from Him; He was despised, and we esteemed Him not.”

The saddest and most painful thing was His brethren's alienation. In this Joseph and Moses were types of Him; but each in a somewhat distinct way, the better to foreshow Him. Joseph was separated from his hating brothers, to rise through a humiliation still deeper where he was as a man that has no help, cast away among the dead and remembered no more. From all this he rose at once to be the highest next to him on the throne, quite outside Israel over the Gentiles. Moses was forced to flee from his brethren who would have valued his turning to

account the world's influence, and cared not for his going down in love to share their affliction. But his heart was ever with them in his separation from them, and awaited the time to return for their deliverance from Egypt. Nor can any fact more clearly mark the difference than that he called his son Gershom, “a stranger"; while Joseph called his eldest Manasseh, “forgotten.” For such he was, in no way settled down in Midian; but his affections were with his poor brethren, and he looked for the day when by his hand deliverance would come for them.

In Joseph's name for his eldest we have the other side of what was so fully verified in Christ; for God had made him forget all his toil, and all his father's house; as the second was named Ephraim, or fruitful, in the land of his affliction. But Gershom expressed that Moses was a stranger in a strange land, and Eliezer's name only comes in later, My God a help, when Moses under Jehovah's power had delivered the people. So carefully does the inspiring Spirit deign to keep us even in typical shadows from the narrowness of the human mind or will, and lead us on to delight in the largeness of divine grace in our Lord Jesus.

Stephen: The Christian Proto Martyr, Stephen the Christian Protomartyr: 3. Joseph and His Patriarchal Bret

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

Joseph and His Patriarchal Brethren. Acts 7:9-16.

At this point the defense carries us on to the first of two signal types of our Lord, which yield overwhelming evidence to every true heart and exercised conscience.

“And the patriarchs, envying Joseph, sold him into Egypt. And God was with him, and delivered him out of all his tribulations, and gave him favor and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh, king of Egypt; and he appointed him chief over Egypt and all his house. But a famine came upon all the land of Egypt and Canaan, and great distress; and our fathers found no food. But Jacob, having heard of there being corn in Egypt, sent out our fathers first; and at the second [time] Joseph was made known to his brethren, and the family of Joseph became known to Pharaoh. And Joseph sent and called down to him his father Jacob, and all [his] kindred, seventy-five souls. And Jacob went down into Egypt and died, he and our fathers, and were carried over to Sychem (Shechem), and laid in the sepulcher which Abraham bought for a sum of money from the sons of Enamor of (or rather, in) Sychem” (vers. 9-16).

Here it is no question of unclean Canaanites or oppressive Egyptians, nor is it the failure of a saint through amiable feeling, or the pinch of want. The heads of the tribes of Israel betray their evil state from the first. Nor was there any just ground of provocation, but insubjection to the father, hatred of their godly brother, and rebellion against the mind of God. They envied Joseph and, even when they gave up their deadly purpose, sold him away into Egypt. Pride of position hates the faith that rebukes it, the spirit of grace in deed and truth, and proceeds to enmity beyond measure, more cruelly than the world.

Not a word does Stephen say of the Lord Jesus, yet who could fail to see the parallel between the Just One, and the guiltless object of patriarchal jealousy? Could any one doubt that his was no ingenious device to serve a desired turn, but the unquestionable lesson of their own scriptures? Had not the first book of the law God's moral aim and spiritual purpose in laying bare the base conduct of the fathers, and the sufferings of Joseph? Even their scribes did not limit scripture to a passing person or circumstance; the Pharisees confessed its divine authority; the chief priests, the elders, and the doctors of the law owned that under the surface it is full of reference to the Messiah, the hope of Israel. To confine it to its more immediate bearing literally was to deny its prophetic character, and betray oneself a skeptic or Sadducee.

So plain and direct were the facts in Genesis that it was enough to state them with all brevity. Yet when they are duly weighed, their more profound application becomes apparent; and God's design thereby is as important for souls, as it is worthy of Himself. Israel's wickedness through unbelief is as manifestly foreshewn, as Messiah's humiliation and rejection by His brethren. Such was Stephen's thesis, which he could not but speak out if he cared for the Lord and for their souls. Disdain it they might, but it was just the truth they needed then as they do still. But if the Jews be prominent as they are, Gentiles share the same sin. It is at bottom the common guilt and ruin of all mankind, as the cross proclaims.

Equally certain is it, that as God was with the abhorred Joseph, so was He in all fullness with Jesus, the object of divine delight as He was the depositary of wisdom to His glory; and when delivered out of all His tribulations, deeper than ever befell any, God highly exalted Him and set Him at His own right hand. But if it was not the Israelitish kingdom, of which Zion is the center, this only confirms the propriety of the type. It was the administration of a kingdom wholly different from the day when He shall be the one king of all the earth as well as of the chosen people, coming in manifested glory on the clouds of heaven. That day is in no way arrived, as it surely will. But the despised and rejected One is exalted on His Father's throne, not yet on His own; and He has all authority over a kingdom as extensive as the world in a form quite special which He received when cast out and separate from His brethren. Of this Joseph's exaltation by the king of Egypt is the striking shadow, made chief over Egypt and all his house.

But as Joseph predicted in his sphere, so did the Lord in His far higher and greater deal with all the world. Yet famine and great distress of every kind His grace can use for even that mercy and blessing. But in order to be blessed the sinner must feel his evil state, and Himself work too, that He may withdraw man from his purpose, and hide pride from him, deliver his soul from going to the pit, and give him to see the light. Food for the inner man is only from Him, as the sons of Jacob found none in Canaan; and their father, hearing of it in Egypt for the fulfillment of divine purpose, sent them there, where Joseph had provided for a famished world, and his heart yearned to supply his father and his brethren, little as they knew, who sold him away there. They thought evil against him; but God meant it for good, and to preserve them a posterity in the earth and save their lives. How much more was this verified in the greater than Joseph!

Nevertheless the blindness was to pass from the guilty brothers. No thanks to them, but to his grace who on the second time was made known to them. So it will be for the Jew when the Lord fulfills, yet exceeds, the type as He ever does. The repentance will be as deep as their faith will be living. “And I will pour upon the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem the spirit of grace and of supplication; and

they shall look upon me whom they have pierced; and they shall mourn for him as one mourneth for an only one, and shall be in bitterness for him as one that is in bitterness for a firstborn." How touchingly even the type exhibits this inward word in Judah's plea with Jacob that Benjamin should go as was required, and with Joseph for Jacob when he owns that God had found their iniquity, offering to abide as bondman in lieu of Benjamin! How yet more when Joseph weeping aloud made himself known to his brethren! Yes, it was to save their lives, and many more, with a great deliverance.

Nor was this all. "In the best of the land," said the great king, "make thy father and brethren to dwell"... "And Joseph placed his father and his brethren in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had commanded." For this type looks at a far wider circle of blessing than Canaan; just as the rejected Son of man is destined to have dominion and glory and a kingdom that all peoples, nations, and languages, should serve him. Compare too Isa. 49—It is a light thing that thou shouldst be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth. But this in no way hinders the special honor and nearness of Israel; for the Gentiles shall bring Zion's sons in their bosom, and carry his daughters on their shoulders; and kings shall be thy nourishers, and their princes thy nursing mothers. They shall bow down to thee with face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet. This future earthly glory however is not at all noticed by Stephen, who speaks here to conscience in view of Jewish unbelief and sin against the Lord, as this only was then seasonable.

As no small objection has been taken to verses 14-16, suffice it to say that Stephen cites the number (75) of Jacob's kin, not as the Hebrew gives it (70), but as in the Greek version, the Septuagint, which adds these to the two sons of Joseph in their descendants, &c. It is only a further addition; as in the Hebrew itself we find 66 as well as 70 according to a differing point of view. The difficulty in the last clause of ver. 16 is more considerable, and lies mainly in the name of Abraham where Jacob might have been expected with burial of his sons in Sychem. That Stephen was ignorant of the Hebrew enumeration (66, and 70), or confounded the sepulcher in Hebron with that of Shechem, is too absurd, save for a rationalist. How impute it to one so perfectly at home with the inspired history, not only in its obvious facts, but in their spiritual and prophetic import, to which the natural mind in the learned is as blind as it is in the unlearned? It was not without motive that he should draw attention by the way to the burial of the heads of the tribes, not with their fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but in the seat of their Samaritan rivals. To account for the insertion of Abraham here, and for the peculiar description of the purchase from the sons of Hamor in or of Sychem, is another thing.

Stephen: The Christian Proto Martyr, Stephen the Christian Protomartyr: 2. The Appeal - Abraham

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

Acts 7:1-8.

It is notable how mild was the challenge of the high-priest. He like the rest seems for the moment overawed by the radiance that shone in Stephen's face. It could not but have reminded them of Moses at a critical point in Israel's history as well as of his own; and now he was accused of speaking against Moses, the sanctuary, and the law, yea of threatening the temple's destruction.

"And the high-priest said, Are these things so? And he said,1 Brethren and fathers, hearken. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran, and said to him, Go out of thy land and out of thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall show thee. Then going out of the land of the Chaldeans he dwelt in Haran; and thence, after his father died, he removed him into this land in which ye now dwell. And he gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot-plant; and he promised to give it him for a possession, and to his seed after him when he had no child. And God spoke thus, that his seed should be a sojourner in a strange land, and they shall enslave them, and entreat [them] evil four hundred years. And the nation to which they shall be slaves will I judge, said God; and after these things they shall come out and serve me in this place. And he gave him a covenant of circumcision; and thus he begat Isaac and circumcised him the eighth day; and Isaac, Jacob, and Jacob, the twelve patriarchs" (vers. 1-8).

It might seem astonishing (if we did not know from God what the heart is) that so many men of ability and learning have failed to apprehend the admirable power and nice relevancy of Stephen's answer. But evidently the inspiring Spirit attached to it signal importance, as shown in more space devoted to it than to any other in the book of the Acts. Its force as an appeal to Jewish conscience assembled in council, sealed in Stephen's blood, is another though awful proof of its cogency. Had it consisted of, or only contained the "demonstrable errors" which some have dared to impute, it must have fallen at once through its own impotence under men's contempt. Not so; it was the energy of indisputable truth which pierced through forms to their hard hearts; as it roused their indignation to white heat, when their own sad history of unbelief, disobedience, and opposition to God was proved from holy writ to be as applicable to their present state as it had been to their forefathers in early days.

"The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia." What unanswerable evidence of sovereign grace! To overlook it springs from a wicked heart of incredulity in turning away from a living God, and hardens the soul in self-sufficiency, so that His voice is distasteful, disliked, and dreaded. Yet had they not often heard and read Joshua's testimony (Josh. 24:2, 3)? "Thus saith Jehovah, the God of Israel, our fathers dwelt of old time beyond the river, Terah father of Abraham and father of Nahor; and they served other gods. And I took your father Abraham from beyond the river, and led him throughout all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his seed, and gave him Isaac." Assuredly it was not Stephen who slighted Jehovah's call of him who was to be dignified pre-eminently as "the friend of God." It was many centuries before the law, far away from Canaan, expressly before he dwelt in Haran; it was in Mesopotamia, infamous as the mother of idolatries, and the prison to which idolatrous Judah was sent, judicially captive, for that sin.

Nothing can be conceived finer than the exact discrimination given to this holy man of God in beginning with Abraham. He first was not only chosen by grace, but called out of open departure from the true God, from country and kin devoted to other gods, to be the head of a family, and at length a people, whether in flesh like Israel, or (when Israel lost place for a while by apostasy) by believers spiritually as now separated to God for Himself, His own peculiarly. It was first outward, first what was natural, not spiritual which only came to light when the

Jews rejected their own Messiah. The principle was plain in Abraham, though even in his case darkened and delayed by yielding to human feeling. For though he went out of his land, he did not get out of his kin, but dwelt with his father in Haran till Terah died, Then only God removed him into the land in which the Jews gloried as their dwelling.

It was not so with Abraham. He was a pilgrim and stranger in Canaan; and this by divine design: so far was Jewish boast from God's mind which Abraham enjoyed by faith. Faith brought him out of the land of the Chaldeans; but how in Canaan? “By faith he became a sojourner in the land of promise as not in his own [land]; for he looked for the city which hath the foundations” (Heb. 11:8-10). The Jews, like unbelievers at all times, are on the ground, not of faith but of tradition and external privilege. But the God of glory gave Abraham no inheritance in it, not even a foot-plant, and He promised to give it him for a possession, and to his seed after him when he had no child. Abraham thus lived on promise and walked by faith, not by sight. This has its highest form and power in Christianity; and its opposite is in Judaism as then, especially in such as hated Stephen.

How strange that any Christian should be so dull as not to perceive that this very exordium is brimful of what exposes the Jewish antagonists of fighting against their own scriptures and the God who sent the Lord Jesus in their hatred of the gospel testimony. We shall see that all the statements which the chapter records follow up the same yet ever growing evidence urged on their hearts, if peradventure they might hear and live. But none are so impervious as those who rest on an ancestral religion with godly men in the line, who suffered in their day for their living faith from those who had not faith, the predecessors of those who resist the truth to-day.

“And God spoke thus, that his seed should he a sojourner in a strange land, and they shall enslave and entreat [them] evil four hundred years. And the nation to which they shall he slaves will I judge, said God. And after these things they shall come out, and serve me in this place.” At no time was there a more conspicuous proof of God's interest in them, than during those centuries, and the time of deliverance studded with miracles and still more glowing prophecies which followed: a time in every way striking both in Egypt and in the wilderness, but entirely apart from establishment in the land of promise. Never was there a more awful display of His displeasure and of blows in His wrath which befell their oppressors. Never was there a more wonderful witness in the past of His adoption of Israel as His own people, redeemed from the world's bondage, and its then mightiest and proudest monarch. When was a people like Israel carried through the desert by His own constant presence and faithful care, spite of as constant refractoriness even to rebellion on their part, kept as they were solely by Him with not a merit or a resource of theirs?

As His mouth had threatened judgments on injurious enslavers, so did His hand perform in due season. And this dealing of Jehovah the God of Israel fills the Law, and the Psalms, and the Prophets, which predict yet greater glories to come when they own not only their idolatrous evil but the still more heinous one of rejecting their own Messiah. Could any line of argument more lay bare the character of Jewish opposition to Stephen, or more powerfully support his testimony? For “this place” where they were to do Jehovah religious service in chap. 7:7 was as different as possible from “this holy place” or “this place” in chap. 6:13, 14. The one had the magnificence of “great stones and costly,” and the splendor of gold and rich array; the other, the awe-inspiring and evident display of divine majesty in the true God proclaiming His law to His people in the wilderness of Sinai. Was the sublimity greater in Jerusalem or the temple from which the glory was departing? “Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.” Men are apt to boast when they have least ground for it, and every title reason for humiliation; and this was Stephen's plea.

Another word is added in ver. 8, the pertinence of which one could not expect to be felt by those who only see the surface of scripture. “And He gave him a covenant of circumcision; and thus he begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day; and Isaac, Jacob, and Jacob, the twelve patriarchs.” God after the deluge had established His covenant with Noah and with his seed after him; “and with every living soul that [is] with you, of bird, of cattle, and every beast of the earth with you; of all that go out of the ark—every beast of the earth;” henceforth, no flood to destroy the earth. Of this everlasting covenant, God set His bow in the clouds (Gen. 9) as sign. It was God's covenant with nature, and as permanent as nature itself for an earth inaugurated by sacrifice (chap. 8). But the covenant with Abraham, of which circumcision was the sign, had a far deeper significance.

Important as God's institution of government was for man on the earth, the foundation of a stock in Abraham, separated from demon worship to the one true God, the Almighty, to be their God in their generations for an everlasting covenant, was incomparably deeper. But even this was far from the narrowness to which Judaism reduced it; for if the covenant of circumcision was with Abraham, he should be father of a multitude of nations, and kings should come out of him. Hence its sign was not to be in the clouds for every eye to see, but in the flesh, with which it dealt war to the knife, proclaiming death on it as unclean; not merely purity demanded, but death in figure of Christ's death for His own, naturally as unclean and ungodly as others. It was not of Moses but of the fathers, as the Lord told the Jews (John 7:22), proud of the law which none of them really kept, as thus too all came under its curse. But as a shadow, whereof Christ was the substance, it was most instructive, as the confession of flesh cut off unsparingly to be God's people, instead of the vain endeavor to ameliorate it by ordinance, morality, or philosophy.

With Abraham therefore circumcision began and was to be perpetuated in his seed after the flesh, and even with any stranger born in their house, the imperative sign of Jehovah's covenant in his flesh. But the Christian enjoys it in the better way of the spirit, circumcised with circumcision not done by hand, in the putting off of the body of the flesh in the circumcision of the Christ (Col. 2:11). Here we are carefully told that “thus he (Abraham) begot Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day” (the day of resurrection and its glory according to that new estate for the believer according to the counsels of grace). In Gen. 15 he believed God, who reckoned it to him for (or, as) righteousness; he had been called out, and obeyed the call, as separated to Jehovah, both in uncircumcision. But it was after his circumcision, and in the full order of the covenant that he “thus begot Isaac and circumcised him the eighth day.” So it went on henceforth regularly in the line: and Isaac [begot] Jacob; and Jacob the twelve patriarchs? It was a privilege conferred on strangers, on slaves; though so requisite for every male in Israel that he who neglected it was to be cut off from his peoples for his breach of the covenant. Who best maintained its spirit Stephen, or his adversaries? Who can intelligently aver that Stephen beat the air in this brief outline? Great men are not always wise, indeed never so, when they judge scripture.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 7:51-53

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In these verses we have the conclusion of the address, a most grave and pointed appeal to the consciences of the Jews who, under the form of a most instructive and wonderfully compressed summary of their national sins from first to last, heard of God's unparalleled dealings with Israel. The facts were beyond question, the language (even when most unsparing) that of their own confessedly inspired writers, the accusation therefore as unutterably solemn as it was impossible either to rebut or to evade.

“Stiffnecked and uncircumcised in hearts1 and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers, so ye. Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute? and they slew those that announced beforehand of the coming of the Righteous One,2 of whom now ye became betrayers and murderers, ye which received the law as ordinances of angels and kept [it] not.” (Ver. 51-53.)

“I have beheld this people” said Jehovah to Moses at the Mount Sinai; and behold, it is a stiff-necked people” (Ex. 32:9); again (Ex. 32:3), “I will not go up in the midst of thee; for thou art a stiff-necked people, lest I consume thee in the way.” For the Lord had said unto Moses, “Say unto the children of Israel ye are a stiff-necked people” (5). But this very fact is turned into a plea by the skilful advocacy of the mediator: “If now I have found grace in thy sight, O Lord, let my Lord, I pray thee, go among us, for it is a stiff-necked people; and pardon our iniquity and sin, and take us for thine inheritance” (Ex. 34:9) If Stephen repeated the word at the end of their history, it was fully borne out from the beginning. “How much more after my death?” said Moses (Daut. xxxi. 27). “For I know that after my death ye will utterly corrupt yourselves and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you; and evil will befall you in the latter days” (ver. 29). The predicted evil was about to be, as it had been already, fulfilled to the letter, and as the latter days are not yet run out, so neither is this evil exhausted: “this generation” still repeats the same sad tale of unbelief and departure from the living God.

It is Moses again who lets Israel know in Lev. 26 how Jehovah will avenge the breach of His covenant: and yet if then their “uncircumcised hearts” be humbled, and they then accept the punishment of their iniquity, then will He remember His covenant with Jacob, and with Isaac and with Abraham, and will remember the land.

But there was another, and the main, fatal charge: “ye do always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers, ye also.” Before the deluge He strove with man, though Jehovah said it should not be so always, and thus set a term to His patient testimony of a hundred and twenty years. After that judgment of the race Israel was the theater of His operations, according to the word that Jehovah covenanted with them when they came out of Egypt. But they rebelled, and vexed His Holy Spirit: therefore He was turned to be their enemy, He fought against them. Here again Stephen had the surest warrant for vindicating Jehovah and His Anointed, and for convicting the proud stubborn Jews of their old iniquity and opposition to every dealing of His grace. Alas! they were, as Moses told them at the outset, a very froward generation, children in whom is no faith; and without faith there is no life, nor is it possible to please God. Faith working by love seeks His glory and is subject to His word, the expression of His mind and will. Israel without faith was the sad and constant witness of a people outwardly and in profession near to God, their heart ever far from Him and pertinacious in antagonism to Him. Their rejection of the Messiah, their indifference to, or malignant contempt of, the Pentecostal Spirit, were only of a piece with their history throughout. Far yet from being the light of the blind heathen, the instructor of the benighted nations, they are the ringleader of the world's rebellion against God, uniform only in this from father to son throughout their generations.

“Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute?” The prophets dealt with the people's sin, exposing it fearlessly in the light of truth, righteousness, and God's judgment, while looking onwards to the kingdom of God which should set aside all evil, and the suffering Messiah be exalted and extolled and very high. It was this confronting the wicked will of man with the light of God that condemned it, which drew out the enmity of Israel, and made the prophet an object of dishonor and hostility nowhere so much as in his own country. God was brought near; and guilty man will not have God at any price. Had Stephen gone outside the record, or misinterpreted its spirit? Jeremiah, who was not a whit behind the rest in the bitter contempt and positive persecution he had to bear from priests, prophets and princes, bears a plain testimony to God's sending on the one hand, and to Israel's rebellion on the other. So in 2 Chron. 36:15, 16 we read, “The Lord God of their fathers sent to them by His messengers, rising up betimes and sending; because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place; but they mocked the messengers of God, and despised His words, and misused His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord rose against His people, till there was no remedy.” Was Stephen then right in asking “Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute “?

But did not the Jews delight in the promised Messiah? Did they not eagerly anticipate His kingdom, when they will be delivered out of their enemies, and all that hate them be covered with shame and dismay, and glory dwell in their land, and blessing chase away the gross darkness of the earth? Whatever their thoughts afterward, their bitterest rancor broke out against those that announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One. If there was any difference, such “they slew.” It was a kingdom they wanted with ease and honor for themselves; not a king to reign in righteousness, and princes to rule in judgment. No care had they for the inalienable principles of His kingdom; no love, but heart-hatred of every quality of the divine nature, and of God's rights, which, if in abeyance, can never be abdicated. He was in none of their thoughts, nor His Anointed; and those who held Him before them were most obnoxious, so that the occasion failed not to work their violent death, And if their children built the tombs of the prophets, and flattered themselves that they were of wholly different temper and condition, the farthest remove from participation in the guilt of the prophets' blood, they only proved thereby that they were blinded by the enemy, and they witnessed to themselves that they were sons of those that slew them. For faith does not act in garnishing sepulchers, or in monumental tablets to the holy sufferers of days gone by; it walks and suffers reproach, if not worse persecution, in the days that are, looking for heaven and glory only when Christ appears.

Unbelief on the contrary seeks present satisfaction and credit in the honoring of those who render no more a living testimony to their consciences, and falls under the cheat of the enemy who builds up the higher that hypocritical temple of worldly religion where those once despised and slain as martyrs now fill a niche as idols.

And the Lord tested, as He always does, delusion and falsehood. He sends fresh testimony, and will till judgment. He sent His servants when on earth; He sent them from on high, as He continues to send. And the world hates the true and faithful, as it loves its own. But He Himself is ever the most searching of all tests; and how did He fare at their hands? “Of whom now ye became betrayers and murderers.”

It was possible to complain of others. No saint, no prophet, was immaculate or infallible. “In many things we all stumble” —I say not must, but do. And if it be so now since redemption and the gift of the Holy Spirit, it was assuredly so in the less privileged times that succeeded. The unfriendly eye of man could descry even in the most blessed of God's servants words and ways, which were sadly short of Christ, and might be perverted into an excuse for slighting their testimony. But what could they say or think of the Righteous One who appeals to them, “Which of you convinceth Me of sin?” “If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why smitest thou Me?” He was indeed the Holy One of God, who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth, yet was He treated with altogether unprecedented and most aggravated scorn; and though lawless men had their hand in the cross, the heart and the will of the Jews were engaged in an incomparably deeper way. (John 19:11.) They were betrayers and murderers of their Messiah, Gel's Messiah; and Stephen only applies to the living Jews around him what the prophets had declared fully of old, what David had written in the Spirit long before Isaiah, and Micah, and Zechariah, to speak only of the plainest.

By one more characteristic does this most resolute witness of the Lord further explain their position and their guilt, “Which received the law as ordinances of angels and kept it not.” That law in which they boasted was their shame, certainly from no fault in it, for all the evil was in them. But so it is with man, and most of all with man professing to have a religion from God. His boast is most manifest condemnation. It matters little what he boasts in; it is at best worthless. There is indeed a resource given in God's infinite grace, where he may and ought to boast; but it is in the Lord; it is not in the law which he fondly flattered himself, he was keeping, when in fact he had utterly and miserably failed, and in all its parts, Godward and manward, in himself and toward others. The Lord he had definitively disdained; nor in truth does any soul receive Him till sense of sin before God breaks him down overwhelmingly, whilst notwithstanding he casts himself on God's mercy, till he sees the rich and perfect provision made for such as he is in the offering of the body of Christ once for all. Then he does truly boast in the Lord, as is meet.

The apostle's language in Gal. 3:19 materially helps to clear up the words of Stephen here, though it is (εἰς διαταγὰς ἀγγέλων) has been the occasion of strange perplexity and dispute among the learned to the depravation of the sense. Winer (32:4, 6,) refers to Matt. 12:41 as illustrative of the force here too of the preposition; but the difference of the phrases seems to render the desired sameness impossible. “Repenting at” the preaching of Jonah is very intelligible and clearly meant; not so “receiving” at ordinances of angels. Hence Alford, who follows this later suggestion of the German grammarian, understands it as “at the injunction” of angels. But this departs from the sense we had got for διαταγάς from Gal. 3 which signifies beyond just doubt “ordained” or administered through angels, not “enjoined” by them, a very distinct idea, as is also “promulgated.” Now what is the meaning of receiving the law at ordinances of angels? Those who take εἰς here as “at” are obliged therefore, in order to make sense, to interpret δ. as “injunctions,” swerving in this from the true force of the participle in Gal. 3:19. It appears to me accordingly, that if it be “ordinances” here in keeping with “ordained” there, we must understand εἰς in the very common Hellenistic sense of “as” rather than “at,” the accusative of the predicate, to which Winer had inclined in earlier editions, and, as I believe, more rightly. Israel received the law, not as a code drawn up by human wisdom, but as administered by angels, and so, through their intervention, from God. Hence the solemnity of their failure to keep what was divine. The allusion seems to be to Deut. xxxiii. 2, Jehovah came from Sinai, rose up from Seir unto them; He shone forth from Mount Paran, and He came from myriads of holiness (or, holy myriads)—from His right hand a law of fire (or, fiery law) for them. Compare Psa. 68:17. It is needless to cite Josephus, Philo, or the Rabbis. What is of more moment, Heb. 2:2 quite falls in with the Galatians and our text. In the Septuagint we find singular confusion; for first instead of “holiness” they seem to have read it “Kadesh"; and yet, secondly, they bring “his angels” into the last clause, instead of “a law of fire"; so that this version errs greatly from the text.

The discourse thus is brought to a due conclusion, and this terse and pointed application does not sustain the notion of an abrupt stop which shut out words needful to complete Stephen's answer to the accusation. The facts adduced throughout, and now condensed in the final and most cutting appeal which laid bare their pride not more than their persistent rebellion and extreme ruin, appear to my mind singularly effective and complete. He begins with their habitual antagonism, fathers and sons alike, to the Holy Spirit; so that their prime religious badge had lost all meaning—their circumcision was become uncircumcision. They had persecuted the prophets, they had slain those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One; they had now actually betrayed and murdered Himself; and of course the law (received so solemnly through angels)3 they kept not, notwithstanding all these self-righteous pretensions, as if to have the law were to do it.

It was man, not left to himself, like the nations suffered to walk in their own ways, but governed as Israel was by God's law, enlightened by prophets, blessed with the coming of the Messiah, and according to the word that Jehovah covenanted when they came out of Egypt, so His Spirit stood among them: no people till then so privileged, none so guilty, and, we may add, so convicted; for they had broken the law, persecuted the prophets, slain the Messiah, and always resisted the Holy Ghost.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 7:38-50

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

The parallel is yet farther pursued in what follows. “This is he that was in the assembly in the wilderness with the angel that spoke to him in the mount Sinai, and with our fathers; who received living oracles to give us: to whom our fathers would not be subject, but thrust [him] away and turned in their hearts unto Egypt, saying to Aaron, Make us gods who shall go before us; for this Moses, who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we know not what is become of him.” (Ver. 38-40.)

Moses is presented in his mediatorial position, between the angel of Jehovah on the one hand, and “our fathers” on the other. In the “church” is suggestive of thoughts and associations altogether misleading. The children of Israel are meant in their collective capacity. It has not the smallest bearing on what in the New Testament is called the church of God, the body of Christ; indeed this is only noticed here in order to guard souls from an error so grave. The church is part of that “great mystery” or secret which the apostle was given to reveal, the mystery hidden from ages and generations but now made manifest to the saints. What God was then doing by Moses was part of His ordinary dealings, when Israel so readily overlooked the promises to the fathers and took their stand, to their speedy sorrow and inevitable ruin, on their own obedience as the tenure of their blessings.

Immense indeed was the privilege vouchsafed not only then in works but in words of God henceforth given to man in permanence. It was not merely that the angel spoke to Moses, but he “received living oracles to give us” —an unspeakable boon, yet more characteristic of the greater than Moses, whose coming was followed by a fresh, complete, and final revelation of divine grace and truth. Indeed the citation of Moses' own prophecy in ver. 37 prepared to way for new communications with a yet higher sanction. In vain then would Jewish unbelief idolize the servant in sight of his Master. But on the one hand “lively” is too slight here, as also in 1 Peter 1:3 and 2:5; on the other “life-giving” goes too far, and at any rate is not the epithet intended, for this is to characterize the oracles themselves, not their effect on others. I know not why Mr. Humphry should have endorsed the error which Kühnöl adopted from Grotius. And why “saving"? This is but to change, not to translate or expound, any more than the opposite lowering of the sense by J. Piscator and J. Alberti, as if received viva voce! “Living” alone is right and sufficient.

And how did the children of Israel treat one thus signally honored in that day? “They would not be subject” to him. If the fathers so treated Moses, was it surprising that their children did not receive the Messiah of whom he prophesied, and was besides so striking a type? Thus the simple recall of scripture history vividly presents the actual guilt of the Jews where any had ears to hear. If their fathers of old thrust Moses from them, what of that incomparably more honored Prophet, mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, so recently delivered up to be condemned and crucified? That their hearts were gone from God and turned to Egypt was plain enough then from their appeal to Aaron and his shameless compliance. But was it less true now when a robber was preferred to “the anointed of the Lord?” “Then cried they all again, saying, Not this man, but Barabbas. Now Barabbas was a robber.” “Ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you.” The difference between the fathers and the children was not in favor of those then alive, ever dull to estimate the present race, and self above all, which it most concerns men to judge aright. Yet is it exactly what the Spirit of God effects in every soul that comes to God: if there is living faith, there is true repentance.

But unbelief craves a present and visible guide. “Make us gods who shall go before us. For this Moses, who brought us forth out of the land of Egypt, we know not what is become of him.” Israel was rebellious, when Moses was on high; and so is the Jew now that Christ is gone to heaven. But is it only the Jew? Does the Gentile stand in the truth? Only by his faith can it be, as the apostle declares. Is not Christendom high-minded, instead of humbly and heartily hearing? Is it not lifted up with pride, instead of abiding in goodness? And what must be its end? Thou also shalt be cut off.” Christendom, little thinking it, is doomed. If God spared not the natural branches, the Jews, He will certainly not spare the presumptuous wild-olive graft.

Alas! the baptized soon forsook their own mercies and denied the special testimony for which they were responsible to God's glory before the world. They got weary of dependence on an exalted but absent Lord; they ceased to wait for His return from heaven; they practically superseded the presence and free action of the Holy Spirit in the, assembly; they gave up their bridal separateness for worldly influence and favor; and they swamped grace under a system of law and ordinances; so that the word of God became of little or no effect through tradition, as departure from the truth became more and more the state of those who professed the name of the Lord. Insubjection to Him speedily bred alienation, and the heart soon turned toward that world out of which grace calls and severs to God. Men are even more naturally idolatrous than skeptical, unbelief being the mother of both these enemies to God and His truth. Men love to have gods to go before them. The true Deliverer being irksome passes readily out of mind: “we know not what is become of him.” Is not the wilderness history prophetic? Did not these things happen as types of us that we should not be lusting after evil things, as they also lusted, nor be idolators, as some of them? Indeed all the things recorded happened to them as types, and were written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the ages are come.

“And they made a calf in those days, and offered sacrifice to the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands. But God turned and delivered them up to serve the host of heaven; as it is written in [the] book of the prophets, Did ye offer me victims and sacrifices in the wilderness, O house of Israel? Yea, ye took up the tabernacle of Moloch and the star of your god Remphan, the forms which ye made to worship them; and I will transport you beyond Babylon” (verses 41-43). So prone is the incredulous man to abandon the living God in spite of daily standing witness of His power and grace, as well as solemn occasional judgments before all eyes; so readily does he take up that idolatry which he had so lately known to dominate the high and mighty, the refined and learned—the world, in short, where he himself had been enslaved. So powerful an adversary is “public opinion” to the will and glory of God, even in the face of the grandest exhibitions of His favor to His people, and of stern unmistakable punishment on their enemies, and, not least, of shame on their gods who could neither help their votaries nor screen themselves. Nor did the “calf,” the abomination of Egypt, satisfy Israel; they craved after objects higher than the works of their own hands, whatever the charm of this to man's vain heart. Once yielding to the snare, Israel must outdo Egypt. So “God turned and delivered them up to serve the host of heaven.” Groveling idolatry aspires to higher things and inflates itself with its heavenly imaginations. Not Stephen is the authority for so withering a charge, but Amos. In the prophets' book it is written: would an Israelite gainsay them too? or tax scripture itself with saying blasphemous things against Israel? The forms of Moloch, “horrid king,” and of Remphan, they made to worship, and they did worship.

And not the least repulsive feature of this early corruption among the chosen nation was that they offered all the while victims and sacrifices in the wilderness to Jehovah. The poorest can afford to be lavish in honor of false gods, who complain of what is due to the true God, as if He were a rigid exactor and not the giver of every good and perfect gift.

But divine judgment is sure if it seem to slumber, and the prophet at a far later day pronounces the sentence for the sin perpetrated in the desert. Whatever may have been the aggravation afterward, it is the first sin which decides. Evil never gets better, never works itself out, though it may easily and always does wax worse. The evil heart of unbelief departs more and more from the living God. Patience may go on for ages in ways admirable in the eye of faith; but judgment, however deferred, is certain, and in due time is revealed, it may be long before it is executed. Neither Damascus, the head of Syria, nor Babylon, the golden city, is the limit of Israel's departation from the land they had defiled: “I will transport you beyond” —saith the Lord. To say that “Babylon,” true in fact, was an error in quotation is a statement Mr. Humphry should have left to skeptics.

“Our fathers had the tabernacle in the wilderness, as he that spoke to Moses commanded to make it according to the model which he had seen; which also our fathers having in succession received brought in with Joshua, in their taking possession of the Gentiles whom God drove out from [the] face of our fathers, until the days of David; who1 found favor before God and asked to find a habitation for the God2 of Jacob; but Solomon built him a house.” (ver. 44-47).

Yet all this while of idolatrous iniquity “our fathers of Israel” had the tabernacle of testimony in the wilderness, made as they were assured according to the model Moses had seen and God commanded. That the heathen who know not God could serve idols is not surprising, however sad their sin and inexcusable; seeing that their fathers once knew God, but glorifying Him not as God, nor thankful, they became vain in their imaginations and. with darkened heart in their folly changed His glory into an image of the creature which they worshipped and served rather than the Creator who is blessed forever, Amen. And for this cause God delivered them up to vile affections and the most unnatural evil, as well as to a mind void of judgment; so that knowing the judgment of God against all who do such things worthy of death, they not only practice the same but have pleasure in those that do them.

How much more guilty were those who knew far better, stood in national relationship with God as His own peculiar and favored people, and had the very tent of the testimony for Him and against their ways! They bore it not only in the wilderness from father to son, but into the goodly land whence God by Joshua drove out the old heathen inhabitants that Israel might be in the possession of it, adding thus gross hypocrisy to their greedy idolatry. There is no corruption so grievous as that of God's people; and therefore His proportionate chastenings. “You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.”

In the days of David, the favor which God showed him wrought in the heart of the king, who asked to build a house for Jehovah, but had as his answer that Jehovah would make him a house, and that his son, Solomon should build a house for his name, as Stephen here recounts.

Here then, thought the Jew, must Jehovah restrict Himself to that “magnifical” palace of His holiness. For unbelieving man must have an idol somewhere. “But the Highest dwelleth not in [places]3 made with hands; even as the prophet saith, The heaven [is] my throne, and the earth a footstool of my feet: what sort of house will ye build me, saith [the] Lord, or what [is] my place of rest? Did not my hand make all these things?” (ver. 48-50). Superstitious exaltation of the temple detracts from His glory who gives it all its distinctive grandeur. Jehovah did deign to hallow and glorify it, so that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud; for the glory of Jehovah had filled the house of God. But Solomon himself on that august had owned consecration that heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain Him, much less the house he had just built! And so afterward spoke the prophet Isaiah, long before Babylon was allowed to burn and destroy the object of their pride. It was no afterthought to console the Jew in his subjection to Gentile masters: so had Israel's king spoken to God, and so had God spoken to Israel long before the Chaldeans had become an adversary to chastise their idolatry.

It was right and pious to own the condescending grace of Jehovah, it was presumptuous to limit His glory to the temple He was pleased to make His dwelling. The Creator had made all and was immeasurably above the universe. From such a point of view what was Jerusalem or the temple? Who was now in accord with the testimony of Solomon and Isaiah? The accusers, or Stephen? The answer is beyond controversy, and their enmity without excuse.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 7:30-37

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Thus was Moses an outcast for many long years, not more from the incensed king of Egypt than from his own unworthy brethren, who loved him the less, the more abundantly he loved them; as unmindful of the promised deliverance as unappreciative of him who forfeited all on their account. Israel denied him who was in that day the type of the Holy and the Righteous One. It was no new thing.

“And when forty years were fulfilled, an angel [of the Lord, D E H P, almost all cursives, and many ancient versions] appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in a flame of fire of a bush. And Moses, on seeing, wondered at the sight; and as he went up to observe, there came a voice of [the] Lord [unto him, most authorities, but not the best]: I [am] the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, and Isaac1 and Jacob2. And Moses trembled, and durst not observe. And the Lord said to him, Loose the sandal of thy feet, for the place where 3on thou standest is holy ground. I have surely [lit. seeing] seen the ill-treatment of my people which is in Egypt, and have heard their groaning, and am come down to take them out for myself. And now come, I send [or will send] thee into Egypt. This Moses whom they denied, saying, Who established thee ruler and judge? him hath4 God sent [both] ruler and deliverer, with an angel's hand that appeared to him in the bush. This man led them out, having wrought wonders and signs in the land of 5 Egypt and in the Red Sea, and in the wilderness forty years. This is the Moses that said to the sons of Israel, A prophet will God6 raise up to you out of your brethren, like me.” (Ver. 30-37.)

God ordered the trials for Moses as none else would. For him, at the vigorous age of forty years, spent with every natural advantage possible in that day, who would have planned an equal period in the comparative solitude of Midian, without a project or even a known communication with his race, in patient waiting on God? Yet what wiser, if God were acting in wisdom and power by Moses to His own glory?

Then came a most singular but suited, manifestation: an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of mount Sinai, in a flame of fire of a bush. It was no less significant than that vouchsafed to Joshua at a later day. When conquest of Canaan was in question, what more encouraging than a man seen with his sword drawn, captain of Jehovah's host? When the work was to bring the people through a waste howling wilderness, what more appropriate sign than a bush blazing yet unconsumed, and yet more “the good-will of Him that dwelt in the bush?” Moses, himself, “separated from his brethren,” could well appreciate its significance, when wonder and fear had yielded to reflection in the light of the Divine communications he had received.

And as he went up to observe, there came a voice of [the] Lord, I [am] the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. And Moses trembled, and durst not observe. “Before redemption, even a saint trembled when brought into God's presence. Be it that His voice declares Him the God of promise, of the fathers Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, “Moses trembled, and durst not observe.” Till redemption, peace is impossible. “And the Lord said to him, Loose the sandal of thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.” Before the exodus of Israel from Egypt there was a manifestation of divine righteousness in delivering them and judging their oppressors, and holiness is proclaimed inviolable from the outset; no less is it so when Israel are called under Joshua to uncompromising conflict with the Canaanite dwelling in the land. “Holiness,” it was sung at a later day for an epoch not yet fulfilled, “becometh Thine house, O Jehovah, forever.” The

same prefatory admonition precedes alike the types of redemption accomplished for His people, and of warring in their midst with Satan that they may enjoy their proper privileges. God will be sanctified, whatever His grace in redeeming His own from the house of bondage, or in leading them to victory over the powers which usurp their heritage. Let us not forget it. How often irreverence has crept in, both in learning divine righteousness and in conflict with the enemy! “These things ought not so to be.”

But redemption was in His heart; and of this He forthwith speaks to Moses, now weaned from self-confidence as much as from worldly association. “I have surely seen the ill-treatment of My people which is in Egypt, and have heard their groaning, and have come down to take them out for Myself.” Who but God would have thus undisguisedly spoken of a poor set of slaves as “My people"? Others would have delivered and bedecked them first. It is the same God who as a father falls on the neck of the returning prodigal in his rags and kisses him, whatever the honors afterward lavished on him But, let it be the foreshadowing or the antitypical reality, it is of the utmost moment to apprehend that redemption is the work of God present in person, and delivering, not merely from the enemy, but for Himself. Their ill-treatment must be avenged, their groaning be heard and answered with His consolations; but He comes down to take them out for Himself.

“To deliver” was of course verified also; but the literal rendering is much more expressive, and gives not mere relief from the usurper's hand, but the positive object; and what can surpass it? If it be often overlooked, both in doctrine and in practice, it is of the more consequence to insist on it. Elsewhere may be put forward liberation, of which it is of course right in its place to point out the nature and effects; but here it is God's taking Israel out for Himself, as said of Joseph in ver. 10, and not infrequently in scripture, though the emphatic force only comes out fully in redemption. For Christ suffered once for sins, Just for unjust, that He might bring us to God. It will be manifest when we are in glory; it is no less true now to faith while we are here on earth. Nor can any truth bound up with redemption be of deeper moment for the soul. True spiritual experience rests on and springs out of it.

“And now come, I will send thee into Egypt.” But how different the feelings of Moses! When in Egypt, he had gone forward in his own energy; and now, when sent of God, he makes objections and difficulties! How instructive the twofold lesson for us! So it is ever. The man who was not called readily proffered to follow the Lord wheresoever He might go; as ignorant of himself and of the world and of the enemy, as of Christ. The disciple who was called begs leave first to go away and bury his father, but learns from the Lord that there must be no object before Himself.

“This Moses whom they denied, saying, Who established thee ruler and judge? him hath God sent both ruler and deliverer [or, redeemer] with an angel's hand that appeared to him in the bush.” The language is framed so as to maintain the parallel between Moses, as before of Joseph, with Jesus the despised and denied Messiah, whom God is to send from the heavens, not only to bring in generally the predicted times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord, but to redeem Israel from the hand of the enemy, and to gather them out of the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south. It is not only the New Testament but the Old, as the Lord expounded to the sorrowing disciples on the day of His resurrection, which teaches the sufferings of Christ and the glories which should follow them. “Ought not Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory"? Indeed, He had taught the same before His death. There will be the bright and judicial manifestation in its due season; for as the lightning when it lighteneth out of the one part under the heaven shineth unto the other part under heaven, even so shall the Son of man be in His day. But first must He suffer many things and be rejected of this generation. Then indeed will He bless Israel, in turning every one of them away from their iniquities.

Of Him Moses was but a shadow, however honored of God as both ruler and deliverer, with an angel's hand that appeared to him in the bush. Jesus the Son of man will Himself appear on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory; and He shall send forth His angels with a great sound of trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds from one end of the heavens to the other. A greater than Moses shall be displayed in that day; but in this day a far greater humiliation was His than that of Moses. Still in both respects the analogy was close, evident, and intentional; for the Holy Spirit in the word was providing for the help and warning or blessing of man, and the clear intimations of scripture left the Jew especially without excuse, as Stephen demonstrates.

“This [man] led them out, having wrought wonders and signs in the land of Egypt and in the Red Sea, and in the wilderness forty years.” None denies that Moses stands in the front rank of great as well as good men; but it is God who made His presence signally known and respected in what He did by him chiefly, though sometimes without him, in that long succession of wilderness patience, and of power fruitful in wonders, abundant in instruction. Stephen's aim is however to give scope to an under-current of analogy to Christ, and hence the man Moses comes into prominence, the better to furnish it as his solemn appeal to a people who never forgot their oldest folly and never truly learned from God when again putting them to the test. What could Moses have done without God for one day in the desert, not to speak of forty years? What wonders and signs could he otherwise have wrought in the land of Egypt, and in the Red Sea, before Meribah on the day of Massah in the wilderness, when the Jewish fathers tried Jehovah, proved Him, and saw His work? No doubt there was intrinsic power in the person of the Sea, who from everlasting to everlasting is Galatians Oily, subsisting in the form of God, He counted it not a thing to be grasped to be on an equality with God (in blessed contrast with the first man, who sought to be what he was not, to God's dishonor and in disobedience), but emptied Himself, taking a bondsman's form, coming in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, yea, death of the cross. All between His birth and death was alike moral perfection; a man who never did, never sought, His own will, nothing but the will of God, till all closed in the yet deeper doing by suffering it for sin in death of atonement, that God might be glorified even as to sin, and we righteously delivered. But in His service, of Him pre-eminently it could be said that God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power; who went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed of the devil: for God was with Him. And if that generation denied Him, saying Who established thee ruler and judge? none the less did God raise Him to be a more blessed Redeemer, a more glorious Ruler of the kings of the earth, as He is ordained of Gad to be Judge of living and dead, whilst He will also fulfill every hope of Israel according to the prophets.

No wonder therefore it is added, “This is the Moses that said to the sons of Israel. A prophet will God raise up to you out of your brethren, like Me.” The difficulties and differences of the most celebrated Rabbis prove what a stone of stumbling is the true Christ, the Lord Jesus, to unbelieving Israel. How otherwise could we account for such a man as Abarbanel perverting the words of Deut. 18 here cited, to Jeremiah? If there be among the prophets, yea in all the people, a marked contrast with the honored deliverer from Egypt. and the law-giver in the wilderness, it is the mourning man of Anathoth, whose testimony and life show a continuous struggle of grief and shame between his burning sense of God's ignored rights and his love for the people of Galatians who most of all ignored them, as well as himself. Utterly untenable is

the theory of Aben Ezra and others, that Joshua is meant, who but supplemented, and in little more than one direction, Moses' work, but in no adequate way stands out as the prophet raised up from his brethren like Moses. Hence the effort of some most distinguished among the Jewish teachers to interpret as a succession this singular prophet! as contrary to usage in the language as to the fact in their history. Compare Num. 12 and Deut. 24 The position of Mediator, whose words must be heard on pain of death, points to Moses' peculiarity; only in the highest degree true of none but Messiah. And if the Jews did not then realize the consequence of refusing to hearken to him, soon did the threat begin to fall on their guilty heads. “The wrath,” says the apostle Paul, “is come upon them to the uttermost.” And not yet have they paid the last farthing. The unequaled tribulation is still before them, though a believing remnant will be delivered out of it, hearkening to Him whom the nation opposed to their own ruin.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 7:20-29

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But now Moses is dwelt on at great length, as before Joseph more briefly. Thus is brought before their minds another and most salient personal type of the Messiah, besides the general testimony to the truth for their consciences.

“At which season Moses was born, and was exceedingly [lit. to God] fair, who was nourished three months in his father's house; and when he was cast out, Pharaoh's daughter took him up and nourished him for her own son. And Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians; and he was mighty in his words and works. But when he was about forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the sons of Israel; and seeing one wronged, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, smiting the Egyptian. For he thought that his brethren understood that God by his hand was giving them deliverance; but they understood not. And on the day following he appeared to them as they were striving, and compelled them to peace, saying, Ye are brethren: why do ye wrong one to another? But he that was wronging his neighbor thrust him away, saying, Who established thee ruler and judge over us? Dost thou wish to kill me as thou killedst the Egyptian yesterday? And Moses fled at this saying, and became a sojourner in the land of Midian where he begat two sons.” (Ver. 20-29.)

The enemy had raised up a suited instrument, another king over Egypt which knew not Joseph. Suffering became the portion of Israel and a deadly stroke was aimed at the promise in the person of their babes. For the commandment of the king was to expose them that they might not be preserved alive. At that critical moment Moses was born, fair unto God, with a glorious career before him, however dark its beginnings. He too, came under the sentence of death, and, after being nourished three months in his father's house, was cast out like the rest. But we have the highest authority for affirming that it was “by faith,” whatever the natural affection of his parents, he was hid by them these three months (Heb. 11:23). “They were not afraid of the king's commandment.” God interfered for him providentially; and, the least likely of all in Egypt, Pharaoh's daughter, took him up and nourished him for her own son. It was manifestly an intervention of God.

But Divine providence is no guide for faith, nothing but the word. Providence brought in, whence faith led out. “By faith Moses when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to be evil-entreated with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; accounting the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt, for he looked unto the recompense of reward.”

None can deny that Moses was capable of justly estimating the situation. He was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was mighty in his words and works. He looked, however, not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. His eye was on the kingdom of God; he awaited the Messiah; he knew that the purposes of God, as they center in Christ, had Israel as their inner circle on earth. His affections, therefore, were not with the court of Egypt, or the most brilliant vista it could open for a man of his energy. Poor degraded Israel he loved, and loved, not so much because they were his people, but as the people of God.

So when he was about forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren, the sons of Israel. Alas! they were fallen, not in their circumstances only, but in their souls. Faith wrought in but few of them to expect a deliverer or to appreciate such as had faith in God. In such circumstances the worst moral condition is apt to be found. An unfaithful Israelite sinks below an Egyptian; and Moses must learn this, as Joseph had learned it before; as an infinitely greater than Joseph or Moses learned it even before the death of the cross. “And seeing one suffer wrong, he defended him and avenged him that was oppressed, smiting the Egyptian; and he supposed that his brethren understood how that God by his hand was giving them salvation, but they understood not. They were dark and dead Godward. The hardness of man they felt. The hope God had given to Israel had almost vanished from their souls. There was certainly no expectation of a deliverance at hand; yet surely they ought to have looked for it. The fourth generation was proceeding, in which, according to the word of Jehovah, they, so long afflicted, were to quit ajudged Egypt, and to come into the promised land again. But God was not in their thoughts, and Moses was misunderstood. Nay, worse than this; “And the day following he appeared unto them as they strove, and would have set them at one again, saying, Sirs, ye are brethren, why do ye wrong one to another? But he that did his neighbor wrong thrust him away, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us? Wouldest thou kill me as thou killedst the Egyptian yesterday?” The keenest wound, as the basest blow, comes from God's people: when man rules therein and not God, Satan works underneath it all.

Yet was it all profitable discipline for Moses, who “fled at this saying and became a sojourner in the land of Midian, where he begat two sons.” He must learn of God alone in the wilderness. The wisdom of Egypt must be, as it were, unlearned: God deigns not to honor it for His deliverances. The wisdom that He uses must come down from above. We shall see how God wrought when the due moment arrives. Meanwhile Moses is the rejected of Israel as Joseph before of his brethren. Only as Joseph shows us exaltation over the Gentiles when separated from his brethren, Moses gives us, in another direction, the complication from the offended power and anger of the Gentiles. But it will be noticed that it is during this compulsory exile from Israel that he has a family given him. So the Virgin's Son, Emmanuel, speaks in Isa. 8. There too Israel are unbelieving; there too is a hostile confederacy of the nations; but, “Behold, I and the children whom the Lord has given me, are for signs and for wonders, in Israel from the Lord of hosts which dwelleth in Mount Zion.” Faith waits upon the Lord that hides His face from the house of Jacob, and it looks for Him. At the worst of times He is for a sanctuary; at the right moment He works out unmistakable deliverance. How solemnly all this bore on the actual circumstances of the Jew! They did not understand that Jesus was their Deliverer. They

gradually grew to hate His words, because His words judged them in the secret of their souls, and His parables portended sure destruction on their pride and unbelief. Hence they cast Him out even unto death; but God raised Him up and was now manifesting the children He had given Him, as yet from Israel only, but soon to be from Gentiles also. The hour of Messiah's rejection is but the occasion for a higher glory and a more intimate relationship with those who meanwhile believe; just as the stranger in the land of Midian becomes the father of two sons which he had not in Egypt with the sons of Israel around him.

Had Stephen invented these remarkable facts and yet more remarkable foreshadowings? No Jew, however prejudiced, could deny them to be the brief, true, and bright reflection of God's word in their own hands. The undeniable truth inspired by the Holy Ghost shone solemnly on that which they had done to One attested by God to them by works of power and wonders and signs which God wrought by Him in their midst, as they themselves too well knew. Such is man on the one hand, and such God on the other: so surprising as to provoke the unbelief and ill-will of all who do not bow to His revelation as well as to the bitter conviction of their own evil. To the believer it is the old but ever new lesson of learning the first man, and the Second: where this is learned, the heart seeks and owns it could not be otherwise, man being what he is, as also God what He is; for He cannot deny Himself, though man in his blindness constantly denies both himself and God. But the correction comes when Christ is brought home to the soul by the Holy Ghost in the gospel: one repents, and believes. Such an one reads his own evil in what man did and is: anything of iniquity in a Jew or a Gentile is not overmuch marvelous; he can find a match for Pharaoh or for Israel in his own breast if not his own life, or in both. But greater grace assuredly than was ever shown by a Joseph or a Moses, he knows in the Son of God who came down from heaven not to do His own will, but His who sent Him—in the Son of man who came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many. Thus does faith turn all things past or future to present account; as a man's unbelief loses all blessing from every quarter, and will rather destroy his own soul than give honor really to God and His Son.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 7:8-19

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

At first sight it may appear to some singular that Stephen should introduce circumcision. But he, in fact, simply follows the divine record; so that there is not only instruction conveyed, but it is increased by paying heed to the order impressed on the facts, and so on the history, by the wisdom of God.

“And He gave him a covenant of circumcision, and thus he begat Isaac, and circumcised [him] on the eighth day; and, Isaac, Jacob; and Jacob the twelve patriarchs” (ver. 8).

Thus does Stephen draw marked attention to the covenant of circumcision given of God to Abraham, instead of slighting the institution incorporated in the law. It was thus Isaac was begotten, and those who followed; all submitting to a rite which indicated the corruption of the flesh, and put death on it as the only deliverance from it. But the promise was already long before the law; and the father of the faithful had enjoyed the election and call of God anterior even to circumcision. The truth is a whole, and only suffers from the misuse of one part to enfeeble or destroy another. The Spirit, using the word in view of Christ's glory, puts all in its place, as He alone can. Hence the speaker, being a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, saw and presented things according to God, whereas the unbelieving Jews understood in no wise the true bearing of their own institutions, misusing them for self-righteousness and pride, and hence blindly rejecting the Light of God to whom all pointed.

Alas! it is an old story. Their fathers wore not really better than they; and God has not told us of their doings in vain, if we have but an ear to hear. For how does Stephen sum up the history of that early twelve? “And the patriarchs through jealousy sold Joseph into Egypt; and God was with him, and delivered him out of all his afflictions, and gave him favor and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh, king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house” (ver. 9, 10). A beloved son, or a God-fearing slave, a guiltless prisoner or a wise vicegerent, Joseph had God with him everywhere and in all circumstances. Yet who of the twelve was so tried of his brethren? who so plotted against as he? Who seemed to fare worse in spite—yea because—of his unsullied purity? Nevertheless, even in prison, “Jehovah was with him, and that which he did, Jehovah made it to prosper.”

Was there no voice, from Joseph and his brethren, to the Jews who surrounded Stephen? “Joseph brought unto their father their evil report."..."And when his brethren saw that his father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him." ... "And his brethren said, Shalt thou indeed reign over us? or shalt thou indeed have dominion over us? And they hated him yet the more for his deeds and for his words." ... “And when they saw him afar off, even before he came near unto them, they conspired against him to slay him." ... “And they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites, for twenty pieces of silver; and they brought Joseph into Egypt.” If so the fathers dealt with the type, who that believes could wonder that they should deal worse with the great Antitype? For it was what was of Christ in Joseph, what the Spirit wrought in and by him, which irritated the fathers of the nation against him Was it so wonderful, then, that “this generation” had rejected a greater than Joseph; who being sold convicted them of enmity against God, drawn out by hatred of divine goodness in His own person, ways, and words? Let them not forget, that the rejected of his brethren was exalted to the right hand of power for the blessing of others, and even (specially at the end) of his brethren, to whom he is only thus made known after his long separation from them. Thus did he prefigure Christ in His sufferings, as well as in the glories that should follow them.

“Now there came a famine over all Egypt and Canaan, and great affliction; and our fathers found no sustenance. But Jacob, having heard that there was corn in Egypt, sent forth our fathers for it; and at the second [time] Joseph was made known to his brethren, and is [or Joseph's] race became manifest unto Pharaoh. And Joseph sent and called to him Jacob his father, and all his kindred, seventy-five souls.” (Ver. 11-14.)

It was a pathway of righteous suffering which led to glory; and when exalted, Joseph administers in the wisdom of God what the same wisdom exalted him to provide in days of plenty for those of dearth. Under the mighty hand of God, the dearth pressed not only over all Egypt but over Canaan, where the heads of Israel tasted of that cruel affliction, for they found no sustenance, and in divine providence sought corn in Egypt. This, “at the second time,” gave occasion for their great discovery, not without self-judgment, when Joseph was made known to his

brethren, and the line of promise became no longer a secret to Pharaoh. And the fathers, with Israel their father, went down into Egypt, where they in lengthened and retributive sorrow were to pay the penalty for their heartless wrong to their brother, who was exalted of God where Jew and Gentile had both put him to shame, which he repaid in nothing but grace to all, but especially to Israel.

The bearing of all this on Christ is unmistakable; but Stephen does not apply—he only states—facts, so much the more striking because they were familiar, and now set in a light which shone on Messiah as well as the Jews; that the people might thereby know God and themselves. How little they knew anything as they ought was plain from this, that they had hitherto never thought of seeing in Joseph the Christ, nor in the guilty fathers themselves, the still guiltier murderers of the Lord of glory. Their ignorant boast was their shame. And He that was sold no less than Joseph, and lifted up on high from a worse pit and a deeper dungeon, was waiting to bless them; as they themselves were to taste the bitter fruits of their sin in a dispersion worse than a captivity; whatever the mercy that awaits them in the latter end, when they bow repentant before Him in glory.

It will be noticed that Stephen speaks of seventy-five souls, where the Hebrew has seventy; he cites here, as elsewhere, the Septuagint. Calvin (in loco) considers that this discrepancy came not from the Greek translators themselves, but crept in through the fault of copyists, and that Stephen did not say so; but that it was foisted in here to make the speech agree with the Greek version of Gen. 46:27. But this appears to me an unreasonable way of accounting for what is simple enough; and that the apostle's caution against endless genealogies has nothing to do with the matter. The fact is, that both the Hebrew and the Greek version might both be true one reckoning in five sons of Manasseh and Ephraim born in Egypt (1 Chron. 7:14), according to a latitude of various forms, by no means uncommon in such lists.

There is more difficulty in explaining the next verse but one. “And Jacob went down into Egypt and died, he and our fathers; and they were carried over unto Shechem and laid in the tomb which Abraham bought for a sum of money from the sons of Hamor in [son, or father of1] Shechem.” (Ver. 15, 16). The late Dean of Canterbury had no hesitation in pronouncing him who spoke, full of the Holy Ghost, as guilty of “at least two demonstrable historical inaccuracies"; which, he is pleased to assure his readers, do not affect the inspiration or the veracity of the writer. On the other hand, Bengel, following Fl. Illyricus, &c., seeks to clear the passage up by the supposition that a double purchase and a double burial were intended, with intentional omissions on either side. He therefore maintains the integrity of the reading “Abraham,” and declares the conjectural “Jacob” unnecessary; compendious brevity, when the particulars were all known, accounting for a method which to us seems surprising. The facts are that Abraham bought a burial-place of Ephron the Hittite at Machpelah or Hebron, where the three patriarchs were buried, as well as Sarah; and that Jacob bought a field of the sons of Hamor in Shechem, where Jacob was buried. Where the rest of Jacob's sons were laid, does not appear in the Old Testament: Josephus says in Hebron; the Rabbis, in Shechem, as Jerome also reports. Moderns argue for some here and some there; and one at least maintains a transfer from Shechem to Hebron. I prefer to leave the passage; but in the circumstances the least worthy hypothesis is that this blessed and mighty witness of Christ fell into a confusion of Hebron with Shoehorn, and of Abraham with Jacob beneath an ordinary Sunday-scholar. Is it not a safer conclusion that we may be ignorant of facts which, better known, would dispel this mist, or of some peculiarity in the reference, as in Matt. 27:9, Mark 1:2, to which Westerns are not used, but understood without cavil among Jews? One is disposed (when surveying a speech of surpassing scope, and power of insight from first to last into principles of Jewish history) to doubt that the speaker was ignorant of circumstances lying on the surface of the earliest book of Scripture, and familiarly known to every Jew; or that the inspired writer of the book did not see the discrepancy which must strike the most careless reader. And one may question whether it would not be better, these things being so, to amend our manners instead of assuming to amend the text.

“But as the time of the promise was drawing nigh which God vouchsafed2 to Abraham, the people increased and multiplied in Egypt, till there arose another king over Egypt who knew not Joseph. He dealt craftily with our race and evil-intreated our fathers, that they should expose their babes to the end they might not be preserved alive.” (Ver. 17, 19.)

It is always thus. There is ever war between God and the enemy, and nowhere does it rage so hotly as where His people are concerned, and when a distinct manifestation of divine mercy is imminent. God's approaching favor to Israel drew out the enmity of Satan, who stirred up a suited instrument for his malice in the prince of the world of that day, “another king who knew not Joseph.” The verses are a pithy summary of Ex. 1:7-20, which gives the details of Pharaoh's wiry, aggressive, and unscrupulously cruel efforts to depress, yet just as signally defeated of God; for, say or do what he might, “the people multiplied and waxed very mighty.” The edict to destroy the males failed, not only through human pity, but through the fear of God, who honored those who honored Him, and brought to naught His adversaries.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 7:1-7

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

The remarkable testimony of Stephen comes before us. It was fitting that the devoted Hellenist, rather than any of the twelve, should break fresh ground and pave the way for the wider outgoing of the truth, just after the mention of so striking a witness to its attractive power from the bosom of Judaism in the faith of a crowd of priests.

Stephen was accused of disparaging what was most sacred in Hebrew eyes—the sanctuary and the law. He was charged with attributing to the Nazarene a purpose of destroying “that place,” and of changing the customs delivered to them by Moses. What can be of deeper interest and instruction than his way of meeting so malignant a perversion of his meaning? Grace is never the enemy of law; though incomparably higher, it rather establishes law. The prophetic word did not conceal that of the stately buildings of the temple not one stone should be left on another; but was Jesus a destroyer, because He was a prophet and more than a prophet? Under His reign the law shall go forth out of Zion; and even in humiliation He came not to destroy but to fulfill it. But unbelief is deaf and blind, and is apt to impute its own evils to those who love the truth. Certainly Stephen said nothing but what the prophets and Moses declared should come.

“And the high priest said, Are these things so? And he said, Brethren [lit. men brethren] and fathers, hear. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran, and said unto him, Go out of thy land and out of thy kindred, and

come into the land which I shall show thee." (Ver. 1-3.)

"The God of glory" is no mere Hebraism for "glorious God," but directs the heart from the beginning to One altogether above the world not only in Himself but in His purposes, whatever His ways meanwhile on the earth. "Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood [river] in old time, even Terah the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor; and they served other gods." (Josh. 24) It was in sovereign grace that God thus appeared. Even the line of Shem, the father and kindred of Abraham, were idolaters. Grace gives, not finds, what is good. Not only did the God of glory appear: it was to Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, and thus when he was at the farthest point of his distance from "the land," as well as in idolatrous associations. How little the Jews understood the God of glory or His servant Moses! Stephen, full of grace and power did. Nothing was more foreign to him than "speaking blasphemous words against Moses and God."

Even Abraham, blessed as he was, moved slowly in the path of faith at first. He did not quit Mesopotamia to dwell in Canaan all at once. Before this he dwelt in Haran. He got out of his land, but not so quickly "out of his kindred," so that there was a remarkable delay in coming into the land which God was to show him. "Then came he out of the land of the Chaldeans, and dwelt in Haran; and thence, after his father died, He removed him into this land in which ye now dwell." (Ver. 4.)

It is rather a daring comment to say that "the Jewish chronology which Stephen follows was at fault here, owing to the circumstance of Terah's death being mentioned, Gen. 11:32, before the command to Abram to leave Haran; it not having been observed that the mention is anticipatory. And this is confirmed by Philo having fallen into the same mistake," &c. The truth is that the favorite Jewish hypothesis (Aben Ezra, Rashi) is that Terah did not die till sixty years after Abraham had left Haran. And in all probability the Samaritan Pentateuch has changed 205 into 145 (Gen. 11:32), in order to meet the supposed difficulty. The source of the error among ancients or moderns is the assumption that Abraham was Terah's eldest son, for which there is no more ground in the order of the names than in the case of Noah's sons, where we know that not Shem but Japheth was the eldest. But, for an adequate divine reason, not the elder but the younger is repeatedly named first. To Terah at 70 years Haran was born, Abraham at 130, who therefore could be married to Haran's daughter, Sarai or Iscah, ten years younger than himself See Usher's Works, viii. 21-23, Clinton's Fasti Hellen. i. 289 et seqq. One may not agree with Bengel's suggestion; but an upright help towards understanding the word which is held fast as perfect is to be respected: "truly lamentable" is the pandering to the enemy on the plea of the spirit, not the letter, of God's word. That Terah who had Haran at 70 might have begotten Abraham at 130 is simple enough, dying at 206; that Abraham should at 99 regard it as beyond nature to have by Sarah a son is no less simple. Hagar had borne him a son at 86; and the natural interpretation of Gen. 25 is that after Sarah's death Abraham had by Keturah, his wife or concubine, six sons sent away from Isaac while he lived, that Isaac only should be his heir without dispute. There is no handling of the word of God so deceitful as the unbelief which treats it as if it were not His, or as if He could lie.

Terah was a dead weight, as long as he lived, on Abraham's obedience. As we are told, "Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son's son, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan." (Gen. 11:31.) But Canaan, in these circumstances, they never reached. God told Abraham to quit his kindred as well as his country; and till this was done, he failed to reach Canaan. It would have scarcely been proper for Abram as the son to take Terah his father. So "Terah took Abram," &c. This, however, was not at all according to the call of God to Abram. Hence "they came unto Haran, and dwelt there." When Terah died there, "Abram departed as the Lord had spoken unto him." Then the language is pointedly different:— "And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and all the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan, and into the land of Canaan they came." (Gen. 12:3.) There was no failure, now that his faith was not hampered by the incumbrance of nature which almost necessarily took the upper hand; and therefore the movement lacked the power of God to give it effect. That gone, the blessing immediately followed.

There is a question in verse 4 whether the subject be Abram or God understood. If verse 43 points to the latter, the construction of 1 Chron. 8:6 (in the LXX) favors the former: so that some may and do abide with the Authorized Version instead of following the Revisers, and the Vulgate, Syrr., Ar. Cop., if not Aeth. The connection with verse 5 would lead one to prefer God. "And He gave him none inheritance in it, not so much as a foot's tread, and promised to give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when he had no child."

It is wholly incorrect to say that God did afterward give him a possession in Canaan, namely the piece of land which he purchased of Ephron as a burial place, Gen. 23:17; for the gift of God is absolutely future, and that it is so is confirmed, not weakened or trenched on, by the purchase of a burial-place from the Hittite. For who that possessed this land or any other would think of buying his own possession? There he lays his dead in land so evidently not his own that he has to buy it for the purpose, the pledge to faith that he will have it another day. So far from occasion to wrest our text here or anywhere in order to produce accordance with the history, the language is as plain and perfect as possible. The fact is stated to show how truly the patriarch was a pilgrim in the very land whose present possession had, to say the least, such exaggerated moment in the eyes of his seed, because they walked not in the faith of their father. God will surely give "this land" to Abram's seed. They will buy it of no stranger in that day. No intermediate confusion can touch His promise. "By faith he (Abraham) sojourned in the land of promise as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise." Abraham and his seed will have the promise in the day when glory is to dwell in that land (Psa. 85), a truth which Gentile theology makes even believers forget. Indeed all the earth shall then be filled with the glory of Jehovah; but pre-eminently is the glory to rest on Zion, a defense on all, when God shall have accomplished the cleansing of Jerusalem, not by the gospel simply as now, but by the spirit of judgment and of burning. Then shall the children of Abraham, not by nature only but by grace also, enter on the promised inheritance, he himself being in resurrection glory, when Jesus is revealed from heaven and there come the times of restoration of all things, whereof God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, which have been since time began.

There is no ground for regarding "not," as "not yet," nor "gave" and "promised" as pluperfect in sense, nor "and" as "yet," with learned men who did not understand or believe the scripture before them.

Further, Stephen draws attention to the fact that "God thus spoke, that the seed of Abraham should be a sojourner in a land not theirs, and that they should enslave and ill-treat them, four hundred years. And the nation, to whom they shall be in slavery, will I judge, said God; and after these things shall they come out and serve me in this place." (Ver. 6, 7.) It is a free citation of Gen. 15:13, 14, with a few words, more or less, from Ex. 3:12 instead of the closing phrase. The God of glory thought of His people in Egypt and in the wilderness, before the holy place

or even the law, and will never give Israel up till He has made good His promise, engaged when Abraham had no child. God called Abraham alone, and blessed and increased him. How wrong they all were then in making so much of themselves, and of their privileges, to the slight of His grace and Himself, the God of glory, who appeared to Abraham alone when there was absolutely nothing to boast, nothing but sin and shame in man, and Israel as yet unborn. For as with the father so with his seed. As he went about a stranger in Palestine, so they were first seen in bondage in an alien land; and this for no brief moment, for in round numbers 400 (strictly 405) years intervened from the birth of the child of promise till God judged the nation that had them in slavery.1 When they did come out, it was not even into the land, but into the desert, where they wandered 40 years. He had indeed delivered them to His own glory; but His dealings were not according to their thoughts and prejudices. Were they the people to claim indefeasible and even exclusive rights? To do so, they must disbelieve their own history, yea, God's word.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 6:7-15

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

The measure taken by the apostles in appointing servants for the exterior duties of the assembly, leaving themselves free for prayer and the ministry of the word, was owned by the signal blessing of God. Administration of money is a delicate and difficult task, especially if it be undertaken by such as serve in the word. In a low condition it gives influence of the basest kind to those who otherwise could have little or none. But here we are in presence of the Holy Ghost working in energy, holiness, and love, and raising souls above the fleshly feelings that threatened danger to the church. None would be more struck by the unselfish wisdom of the apostles than the sacerdotal class, ordinarily apt to be greedy of power and influence, if not of worse still.

“ And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples in Jerusalem multiplied exceedingly; and a great crowd of the priests1 were obedient to the faith.” (Ver. 7.)

It looked most promising surely, when the word of God grew as an object of faith and a distinct power among men; when the disciples so greatly multiplied in the city of solemnities itself; when the very priests were now flocking in, unwonted sight as this was, what could most think but that the scattered and peeled nation were at length learning divine wisdom? Would they not soon repent and be converted for the blotting out of their sins, so that seasons of refreshing might come from the presence of the Lord and He might send the Christ that had been fore-appointed for them, Jesus? Appearances gave a color, if not currency, to the thought such as never after that could be claimed for it. The truth was, that God was but severing unto the name of Jesus from His ancient people such as should be saved, before He sent His armies, destroyed the murderers of His servants (and, we can add, of His Son), and burnt up their city according to the word of the Lord.

And so, if I err not, He is doing now in the active work of salvation He is carrying on throughout the earth, in Christendom especially. It is the sure sign, not of the world's surrender to Christ and the cross, but that the Lord is separating His own from the world which is hastening to inevitable, unsparing, and condign judgment. Never till then can there be universal or stable blessing for the earth as a whole, such as we are entitled to expect according to Psa. 72; 65-68;92-107 and the prophets generally. The heavens must receive Jesus till the times of the restoring (not the destruction) of all things of which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets since time began. It is the corrupt harlot, not the true bride, that wants to reign in the absence of the Bridegroom. If grace convert ever so many or ever so extraordinarily, as with the priests, they were but saving themselves from that crooked generation. Judgment personally inflicted by the Lord must precede His introduction of God's kingdom in power and glory; but this does not hinder the action of sovereign grace in changing His own and translating them to be with Himself on high before the day of His judgment dawns on the earth. For when that day comes, they are already with Him, and hence follow Him out of heaven, and appear with Him for the execution of that judgment.

Another element of moment is now introduced—the free action of God's Spirit even in Jerusalem, where all the twelve apostles were.

The ordination, if we call it ordination, of “the seven,” was for a temporal service, expressly not for spiritual ministry by the word, but on the contrary, by handing over to them the exterior duty, to let the apostles be undistracted in their blessed work. Assuredly, if it be a ridiculous perversion in one part of Christendom to devise a modern answer in the charge of the paten and chalice, it is only a shade better to make it a sort of probationership to the office of a presbyter. Scripture is overlaid and ignored by human tradition. “The seven” were stewards for the poor, and not a formal noviciate for a full-blown minister. It was reserved for dissent to find a still lower deep, through money to constitute (what one of their own best men called) “the lords deacons,” with power to conciliate or coerce, to pamper or starve out, the minister. How unlike are all these to the holy ways of God and His word!

Yet one of these is brought before us as used and honored of God in a way quite outside the work for which they were appointed. “And Stephen, full of grace2 and power, wrought great wonders and signs among the people. And there arose certain of those that were of the synagogue called3 [that] of the freedmen [Libertines], and of Cyrenians, and of Alexandrians, and of those of Cilicia and Asia4 disputing with Stephen. And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke. Then they suborned men, saying, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God. And they stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes; and coming upon [him] they seized and brought him into the council, and set false witnesses, saying, 5This man ceaseth not speaking words against the holy place and the law; for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and change the customs which Moses handed down to us. And all that sat in the council, gazing fixedly on him, saw his face as it were an angel's face.” (Ver. 8-15.)

Beyond a doubt the leveling spirit of democracy, the unwillingness to recognize those who are over. us in the Lord, is very far from the word of God. But even in those days when the church shone in order and beauty as never since, when the highest authorities that ever God set in the church were all there, we behold His sovereign grace acting in a man with no other title than what grace gave him. He was not even a bishop or presbyter; he had been set apart with others to a grave but lowly service. Yet we find him soon after described as full of “grace” (not faith merely) and power, working great marvels and signs among the people. There was no jealousy in that day of grace and power: for all who could and did glorify the Lord there was room and welcome. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of liberty. Law and the world and the flesh

gender bondage, and pride, and sin.

The fact is that scripture knows nothing of ordaining a man to preach or to teach, still less if possible for the administration, so-called, of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Superstition has entered, and the power of religious habits of thought founded on every-day routine; so that even pious men fail to see in the Bible what contradicts their theory and practice, and attach to Scriptural acts or words in defense of their own thoughts a meaning which is quite foreign to the truth.

According to Scripture, if a man has a spiritual gift from the Lord, he is not only free as regards others but bound before the Lord to use it. Otherwise let him beware of the condemnation in the parable of the unprofitable servant, who counted his lord hard and was afraid and went away and hid his talent in the earth. It is no question of a Christian's rights but of the grace of Christ, as well as of the obligation on him who has received the gift to use it according to His will to whom the church belongs and for His glory. So says the apostle Peter; and it were well that men who misuse should hear and weigh his words:— “According as each hath received a gift, ministering it among yourselves, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God: if any man speak, as oracles of God; if any man minister, as of strength which God supplieth; that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, whose is the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

I purposely press this scripture which is in perfect keeping with all others that treat of the same subject. It seems the more apposite as he was there with the eleven when God put forward Stephen to act on it. The free energy of the Holy Spirit in gift is therefore in no way a Pauline peculiarity as some affect to believe. In the Epistles of the great apostle of the Gentiles no doubt we have the truth on this head as on so many others dependent on Christ's headship of the Church, developed more profoundly and comprehensively than the Lord was pleased to do by any others. But the principle is the same in all. Thus we find James warning the brethren not to be many teachers, knowing that we shall receive greater judgment, not because they were not ordained. And as the second epistle of John thunders against receiving a man (ordained or not) who did not bring the doctrine of Christ, so does his third encourage Gains (however Diotrephes might oppose) in all loving reception of such as went about preaching the truth. John had authority, if any one on earth then had, to act for Christ; but he takes no other ground than the character of the doctrine they preached for rejecting, or receiving, them. It was a question for him (is it for us?) simply of Christ—of the truth. This we must have if we are to love in truth. Love is of God, and God is love but we must have the truth in order to love in truth. Otherwise it is the most illusive and fatal of snares.

Nor can one hesitate to say, that whatever might be the great marvels and signs that Stephen was doing (8) to the glory of the rejected but exalted Christ the Second man in heaven, the wisdom and the Spirit by which he was enabled to speak (10) were a reality yet deeper and more blessed. The one might arrest any one; but no adversary could withstand the other. And there were many adversaries, here of course all of the circumcision. Who were the Libertines? It would seem, according to the oldest interpretation on record, Jewish freedmen banished A. D. 19 from Rome, whither Pompey had carried many taken prisoners in war, but afterward emancipated by their masters and allowed to adhere to their religion. It is natural, as another has suggested, that men such as these should show strong feeling if they conceived that the religion for which they had suffered abroad was insulted or endangered at. home. They are at any rate put into the foremost rank of Stephen's adversaries by the inspired historian. If it be so, it is a Grecized Latin word. This too would account for the expression “called,” as due to the connected,” Libertines.” Some have tried to make out a city Libertum in Africa; and it is known that there was a bishop of Libertum at the synod of Carthage in A.D. 411. But if such a town existed in the days of Stephen, it was too small to be noticed, and could never take precedence of Cyrene and Alexandria.

Doubt has been felt whether two synagogues were meant or five. It appears to me that Winer is not justified in the former supposition, that the τών first used would have sufficed to have united the five classes, and that the second is not to indicate only two parties, each possessing a common synagogue, but the difference of such as came out of cities like Cyrene and Alexandria with the freedmen first named from those of provinces like Mick and Asia. When we are told that there were then some 480 synagogues in Jerusalem, it seems very unlikely that there should not be a separate place for each, as the Jews were notoriously numerous in most if not all.

It is of solemn interest how unbelieving men can find a show of reason to fasten the most odious charges on the truth which they hate and those who proclaim it. Yet why suborn men to inform, if they honestly felt indignation at alleged wickedness? One can understand that to claim for Jesus the title of the Christ, the Anointed, was to imply His superiority to Moses; and to hint at the transitory nature of the temple, which the Lord had said was to have not a stone left on another, might be regarded as blaspheming the God whose house it was.

However this may have been, they thereby roused the people and the elders and the scribes. Here the Pharisees would be as furious as the Sadducees or more so. It was a general outburst of proper Jewish resentment; and so Stephen was seized and brought into the council. If the words had been said, the witnesses were none the less false. Nothing could be more wickedly untrue than that he said one word disrespectful to God or Moses, to the law or the temple. But wicked men hear with a wicked feeling, and the Spirit pronounces them false witnesses, though, Stephen's words might sound as they reported. “For we have heard him say, “that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and change the customs which Moses handed down to us.”

I know not why commentators should question the singular mark of divine favor vouchsafed to his person, unless they abjure faith and deny the yet more wondrous privilege at the close of his discourse. It was striking that he who was accused of reviling Moses and God should receive from God a sign like that which his servant Moses enjoyed. The Jews at any rate ought to have felt it as a solemn appeal to them above all mankind.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 6:1-6

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

Persecution of the Christian for Christ's sake is an honor from God (Phil. 1:29), as grace makes it a blessing to the Church and a testimony to the world. The real danger is from within, and this yet more when the confidence of love yields at all largely to an evil eye and a discontented

tongue. And so it was now: after God had so signally judged the deception of Ananias and Sapphira, fleshly and selfish complaint broke out among the Hellenistic or Greek-speaking Jews apparently against those of Jerusalem and Judea. It was not the Jews of pure descent jealous of those from elsewhere, who profited by the self-sacrificing love which sold houses and lands that none might want. Still less was it the germ of those judaizing divisions which were to be a source of not only deep, wide, and long-lasting disquiet, but of the utmost danger in denying the grace and corrupting the truth of which the Church and the Christian are the responsible depositories. “Now in those days, when the disciples were multiplying, there arose a murmuring of the Hellenists against the Hebrews that [or, because] their widows were overlooked in the daily ministration” (ver. 1). The murmuring came from those who had more or less of foreign admixture: whereas ill-feeling usually and naturally characterized those who boasted of associations wholly Israelitish. It was the Greek-speaking Jews who murmured against the Hebrews. That the mistake and indeed wrong was with the complainers seems plain, if from nothing else, from the grace evinced by all those who were the object of their murmuring, as the sequel shows. It is habitually the wrong-doer who denounces men better than himself. “Their widows,” they alleged, were being overlooked in the daily supply of wants. We are not told that so it really was, but so they complained. The poor “widows are ever remembered of God. Their mouth should be stopped, if the allegation were false. “And the twelve, having called the multitude of the disciples unto [them] said, It is not seemly that we, leaving the word of God, should serve tables. Look out then, brethren, from among you seven men of good report full of [the] Spirit and wisdom, whom we will appoint over this business; but we for our part will give ourselves closely to prayer and the ministry of the word” (ver. 2-4). Up to this time the administration was in the hands of the apostles, as we see in Acts 4:35, though probably they may have employed many brethren in the actual distribution to each needy individual. But that there were already officers whose province it was is not only without but against the evidence of. Scripture. I am aware that Mosheim tries to prove such a class of functionaries from “the young men” (oi vcilrcpot) in chap. v. 6, which he will have rather fancifully to be the counterpart of “the elders” (01 77-pC0131.yrepoi) who do not appear till the end of chap. xi., Kuhnol and Olshausen accepting his thought. But the usage of Scripture nowhere countenances any such official “younger men,” as it does often in the use of “elders.” On the contrary in the same context, on their return from burying Ananias, they are called “the young men,” (oi vcaveatcot) which cannot be conceived to have such a force and therefore ought to refute it for the previous and corresponding term. They were simply the younger brethren, on whom would naturally devolve any prompt call for a laborious and sorrowful duty, of a physical nature. Compare 1 Tim. 5:1, 2; Titus 2:6; and 1 Peter 5:5. Toat not the Hellenists but the Hebrews had deacons already is the unfounded idea of the same writer, whose history would have small value as to later times if not far better than his use of the inspired source—It would be hard to say where Mosheim is right in his review of the apostolic church. The fit moment was come for the apostles to be relieved from outer work and thus free for what was spiritual. They direct therefore the establishment of responsible men for the daily ministrations in Jerusalem. This service was diaconal, yet peculiar (as Chrysostom long ago remarked), because of the actual circumstances there. Hence it may be that the term “deacons” is not here or elsewhere given to “the seven,” but this number of theirs even more than “the twelve” becomes a sort of distinctive badge. As the money came from the disciples in general, on them do the apostles call to look out from among them brethren in whom they could happily confide; yet the apostles, acting for the Lord in order, established them over the business. It was not seemly, or proper (for apeaTOv admits of a wider sense than the very narrow one of “pleasing,” or “our pleasure” that they should forsake the word of God, and serve tables. To this their continuance in that work would otherwise have come. Loving wisdom thus turns for good ungrateful complaints. But it is in this a principle of moment is rendered evident. Where the Lord gives He chooses, as for all ministry in the word; where the assembly gives, they choose as here. We see the same thing in 2 Cor. 8:18, 19, where a brother was chosen by the assemblies as fellow-traveler with Paul and Titus, providing for things honest not only before the Lord but also before men. This is the meaning of “messengers of churches.” They were selected by the assemblies which sent help to the poor saints elsewhere, as the apostle would not take charge of the collection otherwise. Compare also Cor. xvi. 3, 4. In the case of “elders” we find the apostles choosing, and not the disciples (Acta xvi. 23); and so Titus is told to do. Thus we have three principles quite distinct: (1) the Lord choosing and sending those whom He gives as gifts to the church; (2) the apostle, or an apostolic man by express commission, choosing or establishing elders; and (3) the assembly choosing the administrators of its funds, whom the apostles set solemnly over this business.

That “the seven” were deacons (in the traditional sense of a brief noviciate or apprenticeship to the priesthood) is as unscriptural as that they had previously been of the “seventy” whom the Lord sent out “two and two” with a final message through Judea. Their work was not to preach and baptize, but the dispensing of help to the temporal need of every day. Philip no doubt did preach, but he, we are expressly told, was “an evangelist.” It was therefore in virtue of this gift, not of that appointment to care for the poor in Jerusalem, that we find him, in the dispersion of the assembly, preaching in Samaria and beyond. Just as evidently had Stephen the gift of a teacher if not of a prophet, which he exercised in a most solemn testimony before the council. But neither the multitude chose, nor yet did the apostles appoint, a single man to preach or teach. Evangelists and teachers were given by Christ the Head, and so they are still. The church is neither the source nor the channel of ministry; which is the exercise of a gift flowing from Christ at the right hand of God. So it was at the beginning, and so it remains till He comes again.

Here it was but a local charge, however important and honorable, to which, as the multitude chose, the apostles appointed. The distinction is as plain as it is complete; but men are apt to view matters of the kind through the medium of habit and prejudice. Their duty was to carry out the distribution of the means for relieving the wants of the Christian community; which would leave the apostles free for the service of the word of God. Their number was doubtless suitable to the requirements of their work. Their qualifications were that they should have a good report, and be full of the Spirit and wisdom. To make their establishment more or other is as common as it is baseless. It would be unaccountable if men had not objects foreign to Christ and so to God's word.

“But we,” say the apostles emphatically, “will give ourselves closely to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” This is much to be weighed. For that service of the word prayer should take the first place. So it was with the apostles, but not so with the Corinthian saints, who forgot not only that power is to be subordinated to order (1 Cor. 14) but that life according to Christ has to be exercised now in holy and constant self-denial, as the prime duty of him who names the Lord. Prayer is the outgoing and expression of dependence, and is so much the more requisite, that the ministry of the word be not in the will or resources of man, but in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, yet in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that the faith of the saints stand not in men's wisdom but in God's power. In the order of the soul's blessing from God the word takes precedence, as we may see in comparing the end of Luke 10 with the beginning of Luke 11, where we have the moral sequence of these two means of grace. Receiving from God goes before drawing near to our Father. But for the due ministry of the word prayer is the great prerequisite that flesh may afford no occasion to the enemy, and the individual may be a vessel to honor, sanctified, meet for the Master's use, prepared unto every good work.

“And the saying pleased [lit. before] all the multitude; and they chose Stephen, a man full of grace and of [the] Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Simon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte of Antioch, whom they set before the apostles; and having prayed they laid their hands on them” (ver. 5, 6).

The grace shown by the apostles had a remarkable answer to it in the multitude; for all the names being Greek indicate a Hellenistic connection. Persons seem to have been chosen without exception from the ranks of the Greek-speaking believers, the very class which had murmured against the Hebrews. Was not this grace enough to make the suspicious ashamed? There was no human provision of a balance or of a fair representation, as habits of business or the spirit of a law-court would suggest. God was looked to in faith, and the most marked conciliation prevailed. The supposition that there had been already Hebrew care-takers, and now that Hellenists wore added to look after Hellenistic interests, is to miss and mar this beautiful account of divine love in full activity, by supposing the infusion of a mere worldly prudence.

It is also to be observed that “the seven” when chosen were presented to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them in token of fellowship with their appointment. Imposition of hands, was an ancient sign of blessing, Gen. 48:14, especially of official recognition, Num. 18:15, or of commendation to God's grace, Acts 13:3, 26 (compare xv. 40). The impartation of the Spirit by that act in Acts 8:17, and xix. 6, or again in 1 Tim. 4:14, 2 Tim. 1:6, is distinct, as will be shown in their places. Probably in the establishment of elders there may have been a similar laying on of hands as some have gathered from 1 Tim. 5:22. But Scripture is silent as to the fact, it would seem in order to guard believers from that fatal routine of superstitious form which has overlaid Christendom to the dishonor of the Lord and the hurt of rule. Even if apostolic hands were laid on presbyters, we are not told it; but where the duty was of an outward character, and godly men were chosen by the multitude, the apostles (we are, expressly told) did lay hands on them. Not the multitude, but as we have seen the apostles chose elders for the disciples (Acts 14:23); and Scripture does not tell us of their hands being laid on them, even if the fact were so. How infirm is the groundwork of ecclesiastical pride! How perfect is the word both in what it says and in its reticence!

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 5:33-42

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

One can hardly conceive an answer more direct than this of the apostles. Israelitish authority was for them a judged system; for were the chiefs not convicted of deadly opposition to the God of their fathers? They might again and again command the apostles to be silent about Him whom they had hanged, though God had sent Him as Leader and Savior; nor was it their testimony only, but of the Holy Spirit also, whom the Jews could not pretend to have. How awful and terrible their position!

“ And when they heard, they were cut to the heart [lit., sawn asunder] and took counsel1 (ti 1) H P and the bulk of cursives, the Vulgate, Syriac versions, &c.) to slay them.” (Acts 5:33.) It is always dangerous to oppose the truth, and the more so in proportion to the importance of that in question. Here it was the foundation of all, and so estimated by those whom the Lord called to proclaim it; and as the adversaries were resolved to reject the testimony, they all naturally betook themselves to designs of blood. Convicted yet rebellious, and abhorring the witnesses whom they could not gainsay, they were chagrined to the utmost, and consulted to slay those before them. No compunction, still less self-judgment, as in chap. ii., but they were torn with rage. But the God, who by His angel had just brought them out of prison, was pleased to shield His exposed servants from these more and more guilty murderers, and wrought after another sort of providential interference, not now angelic but human. The hearts of all are in His keeping.

“But there stood up one in the council, a Pharisee, by name Gamaliel, a law-teacher, in honor with all the people, and commanded to put the men [or, apostles] out a little while, and said unto them, Ye men of Israel [or, Israelites], take heed to yourselves as to these men what ye are about to do. For before these days rose up Theudas, saying that he himself was somebody, with whom a number of men, about four hundred, took sides; who was slain, and all as many as obeyed him were dispersed and came to nothing. After him rose up Judas the Galilean, in the days of the census, and drew into revolt people after him; and he perished, and all as many as obeyed him were scattered abroad. And now I say to you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone; for if this counsel or if this work be of men, it will be overthrown, but if it is of God, ye will not be [or, are] able to overthrow them [N A B C co"• D E, at least a dozen cursives, the later Syriac, &c. as against H P, most cursives, versions, &c. which support “it “] lest ye be found [even] fighting against God” (ver. 34-39).

From such a quarter these words of sobriety, as opposed to Sadducean violence, were irresistible. There seems no just reason to doubt that it is the same celebrated man, son of Rabbi Simeon, grandson of the more famous Hillel, who presided over the Sanhedrim during the reign of Tiberius, Caligula, and Claudius, whose son succeeded to the same chief place, and perished during the Beige. Under Gamaliel we are told in chap. xxii., Paul studied the law, of which he was styled “the glory,” as he was the first to bear the title of Rabban. That he was a Christian publicly, or even secretly, is only the assertion of unscrupulous legendmongers. Scripture gives us not only a perfectly reliable but a most graphic account of the man and of his character, as well as of the way in which he was providentially used at this critical moment.

This intervention exactly fits in with the entire context, where God is tracing for our instruction how He watches over His own on earth to His glory. There was the manifestation of. the Spirit's presence where they were all assembled, and all filled with Him (Acts 4:31), lights in the world, holding forth the word of life, living to the forgetfulness of all selfish interests, whilst the apostles with ereat power testified of the Lord's resurrection (iv. 32-37). Then follows the display of the energy of the Holy Ghost in judgment of hypocritical deception and covetousness within (chap. v. 1-11), but along with it the renewed activity of miraculous power through the apostles in grace (chap. v. 12-16); next, the Jews growingly opposing themselves to the testimony of Christ, but their power manifestly frustrated by divine power through the angel which set free the prisoners on their mission of grace and truth (v. 17 -25). Lastly, when the exasperated will of men would proceed to deeds of blood, God interferes in the ordinary way of His providence to protect Hi`s faithful servants by a grave and wise man even in the enemy's camp. The voice of moderation and wisdom, though only natural, prevailed over the rash impulses of pride and passion intermingled with fear. God would still provide a further space for truth to awaken consciences and win hearts among His ancient people, guilty though they were. It was the day of grace, when He would save to the praise of the Lord Jesus. “Ye Israelites, take heed to yourselves as to these

men what things ye are about to do." (Ver. 35.)

Of Theudas, who is in the first instance named by Gamaliel, we know no more than Luke records. "For before these days rose up Theudas, saying that he was somebody, with whom a number of men, about four hundred, took sides; who was slain, and all as many as obeyed him were scattered and brought to nothing" (ver. 36). It is not likely that the Theudas, who, according to Josephus, appeared at least a dozen years after Gamaliel's speech in the fourth par of Claudius (A.D. 44), can have been so seriously misplaced even by an historian abounding in inaccuracies, as all competent men acknowledge. If Luke had been only an ordinary godly Christian, is it conceivable that he would put into the mouth of a prominent and respected Jew like Gamaliel a falsehood so egregious as antedating the story of Theudas. If he be an inspired writer, it is needless to assert his immaculate exactness: God who knows all and cannot lie is the true source of inspiration, whoever may be the instrument. The fact is that, on the one hand, the historical accuracy, as tested by the minutest shades of knowledge in the varying conditions and circumstances of which he writes freely in his Gospel, and even more amply in this book of the Acts, is too well known generally by the most competent to need proof here; and, on the other, the name of Theudas2 was too common (Cf. Cic. ad Fain. vi. 10 ed. Orell. iii. 41, Galeni Opp. xiii. 925 ed. Kuhn), to provoke the least well-grounded surprise that more than one so called could rise up among the many insurgent chiefs who agitated the Jews either before or since the death of Herod the Great. Josephus himself alludes to many, of whom he names but three; the Theudas, whose defeat by Fadus he places a dozen years later, seems to have had a far larger following than the 400 of whom our Evangelist writes.

To the believer it is certain that the revolt of Judas the Galilean was subsequent to that of the Theudas of whom Gamaliel spoke. Josephus entirely agrees with the Acts that it was in the time of the census under Quirinus, A.D. 6. (Antt. xviii. sub. init.) And it is remarkable that the Jewish historian, though describing him there as a Gaulonite of the city of Gamala. susequently (6) speaks of him, just as Gamaliel does in our chapter, as "the Galilean Judas." Had this later mention been withheld, the impugners of revelation would have become loud in decrying Luke as they are absurd in their disposition to treat Josephus as infallible. But short as is the inspired report of Gamaliel's speech, we have strikingly accurate information of Judas perishing, as to which the historian is silent, and of the mere but thorough scattering of his most numerous supporters, who did not come to naught like Theudas, but again and again reappeared, till this last and for a time successful effort terminated in the death of his younger son Menahem, A.D. 66. "After him rose up Judas the Galilean in the days of the census, and drew into revolt people after him; and he perished, and all as many as obeyed him were scattered abroad." Whether Origen (Homil. in Luc. xxv.) had authority to say that this Judas really pretended to be Messiah may be doubtful; bu't he drew his vast crowds with the cry, "We have God as our only leader and Lord." The uprising was fanatical as well as revolutionary. But how did it end? pleaded Gamaliel.

Then follows his advice of patient waiting for results. "And now I say to you, Refrain from those men, and let them alone: for if this council or if this work be of men, it will be overthrown; but if it is of God, ye will not be able to overthrow them lest ye be found also [or, even] fighting against God" (ver. 38, 32). It was the form of toleration which a grave Jew might feel, impressed with recent facts, the character of the accused, and the state of public opinion. But there is far more reference to the issue under God than in the modern doctrine of toleration which is in general a mere homage to the rights of man, ignoring God and the truth. He may have felt that persecution is a sorry means of subverting error or maintaining truth. Whatever the value or the motives of his judgment, it commended itself to the council, and saved the apostles from a death that seemed imminent.

Perhaps it may not be amiss here to give a specimen of the famous John Calvin's skill in handling the word of God. In his comment on the passage he first of all shows little favor to the sober speech with which Gamalial swayed the council and extinguished the fiery zeal of those inclined to extremities. "But if any one weigh all duly, his opinion is unworthy of a prudent man. I know indeed that by many it is held as an oracle; but that they judge badly appears with sufficient clearness even from this, because in such a way one must abstain from all punishments, neither were any wickedness to be corrected longer: yea, one must refuse all helps of life, which not even for one moment is it in our disposal to prolong. Both things indeed are said truly: what is of God cannot be destroyed by any efforts of men; what is of men is too weak to stand. But it is a bad inference that meanwhile we must do nothing. Rather should we see what God enjoins: and his will is that wickedness be restrained by us." (I. Calvini. 0)7p. vi. in loc. Amstel. 1667.) Here breaks out the inflexible rigor which insisted on the burning of the unhappy Servetus, and the severe punishment of others. Their evil doctrines are not questioned; but what have servants of Christ to do with measures of the kind? We have not so learned Him. The church has no doubt its own responsibility in the spiritual domain; as the world in what pertains to this life. Calvin has confounded all this in the opinion which censures Gamaliel; who meant nothing less than to deny the duty of the powers that be, but rightly urged that men should await the manifestation of that which was doubtful, instead of yielding to the hasty measures of passion and prejudice. To dissuade from extreme violence where the work might prove to be of God was certainly wiser than punishing to the utmost where they knew of no adequate reason. Calvin's logic seems as precarious as his confusion is evident of things spiritual and worldly. But this is not so extraordinary as his judgment that when Luke says "After him [Theudas] rose up Judas," he does not mark the order of time, as if Judas were the latter; that Gamaliel brought in his two examples promiscuoucly "in disregard of time," and that "after" means no more than "besides" or "moreover!"3 He had said before, "If we credit Josephus, Gamaliel here inverts the true series of history." Not so; unless we assume there could be only one insurrectionary Theudas. Now Josephus tells us of four men named Judas in 10 years, who broke out in rebellion, and of three named Simon in 40 years; and he in no way professes to name all, but on the contrary implies many more as unnamed. The assumption of Calvin is of all the least rational and least reverent possible.

As usual one wrong step leads to many. For Calvin is led thereby into the truly absurd consequence that, if we reckon the time, we shall find that it was at least twelve years since the death of Christ before the apostles were beaten! This blundering computation is founded entirely on confounding the Theudas of Gamaliel's speech with him who, as Josephus tells us, was dealt with by Cuspius Fadus in the reign of Claudius. "Therefore that space of time of which I spoke is complete, and so the more excellent the constancy of the apostles, who, though ill-requited for the long pains they endured, are in no way discouraged, nor cease to hold the even tenour of their way." Calvin was a great and good man, I doubt not; but the more striking and instructive is the lesson of boldness and folly when a man, no matter who, abandons the sure meaning of the written word for his own reasoning, which in such a case will ever betray its weak and worthless, not to say presumptuous, character. For what is man when he lifts up his voice against God? I do not dwell on other remarks of the commentator, which let out singular unfairness toward Gamaliel, as I have no desire to defend the latter nor expose the former beyond that measure which seems to me profitable for the reader. But I give his actual words:—

“Ergo conficitur illud quod dixi temporis spatium. Quo praestantior fuit Apostolorum constantia, qui quum post diuturnos labores obitos tam indignam mercedem reportent, non tamen franguntur, neque desinunt cursum suum persoqui.”

“And to him they yielded, and, having called the apostles, they beat and charged [them] not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. They therefore went their way from the presence of [the] council, rejoicing that they were accounted worthy to be dishonored for the name4. And every day in the temple and at home they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus the Christ.” 5 (ver. 40-32).

Thus, though plucked from death, the apostles suffered the indignity of stripes at the hands of Jews, as Paul was afterward to experience at least five times. “The unjust man knoweth no shame.” If the Roman judge scourged the Lord of glory, the disciples were not above their Master, and must bear from Jew or Gentile to be treated as wicked men worthy to be beaten, Deut. 25:2. Doubtless it was for their alleged disobedience; and they are dismissed with a fresh command not to speak in the name of Jesus. How senseless is the will of unbelief! Impossible for one who knew His glory and His grace to be silent: God is concerned in it supremely, and not man only or chiefly because he is otherwise lost forever. And what is due to Him who so humbled Himself, and suffered for our sins, and glorified God as nothing else could? “They therefore went their way from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were accounted worthy to be dishonored for the name.” Who can doubt the deep and divinely sprung joy of hearts that answered in their little measure to Him whose delight is in His Son above all? What an impulse, not discouragement, to their testimony “in the temple” to all comers (for of course no proper assemblies would have been permitted there), “and at home,” where the saints broke bread, prayed, edified one another, &c.! But every where and every day there was but one theme: teaching or evangelizing, it was Jesus the Christ.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 5:21-32

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

The apostles, thus miraculously brought out of prison, acted promptly on the message to the confusion of the enemy.

“And when they heard they entered about dawn into the temple and were teaching. And when the high priest arrived and those with him, they called together the council and all the senate of the sons of Israel, and sent unto the jail to have them brought. But the officers that arrived did not find them in the prison; and they returned and reported, saying, We found the jail shut in all security and the keepers standing at the doors, but on opening we found no one within. And when both [the priest and]1 the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these words, they were utterly perplexed about them whereto this would come. And there arrived one and reported to them, Behold, the men whom ye put in the prison are in the temple standing and teaching the people. Then the captain went away with the officers, and brought them, not with violence, for they feared the people lest they should be stoned. And having brought they set them in the council; and the high priest asked them, saying, We strictly charged you not to teach on this name; and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and purpose to bring upon us the blood of this man. And in answer Peter and the apostles said, Obedience must be to God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom ye slew by hanging on a tree: him God exalted with his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and remission of sins. And we are [his]2 witnesses of these things [lit., words], and the Holy Spirit whom God gave to those that obey him” (Ver. 21-32.)

In the temple there was no hindrance to instruction in the word of God, the Old Testament scriptures; and as yet none others were written. The apostles therefore used their liberty, as their Master had done before. (Matt. 21:23-xxiii.; Mark 11; Luke 20 xxi. 37, 38; John 7:14, 28, 37; 8:2-59; 10:23-39.) So it was too in the synagogues; and the apostles were in no way disposed to forego the opportunity of expounding the scriptures to the people, as we see in the history of Paul especially. There they were teaching at break of day; they were obedient, and their hearts in the work.

But the adversaries were not slack on their side. “And when the high priest arrived and those with him, they called together the council and all the senate of the sons of Israel, and sent unto the jail to have them brought. But the officers that arrived did not find them in the prison; and they returned and reported, saying, We found the jail shut in all security, and the keepers standing at the doors; but on opening we found no one within.” Thus the Sanhedrim met in due form, and in all the confidence of the highest religious authority. But the prisoners were no longer in custody; and, what was the most surprising news of all, without violence from within or from without. The building was found by the officials in all security. the keepers on guard at the doors; but not a prisoner was there. “And when both the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these words, they were utterly perplexed about them whereto this would come.” Conscience could not but whisper, the more inexplicable to them it might seem. Strange things had Jerusalem seen and heard: not only when the Christ was here, but more widely and wonderfully since He died, and, as the disciples affirmed, rose and went to heaven. That God had somehow brought out of the prison the apostles, whom Jewish authority had put in, was rather in keeping with all that had been of late transpiring in their midst in Solomon's porch and elsewhere. But unbelief is the rebellion of the heart and may work most proudly in the face of the fullest testimony, without one solid ground of objection or a reasonable excuse. And as it is the heart that is in question, neither age nor sex, neither knowledge nor ignorance, exempts a single person from its poisonous activity. Indeed an active or subtle mind, however much furnished and exercised, only gives the larger means and scope for its evil opposition to God. “Ye will not come to Me that ye might have life.” “For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” “He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true.” Men dread consequences. Faith is subject to God's word, and seeks to please Him. The Jewish rulers were afraid of the issues now. They had no thought of God in the unseen light of eternity.

“ And there arrived one and reported, Behold, the men whom ye put in prison are in the temple standing and teaching the people.” God took care to give publicity to the defeat of the guilty people in the hour of their seeming power over His servants. Had the council before charged and threatened them strictly not to speak at all nor teach on the name of Jesus? Had they now, filled with envy, put them in the public prison? God had by an angel brought them out from doors ever so secured and guards vigilant as they might be; and there they were in the temple standing and teaching the people. “Then the captain went away with the officers and brought them, not with violence, for they feared the people lest they should be stoned.” How comforting to faith the witness of the weak strong, and of the strong weak! Hardened as the captain

and the officers might be, they were overawed, so that they abstained from violence even to escaped prisoners,—and not these but those feared lest they should be atoned. But it was man they dreaded, not God. The apostles had God before their eyes, the only true deliverance from the fear of man.

“ And having brought they set them in the council; and the high priest asked them, saying, We strictly charged you not to teach on this name; and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and purpose to bring upon us the blood of this man” They assuredly had no wish for or thought of accentuating their own powerlessness in presence of a few poor and weak and ignorant Galilean. Yet could they not conceal from themselves any more than from others that their own commands were impotent, and the teaching of the apostles everywhere prevalent in the city, with the blood of Him whom they dreaded to name weighing heavily and increasingly on their consciences. But a little while age Pilate had vainly washed his hands before the multitude, as if he could thus rid himself of his dark blot in delivering Jesus to their will; and then answered all the people, His blood be on us and on our children; and the priests, yea the chief priests, pleaded against the Holy Sufferer, instead of interceding for the Guiltless. Now are they the first to deprecate and feel the guilt of that blood on their own heads, and to shrink from its intolerable burden and (save to faith) irrevocable curse. There was, however, no uprightness of conscience: had there been, they would have found a sure and immediate and everlasting resource in the purging efficacy of that blood. What had the boldest of the apostles proved? Were they ignorant of his denying his Master? Yet was he soon after restored in soul so completely as to be able calmly and earnestly without a blush to tax the people with denying the Holy One and the Just and desiring a murderer to the granted to them! Such is the virtue of Him who came by water and blood: life is in Him only. So testifies the Holy Spirit, and He is the truth. But what did the Sanhedrim care for the truth, especially from the lips of unlearned and ignorant men in reproof of all the erudition and dignified office in Israel?

Peter and John had before this asked, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken to you rather than to God, judge ye. Now they all join Peter in his still firmer reply, Obedience must be to God rather than men. This is the great practical principle of faith, as it was the uniform characteristic of Christ in all perfection here below. “Lo, I come to do thy will, O God:” not miracles, not doing good, not teaching, not zeal, so much as unqualified and unfailing obedience rendered to God. Yet was Jesus a man approved of God unto them by powers and wonders and signs, which God did by Him in their midst beyond past example no less than present doubt. Yet was He anointed with the Holy Spirit and went about doing good, and healing all oppressed with the devil. The people too were astonished at His teaching, and all bare Him witness and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth; and the very officers sent to apprehend Him declared with truth, Never man spake like this man. And for burning jealousy for the Father's glory His disciples could not but be reminded that it was written, The zeal of Thine house hath eaten Ito up. But all these had their fit seasons. Obedience was always there, as unfaltering as constant, as lowly as perfect. Nor is there any principle so essential for the Christian. He is sanctified of the Spirit unto Christ's obedience as well as to the sprinkling of His blood (as the gospel is for faith-obedience, in contrast with enforcement of law), and his soul is purified by obeying the truth to unfeigned brotherly love; for God chose him to salvation in sanctification of the Spirit and faith of the truth. Hence, though he may have sometimes to wait on God for light, obedience is the invariable place and duty of the believer. It is never a question of his rights; he. is called to obey. He is bound to be subject to every human institution for the Lord's sake, whether to the King as supreme—or to rulers as sent by him, free but not having his freedom for a cloak of malice but as God's bondmen. Hence, if collision come between God's word and the ruler's requirement, his path is clear: God must be obeyed, but in suffering perhaps, not resistance to authority. He is always to obey, though in some cases it may be God rather than men. Nothing is so humble, nothing so firm. Naturally the believer might be feeble and timid; obedience by grace gives strength and courage. He might be self-confident and unyielding: obedience gives distrust in self and meekness in doing God's will. “He that doeth the will of God abideth for over;” even as sin is self-will or lawlessness, and its end judgment and perdition. Therefore is obedience not only an inalienable duty, but the true pathway of power, and the sure means of extrication from every snare of the enemy. So the blessed Lord defeated Satan; and so the apostles now lay bare the tremendous fact that the Jewish heads and people were as wholly beguiled by Satan, as they themselves were in simple-hearted subjection to God. Once the elect nation had God in the world, as they had the Messiah in hope. Now that they had rejected their Messiah, they were not only without God like the Gentiles but the proved adversaries of God. They were only “men” like others; and “obedience must be to God rather than men.”

This Peter proceeds to demonstrate in a few plain, pointed, irrefragable words. “The God of our fathers raised up Jesus,—whom ye slew by hanging on a tree: Him God exalted with His right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and remission of sins. And we are [His] witnesses of these things, and the Holy Ghost whom God gave to those that obey Him.” Here the proof is short and unanswerable, the antagonism to the God of Israel in chiefs and people, beyond question. The God of their fathers (how unlike them the children!) raised up Jesus whom ye slew (and with the deepest ignominy too) by hanging on a tree. Here, it is no longer the ambiguous word livearyprev, but the more determinate thcipcv, not merely raising Him up as a living Messiah on earth, as in chap. iii. 22, 26, vii. (18) 37, xiii. 32, but waking Him up after death. Nor was resurrection all; for God exalted Him (not “to” as in Webster and Wilkinson, but) by His right hand (as Peter had preached, ch. 33, in fulfillment of the undeniably Messianic psalm ex). But in what relation to them did He take His place in heaven? As Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and remission of sins. The door of grace was still open. God was waiting to be gracious to His people though guilty of the great transgression; and He could afford by that blood to free them even from their guilt in shedding it. Surely Christ will appear in judgment one day. Meanwhile He is announced as Leader and Savior to give Israel just what they wanted—repentance and remission of sins.

There was testimony more than adequate—abundant. “And we are [his] witnesses of these things [or, words], and the Holy Spirit whom God gave to those that obey Him.” Compare the Lord's own words in John 15:26, 27: “But when the Comforter is come whom I will send unto you from the Father, the Spirit of truth which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me; and ye also bear witness, because ye are with me from the beginning.” The Holy Spirit is not only their power of duly remembering the past, but Himself the witness of the glory Of Christ in heaven. And this blessed Spirit, who wrought mightily in the apostles and others set high in the assembly, is given of God to those who submit to the authority of the heavenly Leader. Such is the full force of the peculiar word “obey” employed here. The distinct personality of the divine Spirit is as carefully guarded as in ver.- 3, though in a different way.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 5:12-20

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

The Lord seized the critical moment when Ananias and Sapphira thus sinned unto death, and a death so awe-inspiring, to put fresh and gracious honor on the Twelve. One of their number had just stood prominently before all as the vessel of divine power in judging deliberate and hypocritical iniquity, in which the offending pair had been consenting partners. Now it was according to His wisdom to manifest the normal flow of His goodness and compassion in honor of the Lord Jesus, and in a world ruined through sin and wretched under its dismal effects.

“ And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; and they were all of one accord in the porch of Solomon. And of the rest durst no man join them; but the people magnified them; and believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women; insomuch as even to carry out the sick into the streets and put [them] on beds and couches, that, as Peter came, at least his shadow might overshadow some one of them. And there also came together the multitude from the cities round about [? unto] Jerusalem, bringing sick persons and persons troubled by unclean spirits; and they were healed every one.” (Ver. 12-16.)

This witness to the supremacy of the rejected Messiah now exalted to the right hand of God we are apt to forget, being so long accustomed to its absence, and it may be thinking too exclusively of His grace to us and too little of His glory. What mercy it is that keeps up that which is yet more precious and even more profoundly wonderful, the unchanged efficacy of His blood, the new creation, union with Him, and the ever-abiding presence of the Holy Ghost in and with us on earth. But we ought not to be insensible to the blessed even if partial display of the testimony to His power over all the groaning creation, and those evil spirits who seduced man to his ruin into their own rebelliousness against God; nor should we ignore the humbling fact that such a display so soon faded away, as doubtless it was meet that it should. The God of all grace (and so now pre-eminently is God revealing Himself) would not stay such an answer on earth to Christ's exaltation to the seat of divine power, were there not the wisest and most adequate reasons, not only on the side of His own moral glory, but because the continuance of such signs and wonders would be an anomaly in His ways, and an injury rather than a blessing to be saints, when the assembly fall more and more from the grace and truth which came by our Lord Jesus Christ.

It is evident that here as on other occasions the apostles were those above all distinguished by doing many signs and wonders. Plainly from Acts 6:8; 8:6, 7, 13 the power was in no way confined to those whom God set first in the church; for the martyr Stephen and the evangelist Philip were both remarkable in that way. Nor can there be an intelligent doubt, for the believer who reads 1 Cor. 12, that such sign-gifts might be distributed widely and apart from all public office; even as our Lord intimated in Mark 16:17, 18, for “those that believed,” not merely for certain prominent functionaries. Here however the mighty works were done by those in the front rank; nor were they done in a corner, but in all publicity, for they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch, of the rest no man daring to join them. The moral effect was immense. On the other hand, the people magnified them; on the other, believers Were more than ever added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women. “Women” had been emphatically mentioned in chapter i, when the disciples, however closely found together, were only so many individuals cleaving to the Lord in faith, and giving themselves up with one accord to continual prayer, before the uniting power of the one Spirit sent down from heaven baptized all into one body. The prophecy applied to the Pentecostal gift implied the common share women were to have in the promise of the Father, and its mighty consequence (chap. ii. 17, 18); and now we hear “women” again named explicitly among the multitudes of believers added to the Lord.

Among the signs and wonders a very special feature is pointed out in verse 15: their bringing out the sick into the streets and putting them on beds and couches that the more shadow of Peter as he came along might overshadow some one of them. So did the abundant goodness of God by man in honor of Jesus fill men's hearts with confident expectation. Nor do we hear of disappointment. On the contrary we are told that the multitude also of the cities round about Jerusalem flocked thither, bringing sick people and those troubled by unclean spirits; and healing was vouchsafed to them all. How wondrous the virtue of that Name which thus unfailingly invested His servants with power superior to every demand over evil seen or unseen!

Again come forward the Sadducean party. Liberalism is no more friendly to the truth than traditionalism. And no wonder. Their citadel had been stormed by the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. They felt themselves assailed and pursued in the open field. by the proclamation of the gospel, and by the miraculous powers which magnified the Name of the crucified Messiah.

“And the high priest rising up, and all those that were with him, which is the sect of the Sadducees, were filled with wrath, and laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in public ward. But an angel of [the] Lord by night opened the doors of the prison, and leading them out said, Go and stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this Life.” (Ver. 17-20.)

During the ministry of the Lord Jesus here below the Pharisees had been His chief adversaries; self, righteousness, unrighteousness, zealously holding to tradition, and veiled by religious forms, waged constant warfare against the Righteous One; and the more, as He was ever the expression of God's grace and truth to those who owned their true condition of guilt and ruin before God. When He presented Himself as Messiah for the last time to the unbelieving people, and was going, as He well knew, to death, not in rejection only but in atonement, all came out in unambiguous opposition, whatever the pretense, chief priests and elders, Pharisees, Herodians, Sadducees, coming to judge Him, but in result to be themselves judged by the word. Now after He rose from the dead those who said there is no resurrection nor angel nor spirit were naturally the most embitterce, notwithstanding their usual self-complacency and character as the mildest of the people. But man never knows himself apart from Christ, any more than he thinks or feels rightly about God. The revealed truth detects and lays him bare in his departure from God; and this is so much the more intolerable as he has a religious position to maintain. Hence the excessive anger of the Sadducean high priest and his party at this time. Their boasted liberty of conscience is only for the different forms of error. The truth of God is ever unwelcome, and those who preach it are mere troublers to be punished without hesitation. They “laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in public ward.”

But the God who had acted in the assembly, with a stroke which slew the guilty husband and wife, was not wanting now; and a providential messenger of His power was sent to deliver His faithful servants. “An angel of [the] Lord by night opened the doors of the prison, and leading them out said, Go and stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this Life.”

The intervention then was as sensible as it was striking. God is marking in the chapter the reality and the varied forms of His action for His assembly and those members of it in particular who are charged with His word and rouse most the animosity of the foe. Angelic care has in now way disappeared for His servants, though there is no such display of power as of old, any more than the presence and energy of the Spirit within the assembly. It is our fleshly activity, and our lack of spirituality, which hinder. We grieve the Spirit by our self-confidence and worldly wisdom; and we fail to discern the wonderful ways in which God delivers. Were our eyes more truly opened of the Lord we should see that, when beset with seemingly countless and overwhelming adversaries, they that be with us, if really with and for Christ, are more than they that be with them. Are they not all ministering spirits sent out for service on account of those that shall inherit salvation?

Here no doubt there could be no mistake about the matter; for it was no question of men escaping by strength or skill or any earthly means, but of an angel opening the doors of the prison by night, leading them out, and commanding them to speak in the temple to the people all the words of this Life. The source of the deliverance was as plain as the commission to speak. The religious chiefs were in flat opposition to the God of all grace who would have men that believed through grace to be His chosen vessels in proclaiming all the words of this Life in Christ the Lord. For there is no other Name of salvation given among men, none other way than the Son to the Father. Life in Him, remission of sins through His blood, the gift of the Holy Spirit, such are the first blessings which the gospel announces to every soul that believes in Jesus. And God will have it to go forth freely and fully, let men say or do as they may. But who shall measure the guilt of thus rejecting every testimony from God, not only despising the message of grace, but forbidding and imprisoning the messengers, that the mercy and truth of God in so speaking to man may never reach his ears? Who can wonder that their judgment slumbereth not? The higher the estate, the deeper the fall.

But God, who knows best that His words are the seed of everlasting life, will not have the proud and evil will of man to intercept His message of good. He therefore as in a day of wonders interfered by an angel to do extraordinarily that which He could have accomplished by more ordinary means, if so it had pleased Him. But the occasion itself then was beyond all that is usual; and it was according to His wisdom that, as His power had been shown judicially within the assembly, and in healing grace by the special envoys of the Lord Jesus, so also with marked superiority over the hostile will of man and authority of the world by the angelic deliverance from the prison. The words of this Life must be spoken at His command that souls might hear and live. One can understand how the courage of faith would be confirmed and increased in His servants by an act so signal; and what a testimony it ought to have been to the consciences of all, especially to the sect of the Sadducees! But unbelief is as hard and as blind towards God, as it is credulous of its own vagaries, and bent on its own will, even with the knell of perdition sounding in its ears.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 5:1-11

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

Manifestation of grace provokes the adversary, and the flesh would gladly gain the highest credit to itself at the least possible cost. It was early to forget that God had just made the assembly His dwelling-place; and certainly the witnesses to His presence therein were many and plain. But the enemy knows how to lure the soul by degrees into fatal evil, and spiritual pretension is a direct road and a slippery as well as rapid descent.

Barnabas had been singled out for special mention as he was afterward to be used and honored of God in the front rank of His servants Ananias follows, but his heart was not right with God: that moment of “great grace upon all” was seized for his great deceit, with the aggravation of his wife knowing and taking part in it. How many a Christian woman has been the true helpmeet of her husband in timely warning and instant appeal, condemning any and every evil at the first buddings! How dreadful when the man and the woman aid one another to forget God and His gracious but holy presence! when they agree to dishonor the name of the Lord by lying pretensions to self-sacrificing devotedness!

“ But a certain man, Ananias by name, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession and reserved [part] of the price, his wife also being privy: and brought and laid a certain part at the feet of the apostles. But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thy heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to reserve for thee of the price of the land? When it remained, did it not remain to thee; and when sold, was it not in thy power? How [is it] that thou conceivedst this thing in thy heart? Thou didst lie not to men but to God. And Ananias hearing these words fell down and expired; and great fear came upon all the hearers, and the younger [men] arose, swathed him, and carrying out buried [him].' (Ver. 1-6.)

Sin is aggravated by the position of the guilty, as is carefully shown in Lev. 4. The ruler is distinguished from one of the people, and the anointed priest involved far more serious consequences than both.

But there is another and yet more solemn criterion, the presence of God, and this according to His nature now fully revealed. In Israel it was Jehovah dwelling in the thick darkness, who governed His people, around Him yet unable to draw near, the Holy Ghost thus signifying that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest. Now it is, by virtue of the blood of Christ, who has therefore entered once for all into the holies, having found eternal redemption. Therefore also is the Holy Spirit come down to constitute us God's dwelling place, His holy temple. If sin became exceeding sinful through the commandment, how abominable in the light of the cross! But therein God condemned sin, not only in its fruits but in its root, and this in Him who became an offering for sin. Such was God's work in sending His own Son, the Holy One yet made sin, that we might become God's righteousness in Him. The sins of the believer are blotted out and forgiven, the evil nature, which could not be forgiven, is already condemned in His cross who died for it; and He is risen, and we are in Him, freed from all condemnation, and living of His life who is alive again for evermore. The Holy Ghost also is not only witness to us but power in us, and personally here to make good God's presence.

Then, again, the dwelling of God is the true and full ground of the call to holiness. Even in Israel it was so “Holiness becometh thine house, O Jehovah, forever.” So shall they hereafter sing in truth of heart when the kingdom comes and Jehovah reigns. And so, looking back, not forward only, it had been when they had no more than a temporal redemption by divine power from Egypt, a type of the incomparably more

blessed and permanent, yea, eternal redemption, which the Lord Jesus acquired by His blood. Even then, when the redemption was but the shadow of better things to come, the God of Israel manifested His presence on behalf, and in the midst, of His people. Now all is real; because Christ, who is the truth, came to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. The full result does not yet appear for the universe, till He comes to reign in righteousness, after which shell be the new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. But meanwhile the mighty work of propitiation is not only accomplished but accepted, and the Spirit of truth is come down in person to effectuate the presence and dwelling of God here below in the assembly of the saints as His house. Hence if the Book of Exodus is, above all books of the Bible, the figure of redemption in its first half, its last half shows us the consequent dwelling, the tabernacle, of Godin the midst of His people; and the ways of the people are regulated accordingly. “There I will meet with the children of Israel, and it shall be sanctified by my glory. And I will sanctify the tabernacle of the congregation and the altar. I will sanctify also both Aaron and his sons, to minister to me in the priest's office. And I will dwell among the children of Israel and will be their God; and they shall know that I am the Lord their God that brought them forth out of the land of Egypt that I may dwell among them: I am the Lord their God.” Exodus 29:43-46.

So it is in the church, now. Holiness is imperative individually, for the Spirit of God dwells in us, as saints purged by the blood of Jesus, alive from the dead, freed from sin and become bondmen to God, that we may have fruit unto holiness, and the end eternal life. “What know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God? And ye are not your own, for ye were bought with a price: glorify God therefore with your body.” 1 Cor. 6:19, 20. But He dwells in the assembly also (1 Cor. 3), and makes us collectively the living God's temple, responsible as come out from unbelievers to be separated, and to touch not what is unclean. There God dwells; to such He is a Father. “Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every pollution of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” 2 Cor. 6:7. Thus in every way, individual or corporate, holiness is grounded, not on law, but on what grace has wrought and given us through our Lord Jesus; and the Holy Spirit is present abidingly to make it good, or, if there be evil, to raise up a suited testimony against that which the cross has proved to be absolutely intolerable. In His children, in the church, will God least of all make allowance for iniquity. God is there in the power of the Holy Spirit to avenge the wrong done to His grace as being there, and to His nature of which the Christian is made a partaker.

Ananias, then, comes forward seeking credit for a display of faith working by love, which the flesh, set on by Satan, sought to emulate without trust in God, nay, seeking to deceive Him too, as if He had no house on earth in which to dwell and manifest His power as well as grace. Part of the proceeds of his sold possessions he kept for himself, part he laid as the whole at the feet of the apostle's. The Lord by His servant resents the sin and insult. “Ananias, said Peter, why did Satan fill thy heart to deceive the Holy Spirit and reserve of the price of the land?....Thou didst not lie to men but to God.” What can more simply and withal more powerfully let us know their sense of God's presence? Sin then blinded the eyes of the guilty disciple; in days not far off unbelief stole the truth away from the church, which thereon set up its own bulwarks, rules, and functionaries, works of its own hands, its calves of gold, in forgetfulness both of Him who is coming back from on high and of Him who meanwhile is here to glorify the Son as the Father. There is no ground to suppose that the motive of Ananias was the hoped for possession of spiritual gifts like Barnabas, or the coveted power to impart them as in Simon's case. It is an error to infer that thus his sin was indeed against the Holy Ghost. The truth of God is deeper than any mere product of human reasoning. It is the same verb in 3 and 4, but a different construction: with an accusative in the sense of imposing on any by falsehood; with a dative as addressing a lie to a person, here to God Himself in the person of the Spirit sent down from heaven.

God was in His holy temple (the old temple being now by the rejection of the Messiah no more than “their house,” the house of unbelieving Jews); and there one bearing the name of the Lord dared to lie to His face. It was no mistake of haste, but deceit with a selfish and hypocritical aim purposed in the heart; and it was so much the more heinous in presence of fresh and boundless grace on God's part, and its fruit in the unexampled self-abandonment of many saints before all. God of old sternly judged an Achan who coveted the accursed thing, and a Gehazi who enriched himself by a shameless prostitution of the prophet's name. “Is it a time,” said the indignant man of God, “to receive money, and to receive garments, and oliveyards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and men-servants, and maid-servants?” So, though it be the day of grace, it is on this account all the more solemn in God's eyes that one professedly a believer in Christ should expect his iniquity to pass muster in the house of His holiness.

On hearing the apostolic words Ananias fell down and expired; so that all that heard were overawed. The younger men that swathed and carried out his body to burial had not returned when, about three hours after, his wife entered, not knowing what was done; and Peter, drawing out from her the distinct evidence that she was privy to the imposture, said, “How is it that ye agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord?” This is just what Satan desires and prompts, that those who are, or at least profess to be, the Lord's should not believe that He is among them. To tempt Him is to doubt this in word or deed—to say in heart, Is He among us or not? How unworthy of those who ought best to know His presence, secured at infinite cost as the Christian at least should also know! How awful to think of the prevalence of this sin now, little felt or judged even by true children of God! So completely, in fact, have the saints in general lost sight of the presence and action of the Spirit in the assembly, that they notoriously and periodically pray that He may be poured out afresh. They of course mean thereby little if anything more than an accession of comfort for believers, and a great increase in the conversion of sinners. But all the while they ignore His actual presence on earth, and seem quite unconscious of the deep slight put upon Him by shutting out His revealed and sovereign working for the glory of Christ in the midst of the gathered saints. They may be waking up to allow more of His free action in gospel work outside for man's salvation; but as for His energy in the church for God's glory and in subjection to His word, they will not hear of it; whatever it may have been, it is out of date and disorderly now! Alas! this is to make the church of man and not of God, though what is of His purpose of grace will last forever.

But Peter added to the convicted widow, “Behold the feet of those that buried thy husband [are] at the door and shall carry thee out. Then she fell immediately at his feet and expired; and the young men coming in found her dead, and carrying [her] forth buried her by her husband.” (Ver. 9, 10). An infliction from its repetition so unmistakably divine could not but make an immediate and still deeper impression; and we read that “great fear fell upon all the assembly, and upon as many as heard these things.” (Ver. 11.) It was meant for all within, as well as without.

This is the first distinct mention of the church or assembly. It is spoken of, not as if just inaugurated, but as a known and already existing body. The church began as a fact on the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit (the promise of the Father, whom Christ sent from the Father as the Father sent Him in the Son's name) baptized all the saints into one body. There had been saints from Abel; now they in the Holy Spirit

became one. In chap. ii. 47 it is well-nigh certain that the true words run that the Lord was day by day adding together those that should be saved, without calling them as yet the church, though of course such they were. The thing was there, not yet so named. Now, according to the words of the Lord in Matt. 16 xvii., they are thus entitled, when God was establishing in the gravest way the reality of His presence by the action of the Spirit who dwells there, and had all power and promptness to avenge deliberate wrong to His nature and majesty done within; unless He would be a party consenting to His own dishonor.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 4:31-37

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

A distinct and immediate answer to united prayer was now given, faith as ever receiving more than it asked. “And when they prayed, the place wherein they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the1 Holy Spirit, and spoke the word of God with boldness. And the heart and soul of the multitude of those that believed was one; and not one said that aught of his possessions was his own; but they had all things common. And with great power did the apostles give their witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus; and great grace was upon them all. For as many as were owners of lands or houses sold [them] and brought the prices of the things that were being sold, and laid [them] at the feet of the apostles; and distribution was made to each according as any one had need. And Joseph that by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas (which is, being interpreted, son of exhortation), a Levite, Cyprian by birth, having a field, sold [it] and brought the money and laid [it] at the feet of the apostles.” (Verses 31-37)

The voice of Jehovah shaketh the wilderness. He looketh on the earth and it trembleth. So when He comes to reign, the earth will see and tremble. Here it is not in judgment, but in grace that He gave this outward token of His intervention, not conveying as in an earthquake the idea of some universal and unlimited danger, but, by its peculiar form, limited to the place wherein they were assembled, giving the conviction that He heard and watched over them for His own glory.

But there was more and better than any external sign. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke (not now, as far as we are told, with other tongues, but) the word of God with boldness. It was the presence of God manifested most suitably in power but grace withal. It is wholly distinct from that operation of the Spirit where a soul is born anew. It was the energy of the Holy Spirit, shown outwardly as well as in believers: the Spirit not only given, but excluding the action of flesh so that, for the time at least, nothing wrought which was not of Himself. It was spiritual power but in the dependence of faith, and uttering not strong and original ideas, but the word of God with boldness, as became His servants, confiding in His perfect grace, and feeling the ruin of man without Christ. Before this, two of the apostles when forbidden by the high authorities of Israel pleaded, “We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” They were all now animated with like faith and fervor in the Holy Ghost. It was no small thing for any to be thus strengthened; how much more to see an entire company of such confessors.

How are they characterized? “And the heart and soul of the multitude of those that believed was one.” Never before Pentecost had such a sight appeared on earth. The description is, if possible, more vividly spiritual now that opposition came out distinctly against them. All savors of His presence who deigned to come down from heaven and make the saints the dwelling-place of God. The Holy Spirit it is whose energy works all that is acceptable to God, all that is edifying for man. Without Him there had been only so many individuals. The Spirit unites to Christ; He also and thereby gives practical unity as here. The heart and soul of those that believed, though a multitude, was one. Undoubtedly such unity could not have been without one supreme and absorbing object, even Christ; but there was also needed the power of the Spirit to exclude the activity of each several will. For flesh loves to differ, and seeks its own things. Next they all sought the things of Jesus Christ, though without intelligence of union with Christ or heavenly relationships. Yet never before nor since has there been in any communion on earth an equal testimony to deliverance through His name from the selfishness of nature and the pride of the world, never more sustained joy in God or mutual love through our Lord Jesus. It was the accomplishment of the prayer in John 17:20, 21, “that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us, that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.” Their heart and soul was one. The expression of the inspired historian is most energetic, as the practical unity in grace was realized with singular brightness before the world. No sign of greater weakness in the church than division of way, feeling, or thought; no more evident mark of the Spirit's power than unity of which Christ is the spring and character.

Next follows, as fresh as ever, that unexampled token of superiority to personal interests which Pentecost first beheld. “And not one said that aught of his possessions was his own, but they had all things common.” Certainly this was in no sense law but grace; but is it not surprising that any believing the scriptures should elude the plain and blessed fact? It was a state of things beautifully suited to the church when it was all in Jerusalem, and in the full early bloom created by the ungrieved Holy Spirit: when saints were gathered to the Lord elsewhere, we find it no more. Communion of goods, so far as it was carried out in grace, in the nature of things could only be rightly whilst all the members were in one place. When the Lord wrought in other places, the saints were as near in divine relationship as those that dwelt in the same city. That which was peculiar to the assembly in Jerusalem then merged into more ordinary and comprehensive forms of love toward all the saints wherever found: for the church on earth is one, and we are members one of another even if in the most distant quarters of the globe. We have then instruction and exhortation of the, most precious kind about giving, as in Rom. 12 Cor. xvii., 2 Cor. 8 ix., Gal. 6, Eph. 4, Phil. 4, 1 Tim. 6, Heb. 13, &c., clearly supposing no such state as all things common, but rather rich and poor who were appealed to accordingly. The word of the Lord, though to us always true, was receiving its most marked application: “Verily, I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, but he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life.”

Here too we are told of the prominent place Christ's resurrection held in apostolic teaching. “And with great power did the apostles give their witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.” Need it be urged that the apostles were right, not the moderns who preach the Lord in His service, or in His death, and there practically stop? For thus do these curtail the true witness of its blessed fullness; and all their preaching, not to say their faith, suffers. For why sever the resurrection from the death of Christ? If He be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your

faith is also vain: ye are yet in your sins. Without His resurrection there is no proof that our sins are gone, ourselves justified, and God glorified. Where resurrection is not held fast in power, the door is ever open both to ignore man's total ruin, and the full deliverance God has wrought in Christ and is now giving freely in His grace. One may reason, others may hope; but the resurrection is the grand fact that He who suffered for our sins is no longer in the grave where man laid His body, but is raised of God; whose glad tidings concerning His Son are that He is thus proclaimed victorious over sin and death, to the salvation of every believer.

And this witness is of all efficacy for the believer, for “great grace was upon them all.” It is of all moment to arrest and turn unbelievers; but faith sees in the resurrection of the Lord the pledge of its own justification no less than of the judgment of all who oppose or neglect so great salvation. The God who raised from the dead Him who made Himself responsible for our sins, and went down into death under divine judgment for our sakes, is the Savior God; and His great grata reproduces itself in those who know Him thus. Love is not the fruit of a command or of an effort to love. His grace has creative power of graciousness in such as know themselves loved of Him

It is painful that any one should, from chap. ii. 47, reduce this great grace to “popular favor.” The next verse does not give the reason why the people looked favorably upon them (“because they suffered none of their number to be in need,” as if the church were a good benefit club!). Verse 34 really exemplifies a special way in which the great grace upon them wrought: especially as it was no longer the simple immediateness of giving which was originally seen in chap. ii. 44, 45. Now, when lands or houses were sold, the prices were laid at the feet of the apostles, and distribution was made to each according as anyone had need. What a contrast between the spontaneous unselfishness here manifest, and the formal rigor of monastic rule, Mendicant Friars, &c.!

Among those distinguished by their self-stripping love for the brotherhood stands specially recorded the afterward eminent name of Joseph, surnamed Barnabas (verses 36, 37), son of exhortation or perhaps consolation. Later on (xi. 24) he ii characterized as “a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost, and of faith.” Here, a Cyprian, he is said to have been a Levite, yet possessed of a field, which he sold, and laid the money at the feet of the apostles. The express mention of the circumstance here proves how little the practice had become compulsory: for why name Barnabas in particular, if it were rule absolute and universal? Where men imitate in the world or even in the church, law-work supersedes grace, and the community swamps the individual, to the destruction of love on one side and of conscience on the other. The grace and truth which came by Jesus Christ alone puts and keeps both in their true place, whether the individual or the body, because thus only God is God before man believingly. Popery and communism alike strive in vain to realize the unselfish grace of these early days in the church; for they are, neither of them, likenesses but caricatures, as far as possible from having the same source, character, or issue. Grace is inimitable: only the Holy Spirit can produce it in reality. He it is who wrought in so rich a measure then; and He abides to work whatsoever is in keeping with Christ at all times, with full consideration of what is due to God's actual ways, and man's state also. But the interests and activity of the Holy Ghost are no longer in the fold of Israel. He is present, in the fullness of grace and power withal, in a new and different sphere outside Israel no less than the nations; He is there bearing witness of the risen Jesus whom men crucified and slew, and of the boundless blessing conferred on those that confess Him. He is producing new and suited fruit in those that are His, united as one soul, whatever their old habits or once clashing interests: such now the sweet effect of their oneness in the Father and the Son, that the world might believe that the Father sent the Son.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 4:23-30

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Undeniably there was now a power on earth intrinsically superior to that of man beyond all comparison, but not at present at work to preclude shame and suffering, above all for Christ's sake. Nor was it merely with dark heathenism that it clashed, but with the highest authority of the Jewish people, now proving themselves as opposed at least as the heathen to the light and truth and power of God manifested by the presence of the Holy Spirit here below. The wonders and signs done by the apostles, the tongues of the Gentiles spoken in a moment by Jewish Christians who, had never learned them, the mighty works of God in redemption set forth, and unselfish grace raising the believers above what not only their own habits craved, but the nature of man universally, did not, rich as they are, constitute the entire testimony for the name of the Lord Jesus. A particular sign before the temple done in His name had roused not more the amazement of the multitude than the jealous fears of the religious chiefs, sore troubled because they proclaimed in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. How blinding is the influence of unbelief! They could not deny the reality of the miracle; they would not believe the gospel. They put in ward and further threatened the instruments of divine power. They have not a word to say about their own Scriptures bearing witness to their rejection and God's exaltation of the Messiah; yet they charged the apostles not to speak at all, nor teach in the name of Jesus, desirous of punishing them, but finding as yet no means how to do so, because of the people whose favor they dreaded to lose, without the fear of God. A truly lamentable picture of those who claimed to be exclusively His people on the earth!

Little did they know that God had begun to call a new corps of witnesses from His ancient people, and that He would gather in more from the Gentiles. And so the Spirit is intimating in this very book as a fact, the ground of which is explained in the Epistles.

“ But being let go they came unto their own [company], and reported all that the chief priests and the elders said unto them. And they on hearing [it] with one accord lifted up their voice unto God and said, Master, thou [art] he that made the heaven, and the earth, and the sea, and all that in them [is]; who by the Holy Spirit, [by the] mouth of our father David thy servant, didst say, Why did Gentiles rage and peoples meditate vain things? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against his Anointed [or Christ]. For of a truth in this city against thy holy servant Jesus whom thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate with Gentiles and peoples of Israel were gathered to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel foreordained to come to pass. And now, Lord, look upon their threatenings and give to thy bondmen with all boldness to speak thy word, while [lit., in that] thou stretchest forth thy hand for healing, and that signs and wonders be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus.” (Verses 23-30.)

What made these believers “their own company?” What drew the two apostles to them instinctively and immediately on their dismissal from the council? It was the Spirit of God who had gathered them to the name of the risen Christ. The people of Israel, their leaders at least, were

now becoming their enemies as His; a new people was being formed with a high priest sat down on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man. For He has obtained a ministry the more excellent, by how much also He is the mediator of a better covenant which has been enacted upon better promises. It is not that they then understood their own privileges as they are here put, nor that the statement here made reaches their best and highest blessings; but they knew the one on high who was the accomplishment and securer of all, and hence they were more and more attracted to the circle of those who confessed Him and detached in principle, as gradually more in heart, from their old belongings and their old boast.

And “their own company” responded with one accord on hearing their report of all that the religious chiefs of the nation had said. It is a remarkable outpouring to God, and proves how deeply they err who fancy that there can be no agreement in prayer save through a previously composed and commonly possessed form: a grave interference with and practical denial of the power of the Holy Spirit, the only right and adequate spring of all that should characterize the assembly of God. For He it was who guided in this spontaneous spreading out before God of their then passing circumstances, according to the written word and in striking identification with the Lord Jesus. “Master,” said they, in the sense of Sovereign owner and disposer of all, “thou art He that madest the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and all that in them is.” They acknowledge His glory in creation, but turn at once to His prophetic word through David in the beginning of Psa. 2 This they distinctly apply to that unnatural combination which Jerusalem had just beheld between Gentiles and Jews, between Herod and Pontius Pilate, against Jesus the Messiah. He who at first created all, governed all; and He had revealed His will in His word.

For beyond a doubt it was of the Holy Ghost that David so spoke. To no event since the Psalm was written can the opening words apply save to the one just before them; of that strange union and daring guilt they do speak with precision, where Jew and Gentile set themselves with their rulers in array against Jehovah and His Anointed as never before or since. There are great principles in Scripture, but also exclusively personal prophecies. But though they discern in it a Satan-directed conspiracy, in which evil seemed to have all its way without check even to the crucifying of the Lord of glory, they are clear that the enemy with all his hosts has in reality gained nothing but defeat. The others thought it not at all when they held their council and adjudged Jesus to the death of the cross; but they were gathered by Him who is higher than the highest, to do whatsoever His hand and His counsel predetermined to be done. And so it ever is, even in this world lying in the wicked one though it be, but not always so conspicuously as the written word made it in that which was and is so infinitely momentous to God and man. But how solemn to see “in this city,” as everywhere, that men who are the nearest concerned, the perpetrators of these horrors against God and His Christ, are the last to perceive the import of their own acts, still less God's gracious and worthy purposes by them! In truth, not one sparrow falls on the ground without Him; and the very hairs of our head are all numbered.

Futile and wicked effort! The murderous violence of man but rivets the bands and cords He would burst asunder. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall have them in derision. But this is far from all. Then shall He speak to them in His wrath and vex them in His sore displeasure. This, however, is not yet; for, instead of judgments to punish their evil and overwhelm their pride, His grace is mean while sending ontthe gospel, repentance and remission of sins preached in the name of Jesus to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem. The promise of His Father is sent forth on the disciples, the Holy Ghost as power from on high to associate those who believe with Himself in heaven. When this work of heavenly grace is done, God will take His place for the earth and Israel especially. He has in no way forgotten or repented of His promise to Abraham or David. “Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: Jehovah hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.” Do any contend that this latter part of the Psalm is now accomplished, spiritually as they call it, under the gospel? It is perfectly demonstrable that such a strain of Scripture is precluded by the context. For it is declared that Messiah shall [not save nor unite to Himself as members of His body; but break them with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. So Rev. 2:7 shows that the faithful who are now being called will share in this with Christ at His coming, instead of its being fulfilled in some allegorical way at this time—a sense unworthy of all just interpretation. Hence the final appeal is to the kings and judges of the earth to pay homage to Jehovah and the Son, lest He be angry, and they perish under ever so little a kindling of His wrath. It is not a call to the poor and heavy-laden to believe the gospel; it is a question of the future and manifest kingdom of God when the Son of man comes in power and glory. Compare Psa. 8 and Dan. 2 vii. Still, whether it be then or now, blessed are all they that put their trust in Him.

In vain do some following a few Rabbis limit or even apply such words to the reign of David or Solomon; for they go beyond their glory, and still more their successors. Neither attempted to reign to the ends of the earth, or required the homage of its kings as such; nor was any man called to trust in either; nor was lack of reverence visited with perdition. That Christ has not yet executed the judgment of verse 9 is no proof that He will not, but rather the solemn assurance that He will.

In our scripture it is noticeable that those, who so definitely use the Psalm for its accomplishment in the uprising against the Messiah stop short thus. Not a thought is expressed of His asking for Jehovah's giving the heathen for His inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for His possession. He is occupied with His heavenly relations and offices now. He will ask for the earth when He is about to come and execute judgment on the living and the dead. Then will be His appearing and His kingdom. Now He is hid in God, the source of gifts for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the body of Christ, till we all come unto the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God.

Hence the praying saints do not ask for such vengeance from God on their adversaries, as we find in the Old Testament, and emphatically the Psalms which reflect the inmost feeling of the godly concerned, whether in their past preparatory accomplishment or in their complete fulfillment at the end of the age. It is not, as many in ignorant presumption dare to think, that these intercessions against the wicked as in Psa. 6 x. liv. lix. lxxxiii. and the like, are vindictive but solemnly judicial when the time and instruments are there to pour out God's wrath on all who despise Him. But now it is the day of grace and salvation, the accepted time, while Christ sits on the right hand of God, and the Holy Ghost is uniting to Him the one body, the church, and sovereign grace in the gospel flows out overflowing for the while all difference between Jew and Gentile who are called to heavenly glory. In a spirit suitable to this do they pray “And now, Lord, look upon their threatening, and give to thy bondmen with boldness to speak thy word, while thou stretchest forth thy hand for healing, and that signs and wonders be done by the name of thy holy servant Jesus.”

It was enough for their hearts that the Lord should look upon the threats of those that sought their injury: He knew best what to permit and what to restrain; and He could deliver. For themselves they besought grace to speak His word with all baldness or liberty. Is this what we are

doing or seeking? Do we prize it as our chief joy and duty and business on the earth? Is it merely with Christian companions of like mind, spending an hour or two in the morning with people of leisure, and in the evening with those who have closed their earthly toils? This may be all well; but in such circumstances it is apt to be sitting over the word rather than the word over them, admiring the things which they know, and criticizing those who do not know the wondrous counsels and ways of grace. Far different was the heart of these early saints who had much to learn; but in their faith they supplied or added that moral courage and zeal for Christ and divine love which drew them out to speak His word “with all boldness.” The Lord granted their desire, not merely in setting at naught when He saw fit for His glory the threatenings of His and their enemies, but in rendering free and bold witness to Himself. His word ran and was glorified as we shall see; and believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women. They spoke of Him devotedly, and abundantly did He bless them. It never occurred to their simple minds that they should preach for preaching's sake with the inevitable and deserved result of absolutely no fruit. Speaking His word, they looked to Him that it would issue to His glory in bringing souls to God and filling them with divine joy in His grace.

It is true that their faith, according to the word of the Lord (Mark 16:17, 18), counted on more than spiritual blessing. The healing of the sick or infirm in His name they desired, as a precious and significant token to unbelievers. So had the Master wrought when here; so would they His bondmen do in witness of His gracious power, as He was risen and in heaven who had vanquished Satan, the Lord working with them and confirming the word by the signs that followed. In the confidence of this guarantee on His part they ask Him to grant them with all boldness to speak His word whilst He stretches forth His hand for healing, and that signs and wonders be done in the name of the holy servant Jesus. This was seasonable where God was inaugurating the infinite fact of the Holy Spirit sent down in person from heaven and now permanently making the assembly to be His habitation, His temple or house on earth. What honor too for Him whom the Jews had crucified by the hand of lawless men, that these signs and wonders were done “through the name of His servant Jesus!” When the name of the Lord was professed throughout Christendom, there would have been no adequate object, or even propriety, in the continuance of such signs, the Scriptures being then accepted in that sphere as the true and full revelation of God. And inasmuch as that profession for the most was unreal and superficial and increasingly to the denial by their works of the Lord whom they professed, how morally incongruous would have been the continuance of these external tokens of honor and power! The more one weighs the matter, the more fitting does it seem that He who vouchsafed miracles at the beginning should not have bound them as an inalienable heirloom to the church or to His servants. He promised that they would follow “those that believe"; and so they did. He never intimated that they were to follow perpetually or absolutely; and they then ceased in His wisdom, as they really could not be now without the danger, yea certainty, of ill results to His dishonor; for they must tend to gloss over the present ruin-state of the assembly, to blunt the conscience of all, if all had them, or to inflate a few if only exercised by a few.

The testimony, the word of God, was then the prime desire which they spread before Him, for they sought mercy and blessing for their adversaries, not vengeance; and the seals of power they asked at His hand did not consist of consuming fire from above, or the earth opening to devour the foe, but rather “healing,” and if “signs and wonders” they besought them “through the name of His holy servant Jesus,” because their hearts were set on the honor of the Son, even as they honored the Father. The power prayed for was not for apostolic influence or authority, but for His glory who made Himself a bondman, and to commend the word that reveals Him. It was the Creator, who had, through His servant David, predicted and now accomplished His work, even through His enemies.

It will be noticed that the critical text differs not a little from the received, not merely in the omitting “God” in v. 24, and “in this city,” in 27, but yet more in the singular addition given by NAB C and other authorities. It is difficult to conceive the ordinary text deliberately changed into that ancient form with its unusual apparent harshness; it is easy to understand that later copyists might soften the phrase. It is not often that the older witnesses give us greater copiousness; but here we have distinct instances of it. Further, in 27 and 30, as in iii. 13 26, the true counterpart is “servant,” and not “Son,” or even “child” here, answering to Isa. 42; 52, as indeed the Authorized Version rightly translates in 25. Only Jesus is here carefully distinguished as “His holy” One.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 4:13-22

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

For the servants of Christ the conflict was now beginning. On the one side worldly power and religion, position and numbers; on the other, faith in His name whom their adversaries had crucified. What could have seemed more unequal? Yes, to those who leave out God, and His Son, and the Spirit sent down from heaven. But in the believer is not this inexcusable unbelief? Why do we not always reckon on divine intervention, till He is giving up people to their own delusions?

“Now beholding the boldness of Peter and John, and aware that they were unlettered and simple, they wondered, and recognized them that they were with Jesus” (ver. 13). In none does the Spirit's power shine more conspicuously than in such as can boast nothing of this world's advantages. For high and low cry up the learning of the schools: the high, as making the most of what they themselves have enjoyed; the low, in general, as excusing their own deficiency and overvaluing what they have not. But in the things of God nothing has power like faith in the God who is glorifying Christ. And learning, whenever leaned on an object, so far from being a help, is apt to become a positive hindrance and a real snare. Man as such is capable of attaining it in the highest degree; and pride generally follows, if not the applause of men. But the ways of God are not as ours; and He was pleased to humble man, not only by Christ crucified, but by choosing the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise. In the front rank of these stand the apostles who, speaking broadly, had not one distinction in the eyes of the world, not one of which flesh could vaunt. Such certainly were Peter and John now in presence of Jewish rulers, who, having rejected Jesus, had lost God, were putting forth nothing but an arm of flesh against His purposes and His servants. The rulers saw their bold bearing, on the one hand, and on the other their ignorance of letters or of any public position which could whet their powers or impart experience and presence of mind. If they could not but wonder, they did also recognize their having been with Jesus. This could only aggravate their uneasiness, especially as an unanswerable witness was present. “And seeing the man that was healed standing with them, they had nothing to say in reply.” (Ver. 14.) How solemn the position of men who, bearing the name of God's people, are so entangled by the enemy that they cannot deny the truth to which they are at the same time determined not to bow! To own it would be, they think, their ruin. Not so in truth, but their salvation! It would have been the humbling discovery of their sin, and of God's unspeakable grace, of a rejected but exalted Messiah, whose

name by faith in it brings life and remission of sins. But no: they will not come to Him that they may have life. They love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil. They value the glory of men and not the glory of God, who is in none of their thoughts. It is not only the unbelieving who perish, but the fearful, the cowardly, bent on present interests according to their own reckoning, and for their own pleasure, in contempt of evidence to their consciences adequate, yea overwhelming, that they are fighting against God. Did not the man stand before all with the apostles who notoriously had never stood before?

Their guilty dilemma they did not disguise from themselves nor one from another when they got rid of the presence of those who morally condemned them. “But, having commanded them to go aside out of the council, they were conferring among themselves, saying, What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable sign hath been done through them [is] manifest to all that inhabit Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it. But that it be not spread farther among the people, let us threaten them [severely, lit., with threat] to speak to no man longer in [lit. on] this name” (Ver. 15-17.) Here the unerring word of God lays bare the workings of hardened feeling without conscience among His enemies; and none are so bitter, none so obdurate, as those who, responsible as His people to do His will, have made up their mind to do their own. They fully knew the remarkable deed just wrought by the apostles; they recognized it as not merely a miracle but “a sign"; yet did they strengthen themselves against the Almighty, running on the thick bosses of His buckler. In the face of the evident finger and instructive lesson of God, they deliberately strive together to extinguish its effects. They are well aware that “these men” claim nothing for themselves, assert nothing but the name of Jesus. But this is the very thing they themselves had to fear and would banish forever if they could. How vain! It is the day pre-eminently for bearing witness to Jesus. This is the true and great business of the believer; this his one unfailing joy and duty; in the gospel, in the church, with friend or with foe, with few or with many, habitually in word, often in deed, sometimes in silence, but always are we called to be His witnesses. Had not He Himself said to these very men with others, as His last charge, “Ye shall receive power, when the Holy Spirit is come upon you, and ye shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judaea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth?” Could these blind, plotting, self-condemned Jewish rulers stifle that testimony? So they hoped in the infatuation of unbelief which hid their own exceeding iniquity as well as God's will and glory from their eyes.

The charge not to speak at all nor teach in reference to (or resting on) the name of Jesus, which the council laid on Peter and John, was therefore as bold as it was wicked; and the more so as emanating from rulers who claimed the highest authority in religion. How solemn to think that so they treated unwittingly their own Messiah! And why was it unwitting? Had God given them ineffectual light in the prophets? They own at that moment a manifest sign in the man that was healed. This they could not deny; that they would not believe! And so abiding in darkness they knew not the impiety of their enforcing silence about the Messiah whose loving kindness was better than life to His servants.

“ But Peter and John answering said unto them, Whether it be right before God to hear you rather than God, judge ye: for we cannot but speak the things which we saw and heard.” (Ver. 19, 20). This reply put the case with unanswerable plainness and moral power. A ruler, especially a religious one, is bound to uphold what is righteous before God; and their charge simply amounted to heeding themselves in preference to God; for they demanded not a word more in the name of Jesus, though God had openly and just now honored it unmistakably. As for the apostles, faith in Christ, love to souls, special call, divine authority, and devotedness to His glory, all wrought to open their lips in His testimony and praise. The things they had seen and heard were so bound up with what was due to Jehovah and His Anointed, as well as with the believer's blessedness and the unbeliever's misery, woe be to them if they held their peace! A necessity was laid on them no less than on Paul at a later day. They had received a personal command from Him by whom kings rule in divine providence; only theirs was on the ground, of grace and truth unknown to earthly governors as such, and for ends immeasurably higher and more enduring. Were those who claimed His sanction in a lower sphere authorized to set it aside in a higher? They might attempt it, but as surely would it be to their own irremediable destruction, as it would be in vain for those who heard the voice of One on high mightier than the noise of many waters, let the floods lift up their voice never so loftily.

“ And they having further threatened them let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them on account of the people; because all were glorifying God for what had been done. For the man on whom this sign of healing was wrought was more than forty years old.” (Ver. 21, 22.)

Threatening, and further threatening, are tokens of weakness and ill-will, not of power which knows how to forbear till the critical moment come. It is the natural resource of such as have not the truth, and withal no plea of unrighteousness in those they would punish. And in this case, as often, the people were feared, not God. Not that they loved but rather despised the people; but they were necessary as an instrument of influence, and the loss of this they dreaded above all. What a contrast with that Ruler, who is just, ruling in the fear of God! Their character is as darkness, and the end death: He, as the light of the morning when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain. Government, poor as it may be now, is right and needful; but it is never right when those who should exercise it shrink from fear of the people, instead of acting before God who authorized them. Alas! it was the council that was without God and opposed to Him; and the poor and simple, ignorant as they might be, in this case did all glorify God for that which was done. They were familiar for many years with the sufferer who by divine power was healed; and they had no class interest which was wounded by owning the good hand of God. The Jewish rulers feared not God but the people, and would have punished the holy servants of Christ if they could only have found an excuse plausible before men. They were in the darkness of nature, with the pride of possessing the law of God, and under the direction of Satan. The wisdom of their wise was perishing, and the understanding of their prudent hid. Learned or unlearned were obliged alike to own in the presence of His revealed mind that they could not read it. Henceforth it was with the servants and confessors of the Lord Jesus; the Spirit given them was self-evidently, not of cowardly fear, but of power and love and a sober mind. The truth of Christ too nearly concerns God and man to be shelved. If truly received, it commands conscience and heart, mind and soul. If the rulers could not deny the sign before their eyes, still less could the apostles refrain from confessing the truth of Christ, the Savior in heaven for man on earth. For them to withhold God's glad tidings in Christ would have been treason spiritually. Indifference to Christ or the gospel is cousin-german to infidelity.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 4:1-12

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The discourse of the apostle was interrupted at this point, which is lost to many a reader by the division of the chapters.

“Now as they were speaking unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, being distressed because of their teaching the people, and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead; and they laid hands on them and put them in ward unto the morrow; for it was already evening. But many of those that heard the word believed, and the number of the men became about five thousand.” (Ver. 1-4.)

Religious authority took umbrage. Who were these men to speak within the precincts of the temple? It is true that a mighty miracle had been wrought publicly, and undeniably; but officials are sensitive to any invasion of their rights, and are apt to leave God out of the account, speaking as of the world and knowing none else than the world to hear them. But a class came forward now, which had been comparatively in the background whilst the Lord lived and labored. Then were the Pharisees His active adversaries, the advocates of defective and spurious righteousness opposing the Righteous One. Now the enemy had ready another and very different body among the Jews, the Sadducees, roused from their habitual calm by a truth which convicted them of utter infidelity and consequent antagonism to God and His word. Miracles were bad enough in the eyes of free-thinkers; they brought the power of God too near; they were a sign to unbelievers that they might hear the truth. But the resurrection, exemplified in the person of Jesus, was intolerable; and none so intolerant, as those who boast of tolerating every shade, when the truth confronts them. The mild Sadducee outdoes the previously fierce Pharisee; none so disturbed by the announcement of Jesus risen from the dead.

And no wonder. The resurrection of Him whom man had just slain is the most conclusive and irrefragable proof of God's power according to His word, the most complete refutation of those who admit nothing beyond the natural course of things in this world. Laws which govern that course none dispute; nor the knowledge of such laws men call science. But the resurrection proves One above those laws, which in no way control or limit His power, as He will demonstrate in the day in which He makes all things new. Meanwhile the raising of Jesus from the dead, while the ordinary course goes on, is the sufficient and striking witness to the power which will destroy the world that now is, and create a new one, wholly different, to His own glory.

Hence the skeptical school took fire at the apostles for proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead; for it laid bare their evil unbelief and convicted them of being enemies of the truth, fighting against God Himself. Otherwise they would have inquired into the facts and compared them with the Scriptures; and must have rejoiced that He had done so blessed and glorious a thing according to His word. For the resurrection of Christ is the pledge that those who are Christ's shall rise as He rose: He is avowedly the first fruits of those who are fallen asleep. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. They are the heads of the two families, the Adam family, and the Christ family, death having come in by the one head, as now resurrection by the other. Those that are Christ's rise at His coming. It is a resurrection from among the dead, as His was; and they reign with Him for a thousand years. The rest of the dead do not live till the thousand years have been completed. Blessed and holy he who has part in the first resurrection: on such the second death has no power; but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years. No one doubts that in another sense they will reign forever, to the ages of ages, as will all the godly who will be born of God during the millennial reign. But this period of special reigning over the earth ought not to be ignored, because of the eternal blessedness of the glorified after the kingdom is over and the new heaven and earth are come in the absolute sense, when the wicked have been raised, judged, and cast into the lake of fire. Theirs is not a resurrection from the dead; for there are none more left in the grave, they themselves being the last remainder after the righteous were raised.

Thus it was not merely the truth of resurrection which roused Sadducean spite, but the resurrection from the dead. The resurrection of the unjust, of the mass of mankind, is not from among the dead; like the resurrection of the just, it is the effect of the power of Christ, the Son of God, when He summons the wicked from their graves to judgment. The righteous have life in the Son now, and rise to a resurrection of life; as the unjust to a resurrection of judgment a thousand years after, when they must honor Him whom they now despise. So perfectly does John 5 agree with Rev. 20. There is no discrepancy; but there are two resurrections according to Scripture, not one only. The general indiscriminate resurrection of the creeds is according to tradition, but a fable. There will be a resurrection of both just and unjust, of the just to reign with Christ at His coming, of the unjust to be judged by Him before He delivers up the kingdom to Him who is God and Father, when He shall have abolished all role and all authority and power. Men, and even believers, whose mind is on the things of men, are offended at the grace which discriminates now, as it will yet more manifestly by the resurrection from the dead. They prefer a “dim religious light,” with its vagueness and uncertainty; they shrink from that blessed hope—at least in its definite shape—which is the fruit of sovereign grace for the believer, involving as it does the solemn and dark background of judgment for all who despise both grace and truth in Christ.

But if the apostles were put in ward that evening till the morrow, the word was not bound, the true light was already shining. Many of those that heard believed. The number of the men rose to about 6,000. This would suppose not a few women and children. Compare Matt. 14:21, Luke 9:14, John 6:10. No sufficient reason appears for taking “men” (ἀνδρῶν) otherwise than in its usual preciseness.

“And it came to pass on the morrow that their rulers and elders and scribes were gathered together at Jerusalem, and Annas, the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of high-priestly lineage. And having set them in the midst they inquired, By what power or in what name did ye this? Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said unto them, Rulers of the people and elders [of Israel], if we this day are examined as to a good deed done to an infirm man, whereby he hath been cured, be it known to you all and to all the people of Israel that in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, in [or, by] Him [or, in this (name)] he standeth before you whole. He is the stone that was set at naught by you the builders, that became the head of the corner. And in none other is there salvation; for neither is there a different name under heaven that is given among men by which we must be saved.” (Ver. 5-12.)

On the morrow flocked together the religious authorities from the highest, including all grades; and the two apostles were challenged. Peter answered in the power of the Spirit who filled him, that the good deed was done in His name whom they had crucified, and God had raised from the dead; whom His word characterize as the Stone, set at naught by the builders, yet become the head of the corner, the rejected but exalted Messiah. What a situation for the rulers and people of Israel! And what a light on all that had befallen “Jesus Christ of Nazareth” was

afforded by the testimony of Scripture to the Stone, the unquestionable figure used about the Messiah!

Consider ever so briefly Gen. 49:22-24, Psa. 118 (22 the very passage referred to), Isa. 28:16, Dan. 2:34, 44, 45, specially with the use made of it by our Lord Himself in Matt. 21:42-44, to which we may add Eph. 2:20, and 1 Peter 2:7-8. There is first His relation to Israel; then His rejection by the chiefs, but exaltation notwithstanding; next, Jehovah's commendation of Him to the believer in the face of divine judgment; and, lastly, His establishment of God's kingdom here below, to the destruction of the Gentile powers which had displaced Israel. The New Testament, while it of course confirms, supplements all this by connecting the Stone with the two advents of the Messiah rendered necessary alike by God's grace and His judgment, and by Israel's unbelief now and repentance in view of His coming again, crowned by Christ's place as the chief corner-stone, who brings even now those of the Jews who believe in Him into better blessings than the nation will by and by receive at His appearing, even to be a holy and a royal priesthood with all that is suited to each of these blessed relationships.

Into this Peter does not enter here; for he was addressing, not the believing remnant of Christian Jews, but the proud and bitter enemies of both Christ and the Christian. But he does set forth, to Christ's honor, and in love even to those who had so guiltily cast Him out, the sure and exclusive assurance of salvation in Christ. “In none other is there salvation; neither is there another—a different—name under heaven that is given among men whereby we must be saved.” How blessed that, though God has set Him up at His own right hand in heaven, His name is given under heaven among men on earth, by which we must be saved if saved at all It is here and now that we must be saved; for it is of grace, and by faith. There is no other name—our own least of all; and no other way, for He is the way. Faith exalts the Savior and the God who gave Him, and leaves no room for works of righteousness of our doing, even were we capable of them, which in our unbelieving state we certainly were not. All is of grace; but grace reigning through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord. How awful that men should neglect so great a salvation—yea, though on behalf of Christ His servants beseech them to be reconciled to God.

Lectures on the Second Coming and Kingdom of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, Appearing and Kingdom of the Lord Jesus, The

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Acts 3:19-21.

Lecture 7.

As my subject tonight is the appearing and kingdom of the Lord Jesus, I have read these verses simply to establish, in a clear and concise form, the distinct proof that the appearing of the Lord Jesus is the introduction of His kingdom here below. I do not deny for a moment that there is such a thing as translation into “the kingdom of God’s dear Son” now. We all agree in this. This, therefore, is not the question, but rather, whether Scripture does not certainly intimate that the Lord Jesus will, by His appearing, introduce His kingdom over the earth. Not merely will the kingdom be preached, and the word, mixed with faith in them that hear it, bring souls born of God to see and enter that kingdom morally (John 3), which no doubt is true now; but Scripture shows us also a change of immense importance for the world, which the appearing of the Lord Jesus will inaugurate. The apostle Peter, addressing the Jews, called upon them to “repent and be converted, that their sins might be blotted out, that times of refreshing” [I have ventured to change one word here: it is “so that,” or “in order that” (not “when”) “ times,” &c., which is never the force of the conjunction in such a construction] “may come from the presence of the Lord, and He may send Him who was fore-appointed you, Christ Jesus,” or, “your Messiah, Jesus” — I do not wish to enlarge on questions of a critical nature, but just give the true sense as we pass along — “whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken of by the mouth of His holy prophets since the world began.”

Now what this passage proves, beyond just question, is this, that God will send the Lord Jesus, and that the sending of the Lord Jesus as the Messiah, according to that fore-appointment which every Jew looked for, will introduce, or at any rate will be simultaneous with, the times of refreshing, of which the prophets are so full. Meanwhile, heaven receives Jesus until (not the destruction of the world; not the passing away finally of the heavens and earth; but, contrariwise) the restoration of all things — the blotting out of the foul stains which cover this world, and the setting in order that which has been confused and dislocated by sin, the mighty power of God (which now works in the salvation of souls and in the blessing of saints by the testimony of His grace and truth in Christ) being then put forth after another sort: not merely in giving eternal life to souls — which will go on, of course — but, besides in righteous power putting down manifestly every influence, and every person too, that is opposed to the glory of God by the Lord Jesus. His judgment, we know, will first deal with the unseen — with Satan and his hosts; it will, in the next place, purge the earth of its destroyers (Rev. 11), or, as it is said, the Son of man shall send forth His angels, and they shall clear the field, which is the scene of His kingdom —the world —of all stumbling-blocks, and of them that do iniquity. For this, unquestionably, the saints in Old Testament times were taught by the Spirit to wait. The New Testament in not the smallest degree weakens such an expectation, but confirms it.

It is fully granted that in the New Testament we have higher hopes, which are fully brought to view now that the heavens are opened; that we bold Jesus at the right hand of God; that we see our own place and portion in communion with Christ there; for grace has given us to look to be with Him, our Head and Bridegroom, in the heavens. I confess that if it were a question of choosing between any earthly power and glory and that which the Holy Ghost now reveals with Christ above, it would be no matter of long deliberation or difficult choice to one. Unhesitatingly, I think, all our hearts (me, to answer to such a call, and to say that (blessed as may be the power that will deal with the earth, that will fill the world with the goodness of God, that will banish from it all things that corrupt, dishonor, and oppose the will of God here below) the heavens are the infinitely higher scene, the only adequate sphere for the full expression of the Father’s love to Christ, viewed not only as the eternal Son, but as the risen man, who has glorified God upon the earth in life, and above all in death. According to Scripture, (John 13–17) the only due answer to His glorifying of God in the cross, is heavenly glory. No one, therefore, can fairly object, I am persuaded, that there is any thought of, or even room left for, weakening the true place of Christ’s highest glory on high, and the Church’s proper blessing in union with its Head. In Ephesians 1:3, we read,

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.” I assuredly believe, that the heavenly places, in contrast with Israel’s blessing in the land of Palestine, shew us the revealed and destined home of our blessing with Christ. It is not meant of course that we are actually there, but He is; and as surely as we are by the Holy Ghost made one with Christ while he is there, so will He come for us that He may introduce us, according to the fullness of His own grace, into that seat of His glory and of His affection for His Bride. We belong to Him, and we are conscious that we do. “In that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, ye in me, and I in you.” That day has now arrived. The Holy Ghost, who has come down to dwell in us, is the Spirit of glory, as well as of God. Even as we know our Savior in glory, and He is our life on the throne of God; so the Holy Ghost comes down from Him thence — not barely from Him while upon the earth, but from Him exalted in the heavens, — and unites us with Him there. And therefore it is but the complement of this astonishing unfolding of God’s counsels in Christ, that He will come to present the Church glorious, without spot, wrinkle, of any such thing, but also to receive us unto Himself, that we may be with Him in the Father’s house (which is certainly not the earth, but in the heavens); in short, that we may be like Him, and with Him where He is.

But how does this heavenly hope in any wise clash with the further fact that the name of the Lord is to be exalted in the earth, as it has never yet been? How does our blessing above negative that which the Holy Ghost kept before the minds oi saints from the very beginning? Does He not take, therefore, special pains to reaffirm it at the very moment, i.e., after Pentecost, when man might have imagined the old expectations of the prophets were completely dead, and gone forever.

Now there is a true sense in which old things are passed away. That is to say, we have now to do with a new sphere of such surpassing glory in Christ, as quite raises the Christian above man, the Jew, &c. Hence we must not blend past hopes with these new revelations as the proper phase of our blessing. Our relationship is really with One who was dead, and is risen and ascended into heaven, where, as was remarked already we belong to Him. We shall join Hire in the air; we shall be with Him on high; but am I, therefore, to deny that the earth also is to be blessed? Do you not rejoice that His praise is to fill this lower scene? Is it not sweet to you that God should show Himself as good; He is? We do well to watch against every look of the evil eye—to hail His who is always and only good. Will you not allow Him to exalt Christ in this world where He Is now despised, where His name is so profaned, and where His truth is so tampered with, defaced, and corrupted? You will, not have God to help the thought, neither will His word strengthen you in such an exclusion of the fixed purpose of God.

If ever a time was when the Holy Ghost wrought mightily in the power of divine grace, if ever there was a time when the saints of God on the earth ware filled with a sense of His goodness and of that which Christ was to them (I do not say for thorough intelligence, but far practical power), it was at Pentecost. For great grace on all, there was like the very hour in which Peter uttered these words. At day, surely, if ever, it might have been thought that the seasons of refreshing were come by the power of the Holy Ghost upon the earth, that times of restoring all things were then established morally by the gospel. Certainly, if blooming and abundant fruits in souls could account for such a feeling, there was peculiar excuse for it then. But this was the precise moment which the Holy Ghost seized by the apostle Peter to declare in the most emphatic manner that these times are still future; that a further mighty change needs to be wrought; that it is not to be effected by fresh or repeated missions of the Holy Ghost on Christians or for Christian purposes, but by sending Jesus — that Jesus who is gone away to heaven; and that, when He comes from heaven once more, then and not before shall be the times, not of the destruction of earth and heaven, but contrariwise of the restitution of all things of which God has spoken by His holy prophets since the world began. The testimony of the prophets, thus appealed to, ought to leave the meaning of this Scripture entirely unambiguous. It is not a question of New Testament declarations and hopes, but of that which was already written or spoken by the mouth of the prophets — “His holy prophets,” it is said, “since the world began.”

There can be no doubt, therefore, that the intention of this statement of the Holy Ghost by Peter was to let the Jews know that their repentance and conversion, that their sins might be blotted out as a nation, is an antecedent condition of the great revolution yet to take place for this world. When the heart of Israel as Israel is touched, when they turn to the Lord — it may be but tremblingly and with very partial understanding of His grace, but when it is a real work in their heart, God shall send Jesus from heaven. Our Lord Himself uttered similar truth in the close of Matthew 23, which passage was before us a short time ago. He left their house unto them desolate, “till” — not forever, but — “till ye shall say, Blessed is He that cometh in the name of Jehovah.” When they so say, He is to come. Jehovah sends Him; for their hearts call Him “blessed” as He comes in Jehovah’s name. This answers to their conversion in Acts 3. They judge themselves before God, acknowledge their sins, and find them blotted out by divine grace in the blood of their own Messiah. There is no other way; but oh, how unspeakably affecting for them above all men! But again, whatever may be the precious power of the blood of Christ, there is no real blessing to any soul at any time save through the judgment of sin— of self — in the conscience. And so we find in the case of Israel: it is strongly enforced upon them, however it may be of grace; for Jesus is a Savior to give repentance to Israel and remission of sins. In Matthew the point is rather the heart turning to Christ. In the Acts of the Apostles it is rather the conscience clearing itself, as it were, or rather clearing God, — vindicating Him against themselves. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive Us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Such is the absolute principle flowing front God’s nature, said of us, no doubt, but ever true. Both are united, and always, more or less, united; and when they are verified in Israel, God will send Jesus, their before-appointed Messiah, and then the times of restitution of all things will begin to run their blessed and blessing course upon the earth.

Nor is this, I need hardly say, a truth by any means confined to one isolated portion of the New Testament. But if this testimony stood alone, it seems to me amply sufficient to exclude as utterly groundless the notion that the times of universal restitution, and of refreshing too, can be brought in, according to Scripture, from any working of God’s Spirit on the earth, without the mission of Jesus from heaven. Were it an effect of the presence and power of the Holy Ghost, it is clear that then these times of refreshing must have arrived. But arrived they were not, as the apostle Peter clearly intimates, when the Holy Ghost was thus producing the sweetest fruit of divine power and grace which ever grew among the saints on earth. He points for the true epoch to the coming of Jesus; he shows that Christ’s presence is necessary, the prophets also everywhere attest.

And is it not, I would urge, a righteous arrangement that so it should be? Does not this revealed, truth, like all others, commend itself to the spiritual mind? For who has not proved the harmony which exists between the instincts of hearts renewed by God’s grace and the precious testimony of God’s word? It is not that anyone could beforehand have gathered this truth from any feeling of his own; but the heart, once it is revealed and believed, bows to it, and confesses how wisely and well all has been ordered of God. On the one hand, then, here is God’s own most positive declaration of His mind and will; on the other, do not our hearts feel that it is exactly what is due to the blessed name of the

Lord Jesus? — that He who had the shame, who knew the sorrow, who has been and is so trifled with by men, should have the joy and the glory of introducing the blessed reversal of this world's sad and humbling history? After all, whatever may be the precious functions of the Spirit of God —and it is not for any one here to weaken them for a moment— there was but One who died for sin; there was but One who suffered for us, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God; there was but One who renounced all His rights here below, that God—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost — might be glorified in the place where sin had so long reigned in death to man and dishonor to God.

Most righteously, therefore, it is His coming, who will change all here below — that blessed One who on the cross made a righteous foundation for all blessing, not only for heaven to be filled with its new sons and heirs of glory, but for the earth at large to sing for joy; not only for the Church to sit down as bride at the marriage supper of the Lamb above, but for that nation also to find its sins, and rebellious evil, and hoary unbelief forever washed away in His blood. He died for the children of God that were scattered abroad, He died to gather them together in one; but He died for that nation also, and I call your attention to it. It is not merely that He tasted death for every man; it is not merely that in bringing many sons unto glory, He, the leader of their salvation, was made perfect through sufferings. Are these, manifold as they are, all the applications of His everlastingly wondrous and fruitful death? Turn to Colossians 1, and hear what the Spirit of God there tells us of the power of His blood in reconciliation. We are more accustomed in general to think of our being reconciled to God; and surely it is a weighty truth, and of the utmost moment to His glory and our own peace and strength; but in Colossians 1 The Spirit of God, though giving to our personal portion its full place, breaks out into a larger circle of divine purposes; "for it pleased [the Father] that in Him should all fullness dwell."

May I here remark, that it was to please, not merely the Father, but also the Son, and the Holy Ghost? It seems to me somewhat to lower the proper glory of these equally divine persons to restrict the good pleasure to the Father. Of course, if Scripture really said so, there would be an end of all questions; but it does not. For, as you will observe, the words, "the Father," are inserted by men (as Tyndale, Cranmer, Beza, &c.) We are always at liberty, perhaps I might say we are bound, to examine whenever these insertions occur. They have no warrant of faith, though they may be a real help occasionally; but it is well to examine them as mere suggestions in the light of the rest of Scripture. In this case I think it certain that the true supplement is God (not Father), or, supplying no word, that the fullness of the Godhead was pleased to dwell in Christ. This, however, did not effect reconciliation. Incarnation is not reconciliation, though there are not wanting those who will tell you so; but such men either speak of what they do not understand, or they have no adequate sense of sin; that is, no true knowledge of God. The Son becoming incarnate is, no doubt, a marvelous display of grace on God's part towards man; but it does not, could not, put away sin. Nothing but the cross avails, nothing but the blood-shedding of the Son, of God; and therefore there was a farther step necessary, not only that all the fullness of the Godhead should dwell in Him, but that there should be a work done by Him. And this work is reconciliation by His blood, as it is said, "Having made peace through the blood of His cross, by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself."

It is not persons, but "things" — "all things unto Himself:" by Him, "whether the things on the earth or the things in the heavens." It is a most dangerous misunderstanding of Scripture to suppose that men are meant here. If they were in question, we ought all to be universalists, horribly false as that scheme is. No such delusion is taught here, or in any other part of God's word. It is the truth as regards things, the creatures of God's power. The reconciliation is destined to embrace all things He has made. Were there one object in heaven or earth (I speak not of rebellious angels, or of unbelieving man) outside the reach, the efficacious reach, of the blood of Christ, so far Satan would have won some triumph over God; he would have been just so far the conqueror of the woman's Seed, instead of the conquered. But reconciliation by blood more than meets the ruin. Nothing needed to be reconciled when God made all things good. It was simply creature goodness. As man its head was capable of sin and of death by sin, so was the lower creation liable to be dragged down into decay, or brought more or less under the power of death. And so it was, so it is. The creature is, as Romans 8 calls it, "made subject to vanity." But now the ransom is found, redemption's price is paid. The reconciling power is not yet applied; but the foundation of all is laid, and never to be laid again. The blood is shed: it is only a question of God's time for accomplishing His counsels, for the application of this power to all the creation that groans and travails still — to "all things, whether the things on the earth, or the things in the heavens."

Meanwhile, before God turns to this account the value of the blood of Christ, He brings in, not all persons, but, as He says here, "you." "You that were sometime alienated, and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath He reconciled."

There it is applied to the Christian, even to the souls who now believe in the Lord Jesus Christ: God has reconciled them by the blood of His cross, which has made peace for them, instead of leaving them to make their peace with God, For He says, "Now hath He reconciled in the body of His flesh through death:" not through His birth, nor through their baptism; not through His incarnation, but "in the body of His flesh through death;" and this because death alone, the death of Christ, gives God's holy judgment of sin in grace to the soul who believes; Infinite mercy that it should be so! The birth of Christ is just the introduction of the person who was to accomplish this truly divine work. It was the manifestation of Him who was God in human nature, which in Him was holy, though in it Adam fell, involving in his own ruin the race and all the creation of which he was chief; it was the manifestation of Him who, though a man, was none the less a Divine person. But now there is infinitely more; now, in the body of His flesh, through death, He has effected our reconciliation. Had it not been so, even His manifestation in flesh must have been entirely fruitless for our deliverance. What a proof that in Him there was life without the smallest taint or smell of death! Nothing that was torn by beasts could be eaten according to the: figures of the law; nothing that had a spot or blemish was capable of being made an offering for sin, even hi type: how much more in the antitype! Yet, He must die — the holy, harmless, undefiled. No otherwise could we have redemption, because in this way alone sin could be adequately judged — in death, the death of Jesus, the Son of God, and Son of man — in His death under divine judgment.

But Christ is dead. He has already poured out His soul unto death. Reconciliation, therefore, is made for every soul that now believes in Him. "You hath He reconciled." And this is the condition into which He brings us before God, "In the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreproveable in His sight." That is, the whole of our old being is regarded as to faith utterly gone under the judgment of the cross, and we are viewed according to our new nature, which nature we never see aright, save in the person of Christ. We are one with Him who is risen from the dead. There was no union when He was here upon earth before atonement. There was then seen one unbroken course of moral perfection in Christ; yea, perfect, Divine beauty; the expression of God Himself in all His ways here below. But the great question of sin with God was not settled; the greatest work of all was not yet done. There was still the hour impending which He so solemnly looked onward to ever and anon, especially when the disciples were occupied with His present power, and the anticipations of His kingdom. He told them, and them expressly, that He was going to suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, &c., and be slain, and be

raised on the third day. No wonder, then, when He did die and the victory was won, when He stood in resurrection — in the power of this new and abundant life to bestow it on the guiltiest of sinners, that the Holy Ghost makes much of it! Do we? It is a serious question, be assured. Remember, it is not a matter only for today, but forever. Remember that it is not a truth merely about our own souls, nor even about salvation; it is a truth about Christ, by whose death and resurrection God brings us into this astonishing place, “To present you holy and unblameable and unreproveable in His sight.” It is not in our sight; for meet it is that we should know ourselves full of evil, judging, both in roots and fruits, the old man in us. We know painfully as a fact, of course, that the old man is there; but the comfort of faith is, that sin is judged in Christ; and it is well to bear in mind that, if it be not judged now, it never can be. If we who believe are not thus reconciled now, when or how are we to be? If we are, how blessed are we! Of course, we are not supposing souls which are still outside Christ; but I say, that for those who have looked to Christ, the work is perfectly done — not merely doing, but done — so that God himself could not add to its efficacy. The atoning work is done; the reconciliation is accomplished “in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreproveable in His sight.” What infinite grace, to give us the knowledge of it now by faith, before the result appears at Christ’s coming! Still there remains the other truth, that the precious blood of Christ includes, in point of title, the reconciliation of all things, whether on the earth or in the heavens.

Nor does the proof depend upon this Scripture alone, though a single Scripture, if direct, is better than all other demonstration, and more than enough to hang heaven and earth upon. I dare not praise, but rather deprecate the habit of not being content with one Scripture, were there but one. If there be Scripture, it is God’s voice, God’s truth: what else is needed? He who does not believe one plain text, would not believe a thousand. But the truth is that Scripture is full of proofs of Christ’s appearing to bring in His kingdom over the earth. Of these I can only present a few tonight.

In Ephesians 1 is a passage as striking as it is in point. We are told there that God “has abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence” — toward the saints now. That is, He has not merely conferred on us a measure of creature ability to know and name certain things, as He gave to Adam when each creature came before him, as the appointed lord of creation, to assign its just name. But now to the saints, in virtue of the Second man, the last Adam, God abounds in all wisdom and prudence. The whole expanse of God’s counsels is spread before the Church now. How can these things be? It is because Christ is the object—because He, the Son of God, has been revealed; and what are all things compared with Him and His work? Counted as the small dust of the balance. No wonder, then, if God have given us Him, if He have united us with Him, that He should tell us all the secrets of the glory He designs to display for Him — all He means to do with everything in heaven and earth for Christ. What, then, is the hope of this boundless scheme for glorifying Christ? God, we are told, has made known unto us the mystery of His will — that secret that was kept hidden in other times, — “according to His good pleasure which he hath purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of times He Might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth” — literally, the things in the heavens, and the things upon the earth — “even in Him, in whom also we have obtained an inheritance.” In this we have a still larger compass than we saw in the Colossians. For, beside the “things in the heavens and the things on the earth” in both, we have here the further intimation that we have obtained an inheritance in Him over all things. So He tells us, a little lower down in the same chapter, God has made Christ to be “the head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all.”

But mark the expression in verse 10 the administration of the fullness of times is committed to Christ. God has purposed in Himself, with a view to or against this administration of the fullness of times, that He will gather all things in one under Christ — that He will put all things heavenly and earthly under His headship, as the risen and gloried man. What a truth! The whole universe of God under man — no doubt in Christ; but man! What a day that will be, and what a state of things! What joy and brightness when a king shall not merely reign in righteousness in a particular land, but when the whole creation of God, rescued from the usurper and from all the sad effects of the fall, will be under the only man capable of using all and governing all for God — capable, too, of filling it with every element of blessing, and upholding it to the glory of God. In that day Christ will accomplish this. He has undertaken this purpose of God, and will bring glory to Him as truly in this scene of government, as already in grace, when He put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. He was once offered to bear the sins of many, and perfectly glorified God as to sin. Yet outward appearances, we know, disclose nothing of the kind. Seemingly sin prevails, and Christ is but the rejected man; but faith knows that the only victory which cost God anything (and it cost Him everything) is won. But what joy when it will not merely be an unseen truth known to the soul, but when every whit of God’s creation will proclaim that Christ is exalted over all things! We too shall be there: we shall be with Him. It could not be but that this must be a joy to us: it could not be that a believing soul would despise such glory and bliss, or think lightly of it when it is presented to the heart in the word of God. But surely it will be to us even deeper joy that Christ will be over all things to the glory of God, — though we shall be the nearest and most intimate object of His love, His bride in association with Him as Head over all things that God has made — deeper still to be with Him where He is, that we may behold His glory, loved as He was of the Father before the foundation of the world. (John 17) Through this Scripture, then, we are permitted to contemplate by faith the scene of immeasurable blessing; which not the departure but the appearing of Christ in glory is to introduce and establish. This we have seen already; but I will cite some few additional proofs which may make it thoroughly plain to those who are little versed in Scripture. Let us take, for instance, Titus 2:11-13; for I wish to skew that the epistles prove this truth quite independently of the prophetic Scriptures, against which some harbor an unwarrantable and most ignorant prejudice. Now, the doctrinal epistles teach no otherwise. “The grace of God,” says the apostle, “that bringeth salvation, hath appeared to all men.” This has already taken place, we all know: the all-saving grace of God has appeared wherever the gospel is proclaimed, “teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.” But is this all? Is there no portion in hope for us? Is there no expectation which is the proper answer to, and product or at least companion of, the grace of God? The authorized version adds— “looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ.” For one phrase here I must be allowed to substitute, “the appearing of the glory.” There is no doubt that this is the true meaning. Too much rein has been given to these loose renderings because of imaginary Hebraisms, which fritter away the true force. Hence, competent translators take it (in contrast with the appearing of grace,) as “the appearing of the glory.” The grace of God has already appeared: the glory of God is going to appear; and this is what we look for, i.e., more accurately and fully, “the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.” And where is His glory to appear? In the same scene where the saving grace of God has appeared. It is not a statement of our anticipated removal into heavenly glory, certainly not this only, but that His glory shall appear.

Take another passage in 2 Timothy 4. “I charge thee, therefore, before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom.” Here we have the same phrase as in the subject of this lecture, and in the same order — the appearing of

the Lord and His kingdom, It is not the kingdom as simply known to faith, such as we know now. Christ has disappeared from the earth; and we know the kingdom of heaven in a mysterious form. (Matt. 13) It is His kingdom in a way unexampled, unknown, and even unthought of. But here we have the converse truth. It is the appearing of Jesus once more. The judgment of quick and dead is not put after His appearing and kingdom, but at that time, whether we adopt the critical text or adhere to the one vulgarly received. It is most evident that the Lord's judging quick and dead connects itself with both; even as from Revelation 19, 20, it is plain that the quick are judged at the beginning of His kingdom and throughout its course, the dead at the end. Will a believer dispute this? Can you affirm that it is not the meaning of the Scripture? What other meaning is carried in these words as simply and clearly as the one just expressed? There is no desire to weaken in the least degree any truth as to the kingdom of God as it now subsists. It is agreed on all sides that, for the present, Christ has gone up to God's right hand in the heavens, and that we have the kingdom of heaven in its actual form of mystery, not manifestation, wherein tares are mingled with wheat, and a continual war is waging between good and evil, where Satan is not bound, but active as the serpent and the lion, and the Holy Ghost wakes good the power of Christ only to faith: a state of things characterized by a vast profession without conscience or feeling toward God the Father, most of all by its dishonoring the Lord Jesus, and by hindering, slighting, grieving, quenching, and denying the Holy Ghost. All this I admit. But here the apostle charges his spiritual right-hand Timothy, "before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at [or, both by] His appearing and His kingdom." Is it not a wholly different state of things? Is Christ judging the quick and the dead now? Clearly not, but the contrary: He is saving those that are dead in sins, quickening them with His own life. He is carrying on a judgment among those that are spiritually alive now, if you will, but it is another state of things altogether — a practical, present dealing with the ways of His disciples, that they may not be condemned by and by with the world. Here it is the positive application of judicial power at His appearing, when He comes in His kingdom — His visible kingdom in power and glory. These points are sufficiently defined here, and the state of things affirmed and manifest; for His appearing and His kingdom are in the closest association, both with each other and with His judgment of living and dead. But it is not at all "the end" of 1 Corinthians 15; for there He gives up the kingdom, instead of appearing and setting it up. When the new heavens and new earth are brought in, nay, when the old heavens and old earth pass away, there is no hint of Christ's appearing or His kingdom. Indeed, common as it may be, it is an absurdity to insert the appearing of Jesus then. For to whom could He appear, when all things are dead and gone, dissolved, and vanished away? Never is it so presented in Scripture. What is affirmed in the word of God as to all this, I hope soon to lay before you as perspicuously as I can, when the subject of "the Judgment and the Eternal State" will come more definitely before us. But it is not an uncalled-for anticipation, if I now remark how manifestly the appearing of the Lord Jesus introduces His kingdom in a distinct and visible character of judgment; whereas now, on the contrary, He is invisible, and His dealing with the world is only grace, in the testimony of the gospel, if they might hear and be saved. But as He once appeared in this world to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself, so He will appear a second time, and this not merely for salvation to those who thus look for Him, but for the judgment of men at large, whether quick or dead. This will be His appearing and His kingdom in their true import, order, and time, No doubt, preconceived views and traditions of men make this a great difficulty to some Christians. It may be desirable, therefore, to remove, if possible, some of their chief difficulties. The future kingdom of Christ visibly established over the earth seems to many conscientious souls a step backward. The more you maintain the exceeding blessedness of the Church now, and that form in which the kingdom of Christ is actually known by faith, the more you do violence to their most cherished thoughts and expectations. They look for the stability of that which now is, yea, for its progress. But that seems a going back. They turn our own weapons against us; they ask whether Christians have not now in this world the Lord Jesus Christ known in the most blessed manner. Has not the Spirit of God been poured out personally and in power, so that the believer may walk by faith in the deep joy of an unseen Savior? Are we not then, they argue, contending for an inferior order of things, for another age to succeed the present, in which sight will take the place of faith, and every natural good will abound to the people of God, and it will be simply power governing, righteously, instead of the Holy Ghost strengthening the saints unto patience and the fellowship of Christ's sufferings, in the knowledge of Himself and the power of His resurrection? Are, we not, then, they say, pleading for a retrograde movement — a going back, instead of forward, according to the usual principle of God's ways? The answer is plain and conclusive, as the difficulty is only owing to a contracted view of the subject, i.e., to ignorance. Let us seek to look a little more largely and deeply at the manner in which God has wrought upon the earth; and it will soon be seen that the very objection against the truth which has passed before us this night turns, as is so often the case, into a positive argument in its favor.

What has been witnessed in this world? Before Christ's coming Israel was under law; but Israel disobeyed, Israel was broken up and dispersed, because they were guilty of rebellion and idolatry, as they were also of refusing and crucifying their own Messiah. It is plain that nothing could be more miserable—no ruin more complete. Then, after the cross, comes another thing. The rejected Messiah takes His place in heaven, head of a new glory, after a manner quite unexpected, not according to Old Testament expectations. I do not mean the bare fact of His going to heaven; nor simply of His taking His seat at the right hand of God; for these things were predicted in the Psalms. Neither do I refer to the bare fact of blessing the Gentiles with His people; nor even to the Gentile call when the Jews were rejected; for the prophets without doubt were not silent on these great particulars. But I mean Christ's becoming the head of a body in heaven, and His abiding there; so that the Holy Ghost should be sent down to form men out of Jews and Gentiles into union with Himself and with each other, so making one new man, the Church, the body of Christ, while at the right hand of God. All this, I say, is the mystery that was entirely hidden in the Old Testament times, and only revealed now to His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. But if we turn our eyes to the Church upon the earth, what witness of a calling so high and glorious do we find now? Alas! the same tale as Israel told before of sin, rebellion, and idolatry; no less dishonor put upon Jesus, no less persistent resistance of the Holy Ghost. And if God spared not the natural branches of the olive tree, will He forever refrain from cutting off the wild-olive Gentile that He was pleased to graft in? Assuredly He will not sanction the iniquity of Christendom, but judge it yet more sternly. He who abandoned Shiloh, He who profaned His own house in Jerusalem winks not at all that He beholds now done, under the name of Christ, in every land under heaven. Indeed, He lingered long with Israel, pitying them, lifting them up, and warning them; but still He was there finally as a judge of His people, and in the very Cherubim of glory in the book of Ezekiel was that which told of the wrath that fell upon the people when His glory departed from them for a season. So with Christendom, whatever may be the long-suffering grace of God. I do not doubt there is this difference in Christendom, that the Holy Ghost being sent down to abide with us forever, never under any circumstances leaves the children of God in this world, any more than He abandons utterly any individual who really belongs to God in this age. Yet, weighing in the light of His word the past and present state of Christendom, I cannot conceive a more heinous insult to His goodness and His holy nature and character, than the notion that He looks with approbation upon the sinful, distracted, anomalous condition of that which bears the name of Christ upon the earth. I do not doubt for a moment His mercy, spite of all around, His faithfulness in blessing the word, the sure dwelling of the Holy Ghost in the believer and the Church: yet, for all this and more, Christendom's history is the history of foul sin, sorrow before unknown, burning shame, constant dishonor against the Lord.

And how stands in these respects the future age? how “the world to come,” whereof we speak? The Lord Jesus comes; and at once — in a moment — those who wait for Him, the faithful in the past mud in Christendom, are caught up to be with Him, glorified and translated to heaven. Is not this progress? Is it not a most precious step in advance that the Church, failing, scattered, degraded, and never so much as now, should be thus taken out of the scene of her sins and follies, and be with Christ Jesus forever in glory? And when He is manifest in that glory, and we shall be manifested in glory along with Him, is this, I would ask in my turn, is this a retrograde step for the Church? Who would not allow that it is the precise contrary? Take again another look. He comes, and all the saints with Him. Forthwith the countless and proud enemies of Israel are overwhelmed and destroyed; the poor trembling Jews are delivered as from the jaws of the lion; the proud chivalry of Western Europe, alas! apostate with the mass of the Jews, perish in their rebellion against the Lord of lords and King of kings. The mighty one from his fastness in the north comes, hoping to take advantage of that “peeled” people, and so seize the holy and long-coveted land of Israel, not believing any more in the glory of God to be manifested in Jerusalem, than men believe in the grace of God now; but he, too, and all his company, are humbled and broken forever. The Lord Jesus destroys all His enemies, inward and outward, near and afar off, down to the last enemy, not merely of the Jews, but of Israel as a whole. The Assyrian is overthrown. (Jog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal, the great northeastern antagonist of Israel in that day, may still remain for a brief space. After the awful judgment of the Western powers, judged still more awfully under the beast and the false prophet, the Lord Jesus will discomfit all the nations, His foes; He will deliver and exalt His people, sanctifying the name of Jehovah in both. He will not only bless Israel, but make them an eternal blessing in the earth. If this be not progress for Israel, what is progress?

And therefore it is that so far from the administration of the fullness of times (Ephesians 1:10) being an act of retrogression in the ways of God, it is the most real and manifest progress, if anything can be so viewed. But then you must beware of comparing the heavenly body of the Church in its calling with the earthly people of Israel. This has been the source of the mistake. Compare Israel in the past or present with Israel wider Messiah and the new Covenant, and then say whether this be retrogression or advance. Take in the fulness of times; view the fulfillment of the entire sweep of the divine purposes: look upon the gathering of all things in heaven and in earth, under the headship of the Lord Jesus, and then you will have the truth simply, but you will have it also gloriously; for then Christ will be the manifest head over all things to the Church, glorious with Him, and, like Him, the sharer of all He has in that day. Even now, wondrous grace He is not ashamed to call us brethren. Do you think it is to speak too boldly or irreverently, if I say that He will have no reason to be ashamed of His Church then? Will not the Church be the reflection of His own beauty and glory; all of it the fruit of divine grace to us? How could He be ashamed of His own likeness, then? I ask once more, will this be progress for the Church? Again, when Israel is no longer stiff-necked and self-confident, boasting about the law, and really and ever breaking it; when the law is written upon their hearts; when they possess all the blessings of the new covenant; when they bow before their own Messiah, no longer despised and spit upon, but received, adored, reigning over them and their land — will not this be progress for Israel? lost assuredly and emphatically.

Again, when the heavens are no longer arrayed against the earth, because of the pollutions and rebelliousness of this lower scene; when the prince of the power of the air falls, who with his angels makes the heaven to be the chief seat of his plans and efforts to delude and destroy the world, as well as to accuse the saints of God; when all these higher places are cleared of the foe, and Jehovah hears the heavens, and the heavens (instead of turning a deaf ear to the bad and bold world below) shall hear the earth, and the earth shall hear the corn and the wine and the oil, and they shall hear Jezreel, who shall then be sown and bear fruits, instead of being as now vainly scattered by every wind that blows — will not this be progress? And when land or water shall know neither scorching heat nor devastating tempest, when the fruits of the earth shall be no more visited by drought or mildew, by palmer-worm, locust, cankerworm, or caterpillar, when (save as a special curse for contempt of God) the four sore plagues shall be no more, and health, peace, and plenty shall be everywhere, and the harvest never perishes, and the herds are no more perplexed nor the flocks made desolate, and the beasts groan and cry no more; but contrariwise the mountains shall drop down new wine, and the hills shall flow with milk, and the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed, and the wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose: for waters shall break out there, and the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water, and grass with reeds and rushes shall be where dragons lay, and a way of holiness shall be there, an unerring way for the feeblest, and neither unclean man nor ravenous beast shall be there; but the wolf shall dwell with the lamb and the leopard with the kid, and the calf and young lion and fatling shall be there led of a little child; and cow and bear shall feed, their young lying down together, and the lion eat straw like an ox, and the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child put his hand on the cockatrice’ den, nor hurt nor destruction be on all God’s holy mountain: — will this be progress, or will it not? Manifestly, whether we look at the heavens, the earth or sea, at the Church above, at Israel or the Gentiles below, or even at the lower creation, it is triumphant progress in every sphere and every object, and it is all through Christ, all through His blood, all to His glory and God’s glory by Him. If the lack of seeing progress in the millennium has deterred you, if you have hesitated about Christ’s appearing and kingdom lest it might be a step backward in God’s ways, blame yourself for your ignorance; beware of the false teachers who so misled you; commit yourself henceforth more simply and fearlessly to God and His word, the only source and standard of truth.

Let me appeal to your conscience, you who accept the truth here insisted on: does it in very deed lower your thoughts of Christ’s appearing? does it make you more earthly-minded to believe the kingdom of God shall be thus visibly introduced at the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ? Surely you feel, on the contrary, that it fills a void in the future as nothing else can, gives meaning to a vast field of otherwise misunderstood Scripture, and vindicates the goodness, and power, and purposes of God in Christ with manifest triumph.

But there is another remark to be made, in the hope of somewhat clearing the subject. Not only does the Church of God differ essentially in its calling, in its worship, in its present standing, and in its future hopes, from that which existed even for the saints in Old Testament times; but the millennial age, the day of the appearing and kingdom of Christ, will differ quite as really and strikingly from that which is going on now. Among not a few proofs, one plain illustration may suffice. Let me first, however, point out a few remarkable points of contrast by the way. When Satan is no longer free to tempt men, when the power of God will be put forth to bless men, when all creation is delivered from the thralldom in which it now groans, when the earth no longer travails in pain but rejoices, when all that has breath here below will hymn the praise of the Lord Jesus, surely, as we cannot but feel and own, it will be an immense change for good. The men then alive on earth will answer to it, of course. Such a revolution must affect their conduct, as well as their minds and hearts, whether they be of Israel or of the nations in that day. There will be no longer room for the mighty working of God’s Spirit in the midst of sufferings, and faith, and patience as now. Not that there will not be divine knowledge; not that there will not be faith in God, and an intelligence of His mind suited to all that then subsists when glory dwells in the land of Palestine, and the nations gather around that chosen center. Surely there will be rich and

harmonious blessing, and the blessed Spirit, who groans with us in our sorrows, will not absent Himself from their bliss and joy and the affections and ways accordant with it all. But the change will be to us incalculable.

Now Ezekiel brings before us certain points of it in a very unmistakable way. We are told there what will be the destiny of Israel, who are, of course, in the foreground, because they will be the pivot of blessing and glory for the earth, as it were, around the Lord, viewed as reigning in their midst, but also, of course, in a glory that embraces all the earth. But when that day comes, Israel — the favored people among the nations, then the head instead of being, as so long, the tail — cannot possess that profound acquaintance with God's grace and counsels in general which ought to be possessed by the believer now, who enters into that within the veil, and has the mind of Christ. In that day, although the sins of Israel will be as truly forgiven as ours, although they will rest upon Christ as really as any souls do now; yet there will not be the same communion, character, or measure in the power of the Spirit formed by the knowledge of Christ. In that day Christ Himself will (not have renounced His heavenly titles, of course, but also) have taken His earthly glory; and it will be in earthly places, not heavenly, that they will know Him, and be blessed by Him. This makes an all-important difference.

Accordingly, although the Spirit of God will be then poured out upon all flesh, we never hear of such a thing as His being sent in the personal manner in which we know Him present now. We must distinguish between the pouring out of God's Spirit, mighty and gracious an effect of divine power as it is, and the Holy Ghost personally sent down to dwell in believers. Never was there a time, never a divine dealing, in which the Holy Ghost was not active. On the day of Pentecost these two things have to be noted: the outpouring of the Spirit in power and grace, and also His presence after a special and personal sort as sent down from heaven. This had never been before; nor is there any ground known to me in Scripture to expect it again. There were not merely signs, wonders, tongues, healings, and miraculous powers of every kind, the samples of that energy which will fill and control the world to come, and so called the powers of that world in Hebrews 6; but there was a privilege incomparably higher than these — the gift of the Spirit to dwell in us personally according to the words of our Savior. Now, the Holy Ghost will be poured out upon all flesh in the millennium; but it is nowhere written, and therefore not to be believed, that He will take up His personal dwelling-place in Israel, much less in any other nation, then. God will, no doubt, dwell in the midst of His people, but it will be in the way of governmental blessing — a very distinct thing indeed. There will be no such result, therefore, for instance, as Jews and Gentiles formed into one body in that day. All Scripture that treats of the millennium distinguishes between the Jews and the Gentiles then on earth, however they may be blessed or associated for God's glory.

Along with this may be next mentioned the fact which gives, to my mind, the strongest conceivable exemplification of the difference. Ezekiel lets us know, when that day comes, what is to be the allotted portion of each of the tribes of Israel when restored to their land. All is mapped out beforehand. We can even now say with certainty and distinctness that Judah will be here — Dan and Gad will be there and there. It could not be clearer if we looked upon the scene after it was all accomplished. Indeed, I do believe that it is better, if I may be allowed so to say, to see by faith, i.e., with God's eyes, than with our own. This the believer is entitled to now. The word of God is distinct, and given that we may believe, not wait like the world till it is a fact. But there is much more. In that day a fresh ceremonial of divine worship is prescribed to Israel. Not only will they inherit a new division of the land, different from any arrangement that has yet been within Israel's experience; but, further, the ordinances of their worship will be altered in most important and significant respects. Thus the feast of Passover will be renewed, as also the feast of Tabernacles; and it is certain, from Zechariah 14, that all the families of the earth will be summoned to worship the King, Jehovah of hosts, at the feast of Tabernacles. But it is a most noteworthy fact that, there will be no feast of weeks then. There is the great feast of the first month, there is also the great feast of the seventh month: how comes it that there is nothing that answers to Pentecost? The omission seems to me to denote how completely it had been realized in the highest sense in the Church, which, as it were, had monopolized it. That heavenly body had come in between the true Passover, and before the verification of the Tabernacles, and had, so to speak, absorbed Pentecost to itself. The Spirit of God had come down in person and taken His place in the Church as He never will again, whatever effusion there may be once more. The fact assuredly is that Pentecost is not rehearsed when the day of glory dawns on the earth. There will be the renewal of the feast of the Passover, because at all times and in every dispensation there is no foundation of blessing but through the sacrifice of Christ. The feast of Tabernacles, again, we can see from Zechariah 14, is characteristic of that day, and then, of course, emphatically is kept a feast in special harmony with the millennium. All men will be keeping the feast of Tabernacles as a kind of witness and thanksgiving for that glory which will be then displayed. But all this makes the absence of the feast of weeks the more striking. Who but God Himself could have thought of such an omission as that of Pentecost six centuries before it was realized so unexpectedly after the ascension? Let me in particular ask you who will have Ezekiel to be spiritually fulfilled in the Church, what you have to say as to this. Can you account for such a fact? if you were right in your theory that the prophecy of Ezekiel finds its due significance and answer in the Church, Pentecost, it is evident, ought to have been the special feast, Instead of this there is no Pentecost at all. Your speculations, therefore, are entirely baseless. The instance specified furnishes clear, simple, unambiguous evidence, which none but God Himself could have provided beforehand, that prophecy contemplates another course and character of things altogether from anything past, and especially from what exists at present. For we know that the Church of God begins with that which is here purposely left out, Then, "the day of Pentecost was fully come," Then the believers came together and received the gift of the Holy Ghost, not merely gifts, though it was also true of them. But when the new age comes for this world, the truth of Pentecost, in its highest meaning, disappears. There is no longer the personal mission and presence of the Spirit, though an outpouring there may be more than now.

Again, take notice that, according to the book of Ezekiel, the vail is not rent, but still supposed to exist; holy places are once more recognized, and a priesthood on earth, with the various accompaniments of such a sanctuary and such an order. Thus another character of things altogether is seen. In Christianity all this has disappeared. Why? Because we are brought to God by the knowledge He has given us of Christ's sacrifice in His sight. He has made known to us His own heavenly estimate of it. A heavenly High Priest is associated with those who can go into the holiest. The consequence is that all earthly priesthood completely vanishes; for now the truth is that every Christian is thereby constituted a priest. Who can deny these differences? Scripture is decisive, and the wisdom of God becomes apparent in all. Men may theories and talk about unchangeableness; they may try to reason facts away; but there the facts are, and God has written all for our instruction. The only priests now upon the earth are Christians. We have a priest, a great High Priest, in heaven; the only other kind of priesthood is that of all Christians. In the millennium it, will not be so. There will be again a Davidical prince and a holy people; there will be again a temple; there will be sacrifices; there will be living earthly priests, sons of Zadok; there will be certain suited feasts of Jehovah; there will be once more the vail. Now, on the contrary, all these are done away in Christ; and so true is this, that as the vail of the temple was rent for us at the cross, so we are given to look habitually by faith on Christ with unveiled face; "we all" behold Him thus, as it is emphatically stated in 2 Cor. 3. It is not a question of arriving at a special degree of power or privilege; but the common privilege of all Christians, in

contrast with Israel of old, and far beyond the passing favor shown even to Moses.

“We all, with open (i.e., unveiled) face, beholding [“as in a glass,” is a blundering addition founded on etymology] the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord (or, by the Lord the Spirit).” In the millennium nothing of the kind will be realized even by Israel. The most favored nation of the earth, the Jews, will still be put, as it were, comparatively at a distance. For this is necessarily the consequence of the earthly temple, priesthood, and ordinances. There will not then be the nearness in relationship and worship enjoyed by Christians now.

On the other hand, the Church which has so intimately known Christ in heaven while itself upon earth, will never lose that sweet fellowship in heaven. Hence we see the notable fact that in the new Jerusalem there is no temple, which, we know, is so prominent in the earthly city, dignified as it may be; for its name from that day shall be Jehovah-Shammah, “the Lord is there.” Assuredly He who is there will justify the glorious name, and prove that it is no mean blessedness for a people to have Jehovah for their God. Still it is earthly, not heavenly; and the glory of the celestial is one, that of the terrestrial is another, even as there are celestial bodies and bodies terrestrial. Men may object, and imagine, and reason. They may disbelieve it, but cannot truthfully deny that such is the clear statement of Ezekiel in contrast with the New Testament and its special hopes. Never has either land or people, priesthood or sanctuary answered to the prophet’s description. Faith, therefore, assures itself that every word must yet be accomplished, but for earth, not heaven, for the Jew, not the Christian. Herod’s temple in nothing corresponded to the temple of Ezekiel; any more than the state of Palestine or the Jews under Roman rule was like that which appears in the prophecy. All awaits the day when Christ shall appear and set up His kingdom. “And Jehovah shall be King over all the earth; in that day shall there be one Jehovah, and His name one.”

The grand point to seize is the union, without confusion, of heaven, earth, and all things in them, under the Lord Jesus displayed in visible glory. The early Chiliasts wrongly dwelt on the earthly things of the kingdom; the moderns have been in general disposed to look only at the heavenly things. The truth which God is now reviving from His word is the united system in which heaven and earth, so long severed, are bound together under the last Adam and His heavenly Eve, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all. To many this presents an idea which revolts them; but I fear its source is thoroughly infidel — the reasoning from present experience so as to reject the plainest testimony of Scripture. Eph. 1:10, Colossians 1:20, are most decisive, and above all exception as being imbedded within the highest unfolding of Christian doctrine which the New Testament contains. But in truth they are found almost everywhere, in one form or another. Thus the Transfiguration in the three earlier gospels presents the clearest view of this most harmonious blending of the earthly with the heavenly, of men in natural bodies with those already risen and changed, and Christ the acknowledged chief and center of the scene; and this is the more to be heeded, because 2 Peter 1:16,17 treats it as a sort of sample of the kingdom. “For we have not followed cunningly-devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honor and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” Nor is the gospel of John silent. Not only does ch. 3:12 attest the “earthly” and the “heavenly” things of the kingdom of God, but the same principle alone explains chap. 17:22, 23. “And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.” Expressly this is the time of glory, ours in title now, but by and by to be so displayed that the world shall know (not “believe,” but “know”) that the Father sent the Son, and loved the saints after the same wondrous love. This is not the present state of things in which nothing of the kind is exhibited to or known by the world; neither can it be the eternal state when there will be no world to know it, even if it were the aim then and thus to make it known. The accomplishment of the Savior’s words can only, therefore, be in a condition which essentially differs from the present state and from eternity; and this, it is evident, can only be the millennial kingdom, with its heavenly glory an object of knowledge to the world below, and a spring of unceasing praise and glory to God.

No wonder that the Apocalypse sets its seal to the same precious truth; but such will be found to be the fact in Rev. 20, where judgment is given to the risen saints, who shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years: a reign which, as it is not begun yet, so it is inconsistent with what is revealed of eternity. The only time that intervenes is the millennium, which follows the advent of Christ in chap. 19, but precedes the resurrection of the rest of the dead, the wicked dead, to judgment in the close of chap. 20. But this is not all; for chap. 21, after getting a complete picture of eternity in ver. 1-8, opens from vs. 9 a retrospective vision of the millennial state, and presents to our view the glorified bride of the Lamb under the symbol of the holy city Jerusalem that descends out of heaven from God, in the light of which the nations walk, and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and homage unto (not “into”) it. What more evident than that here we have the symbolic representation of the same truth we saw in John 17:22, 23? For the world, the nations of the earth and their kings, cannot but see in these glorified saints the fullest witness that they share the glory of Jesus, and that they are loved of the Father as Christ was. No such sight can be as things now are; neither does it suit eternity, when nations and kings of the earth have forever passed away. The millennium alone exactly meets the case, when heavenly and earthly things are thus seen in glorious accord.

But, in fact, though in various degrees of strength and clearness, the same truth appears throughout the Scriptures. For if the earnest expectation of the creation is waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God (Rom. 8:19), which can only be when Christ at His coming has raised them up and at His appearing has displayed them, this again can only be the millennial era. For then creation, as all the prophets bear witness, shall be set free and sing for joy, instead of being dissolved in order to form the new heavens and earth, which will characterize the eternal state. When those who now have the first-fruits of the Spirit are no longer groaning but revealed in glory, creation will be, not destroyed, but delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the sons of God. This is clearly the millennial day of gladness; not the passing away of the creation, when God shall make all things new for the final state. Then again 1 Corinthians 6:2, 3 is most explicit; for what would be the sense of the saints judging the world or angels in eternity? Take it of the millennium, and all is plain; it is just one of the peculiar features which distinguish that day from the present on one side, and from eternity on the other. Again, Philippians 2:10, is plain; for though our Lord be exalted now, yet it is not yet the period when, in virtue of the name of Jesus, every knee bows, of heavenly and earthly and infernal beings— when every tongue confesses that He is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. As this is manifestly not yet the fact, so neither does it harmonize with the eternal state as it does with the intervening millennium. For the point is man thus exalted, and every creature compelled to own him Lord, if it do not bow, as we do by grace with hearty good-will. Now, the grand truth of eternity will be God all in all; not the special glorification of man in the person of our Lord Hebrews 2:5-8 may close with its unmistakable voice these New Testament witnesses, and the more so as it links them on to the Old Testament, which is the distinctive character indeed of the epistle. It is not only that we ax here told of the subjection lo Christ of the habitable earth to come (τὴν οἰκουμένην τὴν μέλλουσαν), which can only apply

as a fact to the Millennial era; but Psalm 8 is cited to prove the putting of all things in subjection under His feet. And so absolutely does this embrace the entire creation, heavenly and earthly, that 1 Cor. 15, citing the same Scripture, has to except Him who put all things under Christ; and Eph. 1, where it is also cited, virtually excepts the Church, because it is the body of Christ, and therefore one with Him who is thus Head over all things. Personally He is now in this place of exaltation; “but now we see not yet all things put under Him.” This will be precisely in the millennium, and neither in strictness before it nor after it; for in the millennium there will be the display of His exaltation, and this over “all things,” whether earthly or heavenly, as the psalm is thus comprehensively interpreted by the Holy Ghost in the later inspired writings which make use of it. The reason why there is a pause between Christ’s invisible exaltation to the right hand of power, (where He has this place of headship,) and the sight of all things put under Him, is because; while He is thus on high, God is calling out those who shall be joint-heirs, yea, His bride, even as now they are His body.

When God’s calling of the heavenly saints is complete, Jesus will come, and in due time, when He is manifested, we too shall he manifested with Him in glory (Col. 3) — a passage which itself supposes men on earth, before whom the manifestation of Christ and the Church takes place. This, too, is millennial, and possible neither in the present age nor in eternity.

It is the day when Christ is not only the true Melchizedek in order, as now, but when He will exercise its peculiar functions and fulfill the type of him who brought forth bread and wine for the conquerors, as the priest of the most high God; when it will not be only sacrifice and intercession within the vail, but the blessing of Him who will bless His people on the part of the most high God, then indeed “possessor of heaven and earth,” and will bless the most high God on the part of His people, whose enemies will have been delivered into their hands.

“As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the consummation of this age. The Son of man shall send his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all offenses, and those that do lawlessness, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine out as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.” (Matt. 13:40-43.) When this age is completed, the millennium, not eternity, begins; and as there is a higher and heavenly sphere wherein the risen saints shine as the sun, so is there a lower and earthly one where judgments are executed by angels who serve the Son of man. Such is the kingdom in both its parts, as the millennial age is clearly the only period in which the power and the glory of Christ are thus variously displayed. The Lord give us understanding in all things.

The Church of God, Church of God, The: Part 2

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

(Concluded from Page 28)

As the effect of the Comforter's coming, He makes the church to be the dwelling place of God. He not merely does a divine work in and by chosen witnesses, but makes a divine institution of the assembly-they become the habitation of God through the Spirit. This looks at the church in its earthly position; the body of Christ is its heavenly relation. Hence there is the difference that the habitation of God may be entered by those not born of God, still less members of Christ's body. We know such did enter, in early days. But, viewed in its full privileges, the church of God is not only a question of life, but of the Holy Ghost uniting to Christ, and this as a body. “He that is joined to the Lord is one Spirit.” By one Spirit we are baptized into one body. Therefore the idea that the unity of the church hinges only on Christ's becoming a Man is a total fallacy. Incarnation may be and is a step toward it, but is not our union with Christ; it is the union of humanity with Deity, which is not our union at all. When redemption was accomplished, there was a righteous basis for union. Had there been union before redemption, it would have been a slighting of sin. The scriptural place of the church of God maintains the moral claims and character of God with greater fullness than any other. Where the truth is not seen, the law may be talked of, but real holiness in separation from the world is sacrificed or unknown.

After redemption, then, we could be, and are, united to Christ. God could not unite lost man in his sins with His own Son. You will say, Is it not lost man who is united to Christ? Yes: but in the cross of Christ the old man is annulled for the believer; nor is man ever united to Christ till he believes.

Union is not by election, more than by faith, but by the Holy Ghost, “In whom, after ye believed, ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.” All sin is judged to the believer, and then the Holy Ghost takes up His abode in him. It is faith founded, not on promise, but on the mighty work of the Lord effected on the 'cross, and it is only after he believes, that union takes place; for the Holy Ghost is given to him because he is a son, on the ground of his being a believer, and not to make him one, which is a previous work. It is, therefore, when by redemption he is out of his sins, when sin in the flesh is judged according to the efficacy of the work of Christ—then comes the Spirit bringing into the one body, and the Christian is a member of it.

The church is not yet spoken of as in heaven. It is here where the Spirit is, who makes it one. Scripture avoids speaking of the body as on high. God foresaw that people would make excuses by saying 'We shall be one body by and by when we get to heaven; but, so many men, so many opinions—we cannot expect to be one body down here!' Thus does unbelief palliate existing divisions. Do they believe in the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven? It is gravely to be doubted.

They believe in His person, Deity, and quickening. But do they believe in His special mission to form and maintain the church of Christ? If you are a Christian, if you are sealed of the Spirit, you are a member of that one body; but are you acting on this? Are you displaying it in your daily life ecclesiastically? Or, like the mass of Christendom, have you given it up as bygone, and slipped into one of the many denominations? The truth is not changed, and we are bound to walk in it as much now as ever.

What adversaries do, is to essay the wretched and unloving task of showing up the faults of those who are seeking to act on the principle of the one body. Instead of so degrading an occupation, should Christians come and help if they can. Let them prove their superior wisdom and

strength by carrying out the truth better, not by staying in evil and error, while criticizing those who leave it. There is nothing easier than to misrepresent and abuse those who stand for the truth of God.

“There is one body!” Now-a-days, alas! if you are a member of one church, so called, you cannot be a member of another, still less of all. The position of such is essentially sectarian. Ought I then to abide in what I know to be unscriptural? There is one flock. 'Yes,' says a modern commentator, ‘one flock, but consisting of many folds' Did one ever hear of such ingenuity of error? There is a flock, and no longer a single fold now, still less many folds, as he says. There is no such thing as the penning in of the sheep now; there is liberty to “go in and out and find pasture,” but no liberty to do what is wrong. We are not under the restrictions of Judaism. If you have the Spirit of Christ, you are not merely Christians individually, but compose God's church; and if you are members of God's church, my advice to you is, Seek no other, and own it really. If there are on earth believers who want no other condition but membership of Christ's body in godliness and truth, with them is your place to worship and serve the Lord.

While souls, even if awakened, are hesitating about salvation, it is evident what they want is the gospel, not the church; but when you know Christ and His redemption, it is not then only as an individual, but as a member of one body that you have to act: churchmen, not Christians only, we should value only the church of God. Men may be met by all kinds of ignorance and differences; but this does not shake the principle. We learn best “within,” not “without” the church.

On the other hand, remember baptism is properly and entirely outside the church (being a question of the individual), and, therefore, should be settled there. The church of God is on the ground that its members have all received the baptism of the Holy Spirit; yet I own, if people refuse to submit to water-baptism, they would be setting themselves in opposition to the institution of the Lord, and, therefore, should not be received as Christians.

It is plain, however, that the church always did assemble as such in early apostolic times. Disciples might go into the school of one Tyrannus to listen to a lecture; but this, important in its place, is not the church as such gathered in the Lord's name. In that assembly there are two main facts which call them together: first, the Lord's supper; and, secondly, the edifying one another when met together. (See 1 Cor. 11; 14.) The Lord is remembered in the one, the Holy Ghost displays His gracious power in the other; though both may coalesce.

I have but drawn your attention to this great truth; but where is the use of being brought into such a relationship if you are unfaithful to Christ: it is a disgrace and a dishonor to it and to you, if, being member of that one body, you never act as such, but go on in a denomination. Do you ever, not to say always, come together as members of God's assembly simply? Look well to it, that you do no despite to the Spirit in this matter. In order to be a valid assembly of God, it must be open to every member of the body of Christ walking after a godly sort, Refuse none but those who are disorderly in ways, or unorthodox. It is our duty to refuse all, no matter what their name, who are unsound or indifferent as to the humanity of, Christ, no less than as to His Deity. So also indulgence in moral evil is intolerable-drunkenness or the like. The church of God is bound to steer clear of all alliance with iniquity.

Of course there are details in discipline; but discipline is only on the ground I have named. It goes on the same basis as receiving, at least, if we confine it to putting away.

There is room for all kinds of ministry in the church of God; and I should not feel it to be such, if there were any exclusion or enfeebling of a single divine gift. “There are diversities of gifts"; but whatever does not leave room for every gift that God has given is not the church of God acting as such.

Far from taking a high or haughty place, I acknowledge that we are very weak indeed; yet, is there not honesty of purpose in cleaving to what we know to be the will of the Lord for us? But we do not pretend to improve on Scripture, nor to assume an authority which neither we nor others really possess. We are bound to obey, but are not authorized to do all that apostles might, either personally or through chosen associates. The church is the place where the Holy Spirit abides and works for the glory of the Lord. God is dwelling there. Does this claim infallibility for it?

What folly in those who so speak? Are you a Christian? Then God dwells in you. Does this then make you infallible? It is just the same thing with the church, There is infallibility in none but God.

But if God dwell in the church, He is there to make known His mind, and to set right what is wrong. He is interested in it, faithful, too, and cares for all who trust Him. Discipline, in putting away at least, ought never to be enforced till every means short of this, acknowledged in Scripture and incumbent on the church of God, has been tried and failed; public rebuke, as well as private remonstrance, etc., from suited individuals, might justly precede. Putting away should be the last sorrowful necessity-an act not of any individual, but of the assembly: the reason is wise and good. The best and holiest individuals might, if opposed, have their own minds prejudiced or even their will at work. We ought all to know ourselves better than to desire it to be in the hands of any private individual. It is therefore a great safeguard that the extreme act should be in the hands of the assembly, after individuals, leaders, or other Christians, have failed to bring about repentance.

May the Lord then give you to look to Himself and His word, and to obey it. Do not allow trial of any kind to hinder you; else it is the destruction of faith. Do not allow the faults of those who are on the ground of the one body to hinder you. Love as well as faith should rather prompt you to help them. Bring whatever of strength or wisdom you can to aid their weakness and exposure. It may be that is just the very thing the Lord wants from you. However this may be, if it be God's assembly, it is the call of God to you. May you hearken to Him and obey! For such a truth, as indeed all revealed truth, is obligatory and practical, becomes a dead weight or a snare if you do not carry it out obediently, and will be a register to your reproof and loss another day. If a divine truth at all, it is a truth for all to act on. It repudiates anything of party, however few may be those who have faith to hold it fast and walk accordingly in this present day of expediency and unbelief. But if it claims all in the name of the Lord, it claims your adhesion most of all, if you know it to be of God. No difficulties about elders, etc., will excuse you from not acting as a member of the one body according to the word, or from going on with what you know to be a mere sect or denomination contrary to Scripture and grieving to the Holy Ghost, who blesses those who are faithful to what they know, and will clear up, if for Christ's glory, what they do not yet know.

W.K.

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The Church of God, Church of God, The: Part 1

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

(A Lecture On Acts 2:41, 42)

As I shall have occasion to refer to not a few Scriptures, I merely take these verses as a prefatory notice of the general character and nature of the church of God. But even before these words could be used, another fact still more fundamental has to be observed, on which a few words seem desirable. “There is one body and one Spirit.” These two truths are inseparably bound together. The one body (and the church is the body of Christ) depends on the presence of the Holy Ghost. Hence the great force of that expression, “One Spirit.” It is the one Spirit who forms the one body.

It is by no means true that the Holy Ghost always acts thus; for in the Revelation (chap. 1.) we read of the seven Spirits of God. It is, of course, no question of founding the church then and there. On the contrary, the church was about to disappear from the world. Its decay had set in, and Christ appears as man, walking in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, not forming now but judging the seven churches. The first assembly is threatened with having its candlestick removed, the last with being spued out of His mouth, when a new state of things follows, where we have no more notice of the church on earth. It is apparent from Scripture that the church is not intended to go on to the end of the world (though it be a common idea that it will; and that through it the whole world is to be converted). Nor is this an unnatural idea, for those who love the church, desire, of course, to see it spread and flourish. But it is well and safe, and due to God, to be guided in our thoughts by Scripture, giving up our own theories, and letting God's word alone govern us. The apostasy and the “man of sin” (2 Thess. 2:3-12) are what the apostle speaks of before the day of the Lord; and the church, so far from converting all the world even to profess Christ, is not then to be on the earth at all. In that day is the great harvest of blessing.

Scripture shows us then, that first the church is caught up to heaven; then the Jews are taken up again in divine mercy, though the apostates are cut off, and the nations get blessing through Israel; when, after a series of judgments, follows the millennium, and after the millennium the eternal state—the great white throne coming in between. During the period when judgments precede Christ's appearing (Rev. 6-19), the church is not seen on the earth, but in heaven, already glorified. Saints, there are to be, here below, both Jews and Gentiles, but distinct from each other and no longer united in one body. This will not be the church of God. For therein is neither Jew nor Gentile, but Christ is all and in all. All such distinctions disappear in Christ's body.

Indeed the object of God in the church may briefly be said to be that there should be a body on earth to reflect the glory of Christ in heaven. And who is sufficient to effect this save the Holy Ghost? Therefore is He sent down from heaven before and in order to what is described, in the verses I have read in Acts 2. And the Lord Jesus is express that the sending of the Spirit could not be till He departed after dying on the cross for our sins as well as to the glory of God. The action of the Spirit of God is not human force, but compelling by the word: suasion, power in conscience and heart, but also new creation, as one must add. Yet it is never power coming in that peremptory way which obliges a man to utter this or that. It may be the case with an evil spirit, never with the Holy Spirit, who does not take him, in whom He acts, out of his responsibility to God. We ought to know how true and important this is; for now we are members of His church, and dependent on grace to carry out according to His word. Not only at the start, but all the way through, is this obligatory on the Christian, with constant self-judgment lest we grieve the Holy Spirit of God.

Man's 'High Church,' of which we hear so much, is low indeed, compared with the church according to the scripture. It is to God's church, as the most vulgar gilt compared with gold tried by fire.

The church, then, is founded on the accomplishment of redemption; on the Savior's taking His place as Head in heaven; and on the descent of the Holy Ghost, to act in this special relation as the One Spirit to the one body; which action will terminate with the church's disappearance from the earth to meet the Lord in the air. Not that there will be no action of the Spirit of God after that; for as the Holy Spirit had always wrought with regard to man on the earth, so this will never cease so long as man is here below. But now it is the Holy Ghost giving one uniform character to the most diversified ingredients ever called into unity. “By one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:13). Nothing like this could have been true of old; nor will it be so in the millennium. In Israel there were the displays of the varied perfections of God; but with that particular nation there was no blending of Gentiles, no forming of one body, but the strictest separation in obedience to God's law.

Doubtless there were no nations as such before the flood; if we go farther back, there was a fallen race, and certain individuals who loved the Lord looked for the Seed of the woman to bruise the serpent, and waited for His coming, as Enoch even prophesied of it. After the flood, God chose a particular man to be the depository and root of promise. To Abraham were the promises made, and to his seed. Look at the seed either in a natural or in a spiritual sense, and there is nothing in this which reveals or even involves the truth of the one body. I know some who cite for this, Psa. 139, “In thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned when as yet there was none of them"; and Isa. 26, “Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise,” as bringing it in; but to my mind there is not a notion of it in either passage. God takes pleasure in man's body even now, as He also means it to be very different from what it is. But the church was never a dead body at all, and never will be. The application of the phrase “dead body,” to the church, is merely a proof of man's perverse ignorance. It is really ruined Israel that is meant, as the context proves. Of all bodies the church is most of all the one living body as baptised by the one Spirit.

But the solemn fact which the New Testament opens before it, is, without disguise—the total failure of all—be he Jew or Gentile; of which the simple and full proof is the rejection of the Son of God. Everything was buried in His grave; all the hopes of man were laid there for the time; and, therefore, the gospel that went out after the cross takes the ground that man is wholly lost. Doubtless, people do not like this, and those who do not, need it most; for though they may be always striving, they can never find rest or peace; and, therefore, it is given up in popular theology that every believer is entitled to enjoy certainty of salvation or abiding peace. No doubt there is a testimony which God in His grace keeps up; but this is independent of Christendom, and opposed by most. The testimony may be kept up here or there, even irregularly by a woman; and there could not be a greater condemnation of Christendom's vaunted order than that God's power and blessing should accompany such irregular preaching. Still more that there should be a greater amount of truth in this eccentric work than is found in the accredited teachers and guides. And whence was that truth got? From what it most of all feared, as well as disliked. I do not speak of conversion only, but of Christ better known; for if there be not a deeper knowledge of Christ, it is vain to speak about the church.

Now, the truth shows us Christ totally rejected by man, and further, forsaken of God on the cross; but on that very cross, where man, and Israel, and Satan did their worst, there even God Himself, in judging sin, seemed to do worst of all to Christi: if it were not a ground for atonement. But a work was done which laid the basis for God to dwell with men, making us His house and temple, as the Scriptures affirm. For this purpose Christ had come, to prove to the uttermost what man was in his sin, and what God is in His grace, delivering the believer according to His own perfection. For there is this ground-work for the gospel: the Son of God coming down in love to suffer for sin under God's judgment; and the Son of man glorified at the right hand of God, as having obtained the victory in righteousness. How blessed is the resulting message which God is now sending out!

There is indeed, much more in the gospel than forgiveness proclaimed. The nature is judged, the old man annulled; the believer has the comfort of counting himself dead to sin, but also the responsibility of walking accordingly. But how grievous to see that the evangelical mind has never recognized death to sin, and therefore has never known how to use the apostle's answer when branded by his antagonists with a tolerance of sin! Doubtless, this is false; but evangelical testimony is imperfect, falling immensely short of the gospel. They do not understand the privilege of the Christian that he has died with Christ to sin. Of course, those that hold it are called Antinomian! But if you affirm that Christ died for your sins, and do not hold yourself dead to sin, you must be at a loss to stand firm and clear; because, taking the ground of law as the rule of life, too often you are sinning, then making excuses for it, and thereon recurring to Christ for forgiveness. Is not this too much like practical Antinomianism? Is it not the teaching of Paul?

The truth is, that besides being washed from his sins at the start, the believer is dead with Christ to sin that he should not allow evil in any of his ways. Nor is there real power against sin practically, until we take our stand on the ground that we are thus dead, and alive in Christ to God. It is all-important, not to Christians only, but to Christ's glory and His work. And not merely is the Christian brought into this place of being dead to sin and alive in Christ Jesus, but the Holy Ghost can and does dwell in those who are washed from their sins in Christ's blood; and, further, He imprints unity on all who are thus resting on Christ and His work.

Do any, to weaken all this, point to Abraham and the Old Testament saints as being in the same position? Such men do not know what it is to be Christians; I do not say they are not: but they do not know their own place and privileges. It is like a member of the royal family through some strange incongruity ignorant of his own lineage, and therefore in no way taking the relationship or acting accordingly. Such is the state of believers who deny the privileges of the Christian and of the church of God.

The Holy Ghost came down in a marked manner at Pentecost. “A rushing mighty wind shows the permeating force of the Spirit of God. There was not one tongue merely, but cloven tongues. The message is going out to Jew and Gentile, though there be but one Spirit. As long as our Lord was here below, no such thing was possible. There was no unity, any more than action toward the Gentiles. There were those that followed Him, but no binding in one. The Lord prepared them for what was to follow. “The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things,” etc. Union is by the Spirit given or sent, not merely by the faith He works in the soul.

[W.K.]

(To be continued)

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 2:2-36

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Such was the preface of the Apostle's discourse: a denial of the carnal, not to say immoral, excitement imputed, and an affirmation of the power of the Spirit, then manifested in the gift of tongues, and prophesying, according to the prophet Joel.

Now he enters on the foundation of their hopes as God's chosen people, and sets forth the facts just accomplished in the light of His word, mainly as we shall see Psa. xvi. cx. and cxxxii.

“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man shown forth from God to you by mighty works, and wonders and signs which God wrought by Him in your midst, as yourselves know—Him given up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye by hand of lawless men did crucify and slay; whom God raised up, having loosed the pangs of death, inasmuch as it was not possible that he should be held fast by it. For David saith as to Him, I kept the Lord in view always before me, because He is on my right hand that I may not be shaken. On this account my heart was cheered and my tongue was exceeding glad; yea more my flesh also shall dwell in hope [that, or] because thou wilt not leave my soul in Hades nor give thy Holy (or Gracious) One to see corruption. Thou didst make known to me ways of life; thou wilt make me full of joy with Thy countenance. Brethren, one may speak with freedom unto you about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is amongst us unto this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God swore with an oath to him of the fruit

of his loins to seat upon his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that neither was He left in Hades nor did His flesh see corruption. This Jesus did God raise up whereof all we are witnesses. Having therefore been exalted by the right hand of God and received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured forth this which ye see and hear. For David ascended not into the heavens, but saith himself, “The Lord said to my Lord, Sit on My right hand till I make Thine enemies [the] footstool of Thy feet. Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom ye crucified.” (Verses 22-36.)

The Apostle addresses them according to their due national title as the chosen theocracy; and, while he in no way hides the name of humiliation, he claims for his Master the indubitably proved character of Messiah. It was God, he affirms, who had shown him forth to them by mighty works and wonders and signs; it was God who by Him thus wrought in their midst. They could deny neither the actual display of divine power in every form of goodness and mercy, nor that Israel had so expected the Anointed of God according to the living oracles. The eyes of the blind were opened, the ears of the deaf were unstopped, the lame leaped as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb sang. Had all this come without the person to whom Scripture attaches it all? If not yet with vengeance, surely in mercy unequivocally divine? Granted that the parched ground has not become a pool, nor the thirsty lands springs of water, and that the way of holiness is invisible save to faith; granted that the unclean abound and are bold, as the lion and the ravenous beasts are still objects of terror, because the people are apostate from their King when He came, as they once gave up Jehovah for every vain idol of the nations. But God had failed in no attestation that could commend His servant whom He upheld, His elect in whom His soul delighted; and they themselves knew it, though tempted by Satan to impute it to the enemy, in order to escape the submission of their conscience to the truth. To the enemy! when Christ's every word and every work directly tended to destroy Satan's evil power and wiles. But what will not the deluded mind of man think or at least say to avoid the grace that pities and would save Him if he bowed to God and His Christ?

Did any Israelite stumble at the cross as invalidating His claims? Yet: on the cross, man—the Jew—being what he is, God had ordered it all marvelously to His own glory. Unbelief and rebellion and blasphemy on the one hand were allowed to work their unimpeded way, when the fit moment arrived; and Jesus was rejected ignominiously by His own people, and the Gentiles were urged by them to crucify Him; that He on the other hand might become a propitiation for the sins of His own that believed, yea, for the whole world. If that was man's inexcusable iniquity, this was God's sovereign grace. If they were the instruments of their own spite, He gave One that has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. Thus in that cross met creature will of man and of Satan in deadly enmity to God, divine love turning the otherwise hopeless sin to the shedding of that precious blood which cleanseth from all sin, impossible without the glorious person who is God no less than man, impossible save by His once in atonement suffering for our sins, Just for unjust. “Him given up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye by hand of lawless men did crucify and slay.” The cross therefore, dreadful as it is as the proof of man's blind guilt and of Satan's power, now that it is seen to be not only necessary that Scripture be fulfilled, but the indispensable and only possible door of deliverance for the sinner in God's grace, is owned as an essential and morally the deepest part of God's ways, as it is the highest moral glory of the Lord Jesus. As Himself said on the eve of it, “Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in Him. If God be glorified in Him, God shall also glorify Him in Himself, and shall straightway glorify Him.”

But the resurrection! what did God say therein? In vain the lie that the disciples came by night and stole Jesus away, while the soldiers slept. Peter does not even notice such an unworthy subterfuge, but simply asserts the grand truth on which the gospel rests: “whom God raised up, having loosed the pangs of death, inasmuch as it was not possible that He should be held fast by it. For David saith as to him, I foresaw the Lord,” &c. The word of God by David pointed to the resurrection of the Messiah; and God showed Him openly when risen to witnesses chosen of Him beforehand. But indeed it was not possible that He should be held fast by death, to which He, the Holy One, had submitted for sin to God's glory. Nor was it possible that the Scripture could be broken which said, “Thou wilt not leave My soul in Hades, nor give [i.e. suffer] Thy Holy One to see corruption.” Even according to the ancient Jewish interpretation these words of Psa. 16 can only apply to the Messiah (Schöttgen, 664-8). Here Peter, and in chap. 13 Paul, declare that it was fulfilled in God's raising Jesus from the dead, not in David, still less in any other. Thus was He shown the path of life through death with fullness of joy in the presence of God His Father.

The Apostle in his reasoning on this next cites Psa. 132, the great psalm of the Kingdom settled forever in the son of David. “Brethren, one may speak freely unto you about the patriarch David, that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is amongst us unto this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God swore with an oath to him of the fruit of his loins to seat upon his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ that neither was He left in Hades nor did His flesh see corruption. This Jesus did God raise up whereof all we are witnesses.” This, and this only, explains the peculiarly glorious character of the Kingdom even in its earthly relations. Even now the King is risen from the dead. This stamps perpetuity as nothing else could: yet is it the kingdom of a man. Only it is man risen from the dead: though here it is Christ only, first-born from the dead, for in all things He must have the pre-eminence.

But in fact resurrection was the immediate steppingstone, not to the If which still awaits His appearing in glory, but to His going up into the presence of God on high; and this for reasons most nearly affecting God's glory now as well as those who enjoy His favor, as we shall hear presently. “Having therefore been exalted by the right hand of God and received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured forth this which ye see and hear. For David ascended not into the heavens, but saith himself, The Lord said to my Lord, Sit on My right hand till I make Thine enemies the footstool of Thy feet. Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom ye crucified.” Again, from that most fruitful treasury of God's words is a sentence drawn to prove that the facts of Christ's life, including His resurrection and ascension, were not only facts of the deepest import, the ground of truths needed for every day and for eternity, but parts of God's infinite scheme for manifesting His own glory and giving effect to His goodness towards us. If Psa. 132 secures the risen son of David for the everlasting King on His throne in Zion, with the abundant and suited privileges peculiar to His Kingdom on earth and in Israel, the citation from Psa. 110 testifies to His present exaltation in heaven. Of this there was the most conclusive proof in the now accomplished promise of the Father, the gift of the Holy Spirit, of whose outpouring there was indubitable evidence to their eyes and ears. That gift Christ had received for the second time. Once again on earth He was sealed, the holy and acceptable One of God's delight: now a man in heaven a second time did He receive that same Spirit, as the One who, having finished the work of redemption, had gone on high, the guarantee and glorious witness of the acceptance of all who, believing in His name, are justified and delivered, that they might be united in one, the body of the ascended Head. And on this rests the perpetuity of that gift, the presence of the Holy Ghost, so essential to the Church of God. Not only is the outpoured Spirit the fruit of His accepted work in all its unchanging and everlasting value, but He is therefore given again to Christ, though for us. Christ received of the Father the promised Spirit and poured forth what was seen and heard at Pentecost: how could the Holy Spirit but abide in honor of Him and of His work? No wonder, whatever be the humiliating and deplorable provocations on

our part, whatever the deep griefs on His part as feeling for Christ's injured name, that He abides in us and with us forever. He is come to testify to God's exalting Jesus, made both Lord and Christ, whom men, yea Jews, crucified.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 2:12-21

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

The tongues were, as the Apostle explains elsewhere, a sign to unbelievers. They were intended to arrest and produce inquiry. The presence of the promised Holy Spirit was an incomparably deeper and more fruitful fact. He was sent down from heaven to form the assembly, the new dwelling-place of God, the body of Christ. He was to be the power of testimony, of God's good news for the world. He was to be in the believers and with them forever, that Paraclete whom Christ after going on high was to send, not only to bring demonstration to the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment, but to guide the saints into all the truth, announcing what is coming, and glorifying Christ as He had the Father. Whatever might be the marvel and the gracious suitability of the tongues, the gift of the Spirit Himself immensely transcends them; but His presence and the all-important results of it are beyond the ken of the world which neither sees nor knows Him. The strange thing occupies men.

“And they were all amazed and perplexed,1 crying one to another, What meaneth this?2 But others mocking3 said, They are filled with sweet wine. But4 Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice and spoke forth unto them, Men of Judaea and5 all ye that dwell in Jerusalem, be this known to you, and give ear to my words. For these are not drunken as ye suppose, for it is [the] third hour of the day; but this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel: And it shall be in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young [men] shall see visions, and your elder [men] shall dream with 6 dreams; yea and on my bondmen and on my bond-women will I pour out of my Spirit, and they shall prophesy. And I will give wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and vapor of smoke. The sun shall be changed into darkness and the moon into blood before the great and manifest day of [the] Lord come. And it shall be, whosoever shall call on the name of [the] Lord shall be saved” (ver. 12-21).

As usual, men arrange themselves in more than one class, some astonished, others hostile and scornful. Peter takes the lead in explaining with gravity and distinctness. He explicitly denies the unworthy thought of intoxication, which the early hoar itself should have silenced as against God-fearing souls. It was really what Joel spoke of: not of course the fulfillment as it is to be in the last days, but an installment of that nature. Indeed the words of the prophet went in this beyond what that day saw accomplished; for “all flesh” cannot fairly be limited to Israel, and God, who was soon about to bring in Gentiles to the name of Christ, will bless the nations in the future kingdom, when all the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord, and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before Him. The gospel now makes good the indiscriminate grace of God even more profoundly than will be under His government, when He will show that the kingdom is Jehovah's, and that He is the governor among the nations.

In the latter day when Joel's words will be fulfilled as a whole, the Spirit will be poured out, and if Israel enjoy the blessing richly, it will flow far beyond their narrow limits. God's way shall then be known upon earth, His saving health among all nations. Temporal blessing is then to be vouchsafed to Israel (2:19-27), and their great northern enemy to be forever disposed of; for Jehovah will do great things for His people and land, whatever the enemy may have prepared to do. “My people,” He says emphatically, “shall never be ashamed.” Then as a distinct intimation the prophet presents two announcements: the first, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (28, 29); the second, external signs of judgment ushering in the day of Jehovah, the circumstances of which are detailed in chapter 3 till we come down to the closing account or their blessings once more. As the wonders above and below precede that day, so does the repentance of Israel prepare for their deliverance, and blessing, and especially the gift of the Spirit. We see the same principle here also.

For God, in pouring out of His Spirit now, does thereby associate believers with Christ exalted on high. Given in virtue of redemption the Holy Spirit sheds the love of God in their hearts, seals them for the day of redemption, and is the earnest of their inheritance. He dwells in them now, and will quicken their mortal bodies then at Christ's coming. Besides He is the blessed and divine bond, constituting them Christ's body and God's house. And here it may be of interest to not a few if I set before them the judgment formed by the celebrated ecclesiastical historian, Neander, who had no bias toward the truth of the church from his Lutheran views. It is not cited as invariably sound or as in any respect authoritative, but as a grave testimony from an able and well-informed Christian in direct opposition to the present state of the church, whether Protestant or Romanist, Oriental or Greek. It is, therefore, as far as it goes, a strong involuntary homage to the revealed truth on this subject.

“What Moses expressed as a wish (Num. xi. 29), that the Spirit of God might rest upon all, and all might be prophets, seems to me a prediction of that which was to be realized through Christ. By Him was to be instituted a fellowship of Divine life, which, proceeding from the equal and equally immediate relation of all to the One God, as the divine source of life to all, should remove these boundaries, within which, at the Old Testament position, the development of the higher life was still confined; and hence the fellowship thus derived would essentially distinguish itself from the constitution of all previously existing religions societies. There could, in such a society, be no longer a priestly or prophetic office, constituted to serve as a medium for the propagation and development of the kingdom of God, on which office the religious consciousness of the community was to be dependent. Such a guild of priests as existed in the previous systems of religion, empowered to guide other men, who remained, as it were, in a state of religions pupilage; having the exclusive care of providing for their religious wants, and serving as mediators by whom all other men must first be placed in connection with God and divine things,—such a priestly caste could find no place within Christianity. In removing that which separated men from God, in communicating to all the same fellowship with God, Christ also removed the barrier which had hitherto divided men from one another. Christ, the Prophet and High Priest for entire humanity, was the end of the prophetic office and of the priesthood. There was now the same High Priest and Mediator for all, through whom all men, being once reconciled and united with God, are themselves made a priestly and spiritual race; one heavenly King, Guide and Teacher, through whom all are taught of God; one faith, one hope, one Spirit which should quicken all; one oracle in the hearts of all, the voice of the Spirit proceeding from the Father; all were to be citizens of one heavenly kingdom, with whose heavenly powers, even while strangers in the world, they should be already furnished. When the Apostles applied the Old Testament idea of the priesthood to Christianity, this seems to

me to have been done invariably for the simple purpose of showing that no such visible particular priesthood could find place in the new community; that since free access to God and to heaven had by the one High Priest, even Christ, been opened once for all to believers, they had, by virtue of their union to Him, become themselves a spiritual people, consecrated to God; their calling being none other than to dedicate their entire life to God as a thank-offering for the grace of redemption, to publish abroad the power and grace of Him who had called them out of the kingdom of darkness into His marvelous light, to make their life one continual priesthood, one spiritual worship springing from the temper of faith working by love; one continuous testimony for their Savior. (Compare 1 Peter 2:9; Rom. 12:1; and the spirit and whole train of thought running through the Epistle to the Hebrews.) So, too, the advancement of God's kingdom in general and in particular, the diffusion of Christianity among the heathens and the good of each particular community, was now to be the duty not of one select class of Christians alone, but the immediate concern of each individual." (Meander's General History of the Christian Religion and Church, i. § 2, 248-250, Bohn's edition.) We need not do more than notice the vague inaccuracy of "entire humanity" on the one hand and of the "King" on the other; for we must never expect a Lutheran to know the total ruin of man or the new relations of Christ. That He tasted death for every man is true; but He is King of Israel and of nations, Head of the church, not of humanity as such. He has authority over all flesh to give eternal life to as many as the Father hath given Him. But this and other passages show that, notwithstanding grave drawbacks, this modern historian understood better than most the peculiar character of that new thing which God formed for His glory on the day of Pentecost; a character in no wise accidental or temporary, but essentially distinguishing it from first to last, and as distinct from that which God had set up in Israel as from the inventions of Satan among the Gentiles. It was God's habitation in the Spirit.

(To be continued)

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 2:1-11

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The death of Christ, as the paschal lamb, took place punctually to the day; so did the resurrection as the wave sheaf; yet no saint knew the significance of either till they were accomplished facts. Nor have we proof, notwithstanding the marked intelligence displayed in the use of scripture since the resurrection (Acts 1; cf. Luke 24:47), that any entered into the meaning of the feast of weeks, with its wave loaves, till it was being fulfilled. They were together, however, in their true place of dependence and expectation. "And when the day of Pentecost was in course of fulfillment, they were all together1 in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound as of a mighty blast rushing, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues parting asunder as of fire, and it2 sat upon each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them to utter" (ver. 1-4).

This was the baptism of the Spirit, though neither the mighty cause is here unfolded, nor are the effects as yet traced out. But the promise of the Father was now fulfilled. The Holy Spirit was sent down from heaven according to the word of the Lord to abide with His own forever, that other Advocate who answers on earth to Christ in heaven, the Divine manager of all our affairs according to the will of God. As being a wholly new thing there were accompanying signs, and these of a twofold character; not only the violent blowing which filled all the house, but the disparted tongues as of fire which sat upon each. Thus was manifested the presence of the Spirit in a general way for all the house, in a special way as power of testimony for each, a distinction of importance found in other forms elsewhere also.

But testimony is the predominant point here; for if they were all filled with the Spirit, they began also to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. Hence the aptness of the form in which the Spirit manifested His action: not a dove as with the Lord when sealed on earth, emblem of One holy, harmless, undefiled, but tongues wherewith now to make known the wonderful works of God, in the new creation every way far beyond the wonders of the old. But the tongues were not one, but parting asunder. The Gentile must hear, no less than the once favored Jew. Now the mission of grace was to go forth indiscriminately as became a dead and risen Savior, whom God exalted on high after man, especially Israel, had rejected Him as their own Messiah on earth. Further, the tongues were as of fire, that set forth Divine judgment intolerant of evil, as just now demonstrated in grace to man in the cross of Christ.

But the languages were as real as they were different from their mother tongue or any naturally acquired one. The fact is as clearly stated, as the gift itself was eminently significant and seasonable. What could be so clear a testimony that if God gave His law to Israel, though in itself the expression of man's moral duty, He was now about to make known His grace in the gospel to every race and tongue? His grace not only forgives all offenses, but quickens together with Christ, so as to be a new and everlasting ground for the energy of the Spirit to produce in a new life the fruit of righteousness which is by Jesus Christ to God's glory and praise. This witness of divine love, efficacious through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, in direction toward all, in effect upon all those that believe. It was not the extirpation of difference in language, not yet the power which will make once more the whole earth of one lip and the same speech, but grace lifting its objects and instruments above the effects of that judgment at Babel, which by diversity of language confounded the pride of the race, when it sought to combine and exalt itself in a union of human will which forgot God altogether. But God remembered guilty and miserable man, and in His wisdom and mercy availed Himself of the chosen people's hatred of Himself and of His Son, (John 15) to go out in the power of the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; and to mark this in a way most touching to every nation under heaven.

"Now there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, pious men, from every nation under heaven, and when this report [or, sound] was made, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because they each one heard them speaking in his own dialect. And they were all amazed and wondering, saying,3 Behold, are not all these that speak Galileans? And how hear we, each in our own dialect in which we were born? Parthians and Modes and Elamites, and those that dwell in Mesopotamia, in Judea and Cappadocia, in Pontus and Asia, in Phrygia and Pamphylia, in Egypt and the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and the Roman sojourners, Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians, we hear them speaking in our tongues the mighty things of God" (ver. 5-11).

If any words were needed to make the nature of the wonder plain and precise, it might have been supposed that these could not fail. But men of this world's science and learning, though bearing the name of Christian, manifest no less incredulity now than the Jews did of old, who foolishly sought to treat it as mere excitement. Some have tried to find in the account the same sort of senseless jargon, or (as Meyer) an

entirely new language as its favorers allege,4 which was revived a half century ago among the Irvingites; others (as Bleek, &c.) contend for a highly excited or ecstatic style of speech suitable to the communication of the marvels of grace, or (Olshausen) for so low a thought as a magnetic relation between speakers and hearers, or (Wieseler, &c.) for mere inarticulate ejaculations of praise! The older rationalists, as Paulus, &c., supposed no other than their native tongue; others, from Gregory of Nyssa and Cyprian to Erasmus and men of our own day, had grafted on this the strange idea that the multitude of foreigners were caused by the Spirit to hear each his own tongue! But Gregory of Nazianzus rejects the notion as making the marvel lie with the hearers rather than the speakers, contrary to the cleart statement of scripture, as indeed are all these vain hypotheses.

The truth is that all these ideas, though maintained not only by preachers, but by theologians of the highest rank, are swept away at the first touch of the written word, ever the standard of truth, and never more needed than in this day of active and daring intellect. The disciples were enabled in the power of the Spirit to speak the various languages of the earth; and it would seem that there were different measures in this gift as in others. The Apostle thanks God that he speaks with tongues more than all the Corinthians, so ostentatious of these sign-gifts; but he also insists on the subordination of them all to prophecy, as a gift characteristically for edification, encouragement, and consolation. The great end in the assembly is building up, to which a tongue without interpretation contributed nothing; as their frequency, if not simultaneous also, was an evident offense against order, both of which he corrects as the commandment of the Lord.

Tongues therefore played a very inferior part in the assembly. That they were conferred for the dissemination of the gospel is the supposition of many in ancient as in modern times. They were certainly used to arrest the Jews from foreign countries, who flocked to Jerusalem for this feast, or were otherwise staying there. What confounded these strangers from so many lands was, that they each one heard the disciples speaking in their own language, and, whatever may have been the prevalence of Aramaic, Greek, and Latin over the then known world, it is idle to tell one who believes this careful and varied enumeration from the N. E. to the W. and S. (which seems to be the reason why Judaea comes between Mesopotamia and Cappadocia), that the inspired writer does not mean to convey more than a few distinct tongues. Not so judged the residents and the sojourners in Jerusalem, whose piety gave them weight, yet least of all disposed to religious innovation. To them the evidence was irresistible, an impossibility if the variety of languages had not been a plain and sure reality of which they were competent judges. “Behold, are not all these that speak Galileans? And how hear we, each in our own dialect in which we were born? Parthians, and Medes and Elamites, &c.... we hear them speaking in our tongues the mighty things of God.”

Still those who heard and believed the gospel that day were Jews and proselytes only. But the wondrous form of testimony prepared the way for those who glean the mind of God from the mighty workings of His gracious power, as well as from the words of the Lord, in His varied commissions to the disciples, the wide-reaching activity in witnessing His love to which they were called. His hands which had been stretched out in vain to a disobedient and contradictory people were already pointing to all the nations, who also would hear. But the Lord had to use, as we shall see in due time, fresh means to reach the ears and quicken the hesitating feet of His own, in that grace that tarrieth not for man, and waiteth not for the sons of men.

(To be continued)

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 28:16-31

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

Thus the apostle comes to the metropolis of the world a prisoner. Such was the will of God. There were saints in it there, as we know from the Epistle written to them from Corinth (Acts 20:3). Many assemblies were apostolically founded, not that in Rome. So did God anticipate by condemning the pride of man which later on indulged in this tradition, as groundless as most others. The chief city of the Gentiles, which lay within Paul’s province, not Peter’s (Galatians 2), could boast truthfully of no apostle as its founder. But, more, there the greatest witness of the gospel came in bonds. So was the gospel to fare even more bitterly in the torture and at the stake when the pagan Babylon became the mystery of impiety, the papal Babylon. Yet the word of God was not bound, any more than crueller fiats consumed it later, even when a pseudo-Christian priest sat on the throne of the Caesars, and men masqueraded in the garb of the Lamb’s followers who were ravening wolves, and really heathen in heart and unbelief.

“And when he came to Rome [the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the praetorian guard, but] 1Paul was allowed to remain with the soldier who guarded him. And it came to pass that after three days he2 called together those that were chief of the Jews; and when they were come together he said unto them, [Men] Brethren, I, though having done nothing against the people or the customs of our fathers, was delivered a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans; who, after examination, wished to release me because there was no cause of death in me. But when the Jews spoke against [it], I was constrained to appeal unto Cæsar, not having anything to accuse my nation of. For this cause therefore did I call for you to see and to speak with, for on account of the hope of Israel am I bound with this chain. And they said unto him, We neither received letters from Judæma concerning thee, neither did any of the brethren on arriving report or speak anything evil concerning thee. But we beg [or, think well] of thee to hear what thou thinkest; for concerning this sect it is known to us that it is everywhere spoken against” (Acts 28:16-22).

Two things appear in the apostle: entire superiority to the rancor that had hitherto pursued him from the Jews, and untiring zeal to seek that they should hear the truth, and not judge themselves unworthy of eternal life. Nor was there the least underhand work. He invited their chief men, not the less informed; and he explained that, without wrong to the Jews or to their hereditary customs, he was a prisoner from Jerusalem among the Romans; who after examination were minded to acquit him but for the opposition of the Jews, which forced his appeal to the Emperor. But he points out the real offense — his stand for the hope of Israel. He might have exposed their conspiracy to murder him when in Roman hands, a fact which, if published in Rome, would have as completely served himself as blasted the Jews. But not a word escapes him, save of unselfish love, that he had no charge against those that had so persistently sought his death. It was truly for the hope of Israel he wore the chain — for the Messiah fraught with blessings of every kind, never to wane, for Israel. And if the servant’s love were thus faithful, what must be the Master’s which had reproduced it in Paul’s heart in his measure? And if Jews turned a deaf ear, those sure mercies

(before which Israel one day will melt in true repentance) must find suited objects, if not in the favored land, in the barren wilderness where open outcasts now live to God's glory, the objects of the grace of Jesus.

Of this grace to Gentiles, however, which had roused the hate of Jews elsewhere, the apostle does not yet speak, but simply of the fact that it was for the Christ, the hope of Israel, he was a prisoner.

The fact is that the Jews, having failed with successive governors, and even King Agrippa, were shrewd enough to apprehend the folly of carrying their complaints of Paul to Caesar. They had no true criminal charge. And what would a Roman Emperor care for their religious accusation? The Jews therefore replied that neither letters nor visitors had laid any formal complaint before them against Paul, but that they wished to hear what he had to say of the sect so universally spoken against as Christians. This was precisely what the apostle's heart desired.

"And having appointed him a day, many came unto him into the lodging, to whom he expounded, testifying the kingdom of God, and persuading them3 concerning Jesus, from both the law of Moses and the prophets, from morning till evening. And some assented to the things that were said, and some disbelieved. And being disagreed one with another they left, Paul having said one word, Well spoke the Holy Spirit through Isaiah unto our fathers, saying, Go unto this people and say, With hearing ye shall hear and in no wise understand, with seeing ye shall see and in no wise perceive. For the heart of this people became gross, and with [their] ears they became dull of hearing, and [their] eyes they closed, lest they should see with [their] eyes and hear with [their] ears and understand with the heart, and return, and I should heal them. Be it known therefore unto you that this4 salvation of God was sent to the Gentiles: they also will hear" (Acts 28:23-28). Verse 29 in the Text. Rec. as represented in the A. V. is not found in the ancient Greek MSS. To cast out an innovation is the reverse of innovating.

Thus God gave His servant an open door to the very people whom he loved so well and whose brethren's malice made him a prisoner, and so much the longer because there was no one to lay a definite charge. It was a moment of exceeding solemnity to the apostle's spirit, as there in Rome he laid bare the truth of God's kingdom and of the Person of Jesus from the law and the prophets for one long day; and with the result that some were persuaded of the things that were said, while others disbelieved, a stronger expression than their simply not believing. The word of God in the light of Jesus comes to put them to the proof, as it does and is intended to do. But if disagreeing among themselves they took their leave, Paul reiterated the long suspended sentence, already pronounced by the Judge Himself in John 12 seven centuries and more after Isaiah was inspired to utter it from the vision in the temple in the year when King Uzziah died (Isaiah 6). What a witness of divine patience as well as of sure judgment on His own people! Jehovah, the God of Israel, sent His prophet with the message originally. Then Jehovah-Jesus toward the close of His rejected testimony of love and light in their midst departed and hid Himself, after having done so many signs which manifested the Father and the Son at work in grace. Yet they believed not in Him according to Isaiah 53; yea more, they could not believe, for the judicial spell was taking effect, fruit of despising every word and proof of God Himself, the Son, on earth. "These things said Isaiah, because he saw His (Christ's) glory, and he spake of Him." Such is the comment of the inspired Evangelist. Now the word is again cited by Paul, only with this emphatic reference — "Well spoke the Holy Spirit." He Who of old gave the prophet to see, hear, and write, was now sent down from heaven to make good Christ's glory, and is declared to be the One Who then and thus spoke. He had been rejected by the Jews as the witness of the glorified Son of Man, as truly as the Son on earth had been, and Jehovah as such of old. On the ground of responsibility all was over with the chosen people, who, having failed in righteousness, abhorred sovereign grace in the gospel. But the mercy they despised will be their only ground in the latter day, when the last empire of the Gentile rises up to oppose the returning Lord at His appearing in glory, in alliance with the Antichrist in the land of Israel. These are the Beast and the False Prophet of the Revelation.

Meanwhile the Jew is finally cut off, and before the apostasy is come and the Man of Sin revealed, the gospel goes forth on its errand of heavenly mercy to the Gentiles. "They also will hear," said the messenger from his bonds in Rome. And so it has been; so it is; though the shadows deepen as the end of the age draws near. Then an ungrateful Christendom will cast off the faith, and more and more return to naturalism, in love not only of present things but of idolatry, and in man set up as true God, that wrath may come to the uttermost on all, whether Jew or Gentile, who spurn grace and bow down to the creature lifted up to destruction by Satan in the despite and denial of the Father and the Son. But meanwhile "this salvation of God was sent to the Gentiles." For the grace of God goes down to the lowest when the light of the knowledge of His glory shines, as now in the gospel, in the face of Jesus at His right hand. Thus Israel is cast off, the Gentiles hear, but the apostle was in bonds. So the history ends. But the apostle, a prisoner in Rome, sent thence to the Jews the deepest message they over received from God, as also to the saints at Ephesus and Colosse the fullest words, on the body and its Head, on Christian experience to the Philippians, and personally to Philemon: so fertilizing the stream that flowed through him in his captivity.

"And he remained two whole years in his own hired lodging, and received all that came unto him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, with all boldness unhinderedly" (Acts 28:30-31).

Such is the simple, solemn, and dignified close of inspired ecclesiastical history. Some speak of it as abrupt, because it does not tell us of the subsequent imprisonment of the apostle, and his death. It is the same spirit of unbelief which complains of the two Gospels that do not set before us the ascension scene; as if God did not know best how to re: veal His own truth. Paul is a prisoner, yet not so as to hinder the going forth of the truth even in Rome. To know more of the apostle we must read closely the word; yet even so there is nothing to encourage curiosity, superstition, or hero-worship, that God in all things may be glorified by Jesus Christ.

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Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 28:1-15

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

The land to which they escaped they subsequently learned to be Malta. This ought to be beyond controversy. Yet has it been contested even to our own day. The first who argued for the islet in the Gulf of Venice called Meleda seems to be Constantine Porphyrogenitus, who hazarded

this opinion in his work on the Administration of the Empire, one of the Byzantine historians and of weight in what he personally knew. But he, like the few who adopted his view of the scene of the apostle's shipwreck, had not duly considered the revealed account, any more than the actual facts of the two places as fitting in with that account. The direction of the wind favors Malta, as it blew them from Crete and Glands, toward the dreaded Syrtis. This could not have driven toward the north of the Gulf. Nor is there any need to narrow the Adriatic to that Gulf; for it is well known, that in ancient usage, and by such careful writers as Cl. Ptolemy, the famous geographer, it comprehended the open sea where the ship really drifted to Malta, and considerably farther. Then again there is nothing in the local features, soundings, anchorings, "rough" or rocky places, creek with a beach, place with two seas, which can apply to Meleda as to Malta. And the argument founded on "the barbarians" is quite invalid; for the Romans like the Greeks applied the term to those who were, not savages, but speakers of a language strange to themselves. Nor am I aware of any proof, even if the word meant "savages," that this then applied to the inhabitants of Meleda more than to those of Malta, though it is difficult to suppose that insignificant isle would have such residents as Publius, his father, and those that honored Paul and his friends with many honors and kind supplies, to say nothing of the universal kindness to the soldiers and ship's company. Malta, from its position and value from of old to this day, has been an important island, never Meleda.

Scaliger and Bochart with their usual discernment and massive learning had no hesitation in refuting the medieval mistake, and vindicating the claim of "St. Paul's Bay" in Malta as the true scene of the wreck and the escape. Bryant's reasoning, and later still S. T. Coleridge's pleas in behalf of Meleda against Malta, have no real groundwork.

"And when got safe we then ascertained that the island was called Melita. And the barbarians [or natives] showed us no common kindness; for they kindled a fire-heap and took us all in because of the then rain and because of the cold. But when Paul gathered a certain quantity of sticks and laid [it] on the fire-heap, a viper came out through the heat and fastened on his hand. And when the barbarians saw the beast hanging from his hand, they said one to another, Certainly a murderer is this man, whom though got safe from the sea, justice refused to let live. He however shook off the beast into the fire and suffered no harm. And they expected that he would be inflamed or fall down dead suddenly; but when they were long expecting and beheld nothing amiss happen, they, changing their mind, said that he was a god" (Acts 28:1-6).

Mr. Smith has well explained that there is no difficulty in understanding how the crew and the officers failed to make out the locality, even if ever so familiar in a general way as an Alexandrian ship with the great harbor of the island. They had drifted there in the dark, and there is no such definite landmark on the adjacent coast as to make identification easy; and, whatever peculiarity may be there, they only discovered when they got close in before the ship ran aground. But the barbarians or men of a foreign tongue1 behaved with unusual philanthropy, which puts to shame what has too often been experienced on British shores and other coasts alas! since Christianity. They lit not a "fire" merely, but one so large that the term employed is one usually applied to a funeral pyre (πυρά); as indeed would be needed to meet the urgent need of such a dripping crowd, with rain falling heavily, and severe cold.

This gave occasion to the incident related so graphically in verses 3-6. The apostle, with his usual earnestness and lowly love, gathers a fagot of sticks near the spot and laid it on the fire-heap, when a viper, no doubt before this dormant in the neglected wood, was roused as well as irritated by the heat and seized on the hand of Paul. It was ordered of God to verify the promise of the Lord Jesus (Mark 16:18), and as a sign to the kind heathen, and so much the more as they quite mistook its import at first, by leaving out God as unbelief habitually does. For when they saw the noxious creature hanging from his hand, they were assured he must be a murderer, escaped from the sea, only to meet a just retribution. But when he shook off the serpent into the fire without suffering anything out of the way, and they looked long in vain for either virulent inflammation or sudden falling dead, all was changed, and they called him a god. Such is the worth of human opinion outside its own sphere. Little could they conceive that he was a man of God, a prisoner in heathen hands because of the deadly hatred of God's people, the Jews; and this really because of the good news of Christ he preached to the Gentiles. But moral enigmas in this world are more surprising than the greatest of intellectual difficulties. Of one thing we may be sure, that the natural man is here invariably astray.

Nor was this all. The signs of Christianity are characteristically beneficent, samples of that power which in the age to come will banish the evil one and chase away the dire effects of sin, when mankind as a whole and pre-eminently Israel shall sing, "Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits, Who forgiveth all thine iniquities, Who healeth all thy diseases" (Psa. 103:2-3). That day has not yet dawned on Israel and the nations; but meanwhile for the inauguration of the gospel and in honor of Him Who was crucified by men but now exalted of God in heaven, there was, wherever it seemed fitting, a display of the powers of the coming age, not only over a vanquished enemy, but in pity for his poor victim, suffering man. Thus another of the signs to follow those that believed was soon after added: "they shall lay hands on sick persons, and they shall be well" (Mark 16:18).

"Now in the country surrounding that place were lands belonging to the chief2 of the island, by name Publius, who received and entertained us three days courteously. And so it was that the father of Publius lay ill of a fever3 and dysentery; unto whom Paul came in and laid his hands on him with prayer, and healed him. This then being done, others also that had sicknesses in the island came and were cured; who also honored us with many honors, and on sailing put on board [or, laded us with] things for our need" (Acts 28:7-10). Here then we have the gracious healing power attached to the Lord's name, but no pretentiousness on the apostle's part. He prayed and laid his hands on the sick man. The healing of one so prominent arrested attention. Many others in the island came with their sicknesses and were cured; for grace is no respecter of persons. Nor did Paul or Luke decline their attentions and kind offerings, though assuredly they sought nothing at their hands. Indeed it is of all consequence that the Christian, while valuing as our Father does even a cup of cold water given in the name of a disciple, should render a simple and true testimony that the gospel, the grace and truth of Christ, has everything to give; it is never to gain what self seeks in this world. God is a Giver Himself, the Giver of the best and indeed of all good, and loves that His own keep up the family character in this respect as in all others (2 Cor. 9:7). On the other hand, it is very far from the ways of Christ to cherish a narrow, hard, and unappreciative heart where kindness is meant, especially because of His word and work. It is only the Holy Spirit keeping Christ before the eye of faith that can enable us to discern the path in the midst of difficulties and dangers on all sides.

"And after three months we sailed in a ship of Alexandria after having wintered in the island, with Dioscuri4 for a sign. And landing at Syracuse we tarried three days; and thence having gone round we arrived at Rhegium, and after one day when! a south wind sprung up we came on the second-day unto Puteoli, where we found brethren and were besought to tarry with them seven days; and so we came unto Rome. And thence the brethren having heard about us came out to meet us as far as Appii Forum and Tres Tabernae; whom when Paul saw,

he thanked God and took courage" (Acts 28:11-15).

We have seen how the Lord attracted hearts by His gracious power to that truth which is for heaven and eternity, but received only here by faith and here productive of good and holy and godly fruits to His praise, the comfort of love among His own, and no small testimony to His name among those that are not His, if peradventure they might be won and called out of darkness into His marvelous light.

In the early spring they took ship again, this time also of Alexandria that had escaped the storm, which had wrecked their former ship because the master and crew had slighted the warning of the apostle. We do not hear of preaching, though we may be sure that the grace of Christ and the love of souls did not slumber in the hearts of His servants. But we see the place given to them and to Paul in particular by their past experience rising more and more as God saw fit to use each occasion where man's wisdom or power was unavailing.

Syracuse, a famous city of Sicily, was soon reached but after a stay of three days they compassed the coast and came to Rhegium and the next day to Puteoli. The former was in the south west extremity of Italy, a port of Bruttium on the sea. The latter, in the Bay of Naples, was celebrated for its thirty-three mineral wells which indeed gave it its name, as well as for its earth valued for its uses even to this day. Here brethren were found who entreated that the apostle and the rest should remain with them seven days, the old term of a visit so natural among Christians who valued above all the joy of fellowship on the Lord's day and at His supper, along with the manifold opportunities of edification, prayer and the word, meanwhile. "Then we went unto Rome." What a contrast with the great ones of the earth, victor or vanquished, who had so often taken the same road! "His be the Victor's name" was their life-song and brightest triumph — His Who "Trod all His foes beneath His feet, By being trodden down." His servants tread in His footsteps, though it was His alone to suffer for sins.

But ere they reached the metropolis of the world, a fresh witness of love greeted the apostle and his company, how refreshing to his spirit! From Rome, when the brethren heard of their arrival in Italy, "they came out to meet us as far as Appii Forum and Tres Tabernae." The former was less than forty miles; the latter more than thirty miles from the great city. Neither place enjoyed a good repute even in heathen eyes. A classic poet has left a lively record of his passing through the more distant of the two with its low yet extortionate taverns and squabbling bargemen. How different the meeting of the apostle of the Gentiles with those saints of Rome to whom he wrote not long before he was taken prisoner! He was nearing brethren he had longed to see that he might impart some spiritual gift for their establishment, or as he humbly and beautifully put the matter, that he with them might be comforted in them, each by the other's faith, both theirs and his. And now two companies had come forth to welcome him; for this is made plain by the mention of places distant by a few miles, but both no short way from Rome in days when traveling was far from as easy as it is now. None of these was troubled by the badness of the water, nor complained of mosquitoes or marsh-frogs or bantering slaves or lazy boatmen; no elation in the company, great friends or good cheer, still less by the wordy wars of buffoons while they dined. But debtor to Jew and Greek he that prayed for fruit to God's glory through Christ the Lord gave Him thanks and took courage when he saw those whom love in the truth had brought from Rome to welcome him. And what a joy for men delivered from the false glitter of the world and their selfish profit from its grinding tyrant, the many-headed Beast, to recognize by grace in Paul the prisoner the most honored servant of the Lord, the inspired writer to them of an Epistle yielding to none in depth and comprehensiveness of treating and enforcing the foundations of a saint's relationship with God, and the walk and service proper to it now!

It will be noticed that there is not a trace of Peter either now or subsequently, any more than in the Epistle more full of personal notices in its last chapter than any other in the New Testament. How unaccountable if the great apostle of the circumcision were then at Rome in any capacity whatever, still more if he there held the position assigned by some tradition-mongers! And if Peter did not found the church in Rome, certainly no other apostle had a hand in it. Indeed Paul near the beginning and before the end of his Epistle to the Romans gives us two statements irreconcilable with that ancient fable. In Romans 1:13, he evidently regards the head of Gentiledom as falling within his province, no less than heathen lands east of it, whilst the Epistle itself from the first chapter to the last is the fullest proof of a large number of saints already there, even both Jews and Gentiles. Then again in the chapter before the last he lays down what was the regular and constant aim of his ministry, his labors where Christ was not named and avoidance of building upon another man's foundation. For, as already noticed, there was a lack in Rome of what an apostle could best supply (Rom. 1:11), which it is inconceivable to suppose asserted if Peter or any other apostle had visited the city before he wrote or went. We may therefore dismiss absolutely what Eusebius states in the Armenian text of the Chronicon, followed as it is in the main by Jerome (Catal. 1) and by heaps of Romanists, that Peter visited Rome as early as A. D. 42! and stayed there twenty years! (Jerome and others, say twenty-five years); a statement as impossible to stand with what scripture tells of Peter as with what we learn there of Paul.

Yet do we see him needing to take courage, as he drew near the city he had so longed to visit in the Lord. He seems as deeply conscious of weakness and fear and trembling as when preaching at Corinth years before. His experience of the Lord's gracious care on the last perilous voyage and wreck, the proofs of His power accompanying him with their effects on all at Malta, did not hinder this. Indeed it is in weakness that the Lord proves the sufficiency of His grace, as he had taught the Corinthians after no less real experience of delivering power in Ephesus (2 Cor. 1:12). And here the Lord works not by such a vision as had sustained Paul when in danger of yielding to depression (Acts 23:11) but by the faith and affection of the brethren from Rome. For it would seem that the delay at Puteoli, due to brethren there who would have him stay a week in their midst, gave occasion to the tidings of his arrival in Italy reaching the saints in Rome and of their coming to meet him. And no difficulty, it is clear, was interposed by the authorities who held him a prisoner: such was the moral respect inspired among the Roman officials, and not least in the centurion who had witnessed his ways and words all the journey from the east to the west.

But how sweet and wondrous the dealings of grace to know from indisputable authority that the saints he was going to help so mightily were used of the Lord for the cheer of the apostle himself on the road: the best comment on his own words written to them beforehand — his desire to have mutual comfort among them, each by the faith that was in the other, both theirs and his! How practical is the truth that the body of Christ is one and has many members set each one in the body even as it pleased God! And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, but one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee; or again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be more feeble are necessary; and those parts of the body which we think to be less honorable, upon these we bestow more abundant honor; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness, whereas our comely parts have no need. But God tempered the body together, giving more abundant honor to that part which lacked; that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Such is the church called to be on

earth the answer to Christ in heaven. Oh! how soon the declension, how far the departure, and how universal the ruin. Do we feel it, judge ourselves, and seek His will?

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 27:27-44

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

“But when the fourteenth night was come, as we were driven to and fro in the Adriatic, about midnight the sailors surmised that they were drawing near to some country, and on sounding, found twenty fathoms, and after going a little farther and again sounding, found ten fathoms; and fearing that haply we should be cast off on rough places, they cast four anchors from the stern and wished that day were come. And as the sailors were seeking to flee out of the ship and had lowered the boat into the sea, under pretext as though they would lay out anchors from the bow, Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship, Ye cannot be saved. Then the soldiers cut off the ropes of the boat and let her fall off. And while daylight was about to come on, Paul exhorted them all to partake of food, saying, [The] fourteenth day to-day ye wait and continue without food, having taken nothing. Wherefore I exhort you to partake of food, for this is for your safety; for not a hair from the head of any of you shall perish. And when he said this, he took bread, and gave thanks to God before all, and having broken, he began to eat. And all were of good cheer, and themselves also took food. And we were in the ship, all the souls, two hundred [and] seventy six. And being satisfied with food, they lightened the ship by throwing out the wheat into the sea. And when it was day, they did not recognize the land, but perceived a certain bay with a beach, on which they took counsel, if they could, to drive the ship. And casting off, they left the anchors in the sea, at the same time loosening the lashings of the rudder and hoisting the foresail to the wind, they made for the beach. And falling into a place where two seas met, they ran the vessel aground; and the bow stuck and remained immovable; but the stern began to break up by the violence [of the waves]. And the soldiers’ counsel was that they should kill the prisoners, lest they should swim out and escape; but the centurion, wishing to save Paul, hindered them from their purpose, and commanded those able to swim to cast themselves off first and go to land; and the rest, some on planks and some on things from the ship. And it came to pass that all got safe to land” (Acts 27:27-44).

A fortnight’s drifting under such a storm brought the end near, which is set as clearly before us as their previous course and efforts. The sounding of the lead indicated the approach of land, and no small danger imminent, which the night made more felt. There is no real difficulty in the Adriatic (vs. 27); because it was often used in a much wider application than to the sea between Greece and Italy, as has been shown in Ptolemy and in Pausanias. Modern usage confines the Adriatic to the gulf only. There is no ground, therefore, on this score to conceive of another Melita (that is, Meleda) instead of Malta, as generally understood. The breakers (which are characteristic of the point of Koura, near St. Paul’s Bay, as Mr. Smith has shown from Smyth’s view of the headland) gave occasion, probably, to the surmise of the sailors, confirmed as it was by their repeated soundings (vs. 28). Anchoring from the stern (vs. 29) was the safer course under such circumstances; and ancient ships had many anchors. It is shown from the sailing directions that the ground is exceptionally good there; so that there is no danger as long as the cables hold.

The unworthy design of the sailors was defeated by Paul. It was not exactly “casting out anchors,” which would not require the use of a boat. Under pretense of extending anchors from the prow, which was no unusual measure, they meant to desert the ship (vs. 30); but his word of warning to the centurion and the soldiers sufficed: “Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved” (vs. 31). With the promptitude of their class, they cut off the ropes and let the boat fall off (vs. 32). God had given His word to save all; but it must be in His way; and He Who promised the end insists on His own means. We have only to be subject and obey.

Nor was the apostle only thus vigilant; he seeks, and not in vain, to comfort all and animate them with courage and confidence in God on the eve of the utmost apparent peril. He besought all to partake of food after their long abstinence, assuring them absolutely of preservation (verses 33, 34); and set the example himself after thanking God before all (vs. 35). There is no ground for the observation of Olshausen that it was, for the Christians, the celebration of the Lord’s supper or of an agape. For though the terms are just such as were so employed, they are no less expressly applied to an ordinary meal in Luke 24:30, and elsewhere. Indeed there is no small superstition in the some too often attached to them. It is the object of the Eucharist winch gives it its character; and this was quite out of place here. But the most ordinary food should be sanctified by the word of God and prayer, and the apostle here acts on his own instructions tonTimothy. No wonder that all became cheerful and took food (vs. 36), after long dejection and disinclination, with death before their eyes! Their number (vs. 37) is carefully added as two hundred and seventy-six, and then the lightening of the ship (a fresh nautical expression) by casting out the corn (vs. 38). They had eaten their last meal before the wreck, which is minutely described in the closing verses.

Wonder has been expressed that none of the sailors knew the land (vs. 39); but we are told by those competent to judge, that, remote from the well-known harbor of Valetta, this spot possesses no marked feature by which it might be recognized.

The A. V. here (vs. 40) is far from accurate. They did not take up the anchors, but cast them away (lit. round), and abandoned them (not “themselves”) into the sea. The loosing of the bands of the rudders, attached to the stern on each quarter, was a necessary act; for when a ship was anchored by the stern, the rudders had to be lifted out of the water and secured by lashings, which again were loosed when the ship got under way. Further, it was not the “mainsail,” but the foresail which they raised to the wind. Possibly the French term misled here; but the weight of practical or circumstantial evidence, as in Smith’s Dissertation, seems decisive. In this sense ὑρτεμὼν occurs in no ancient Greek author. We see a foresail in an old painting of Pompeii. Luke alone designates it here. It is remarkable how the master and the pilot vanish from notice at all these times of danger, and for wise measures. The apostle really guides at the crisis; the sailors are only mentioned as meditating ineffectual treachery; the centurion takes action, with the soldiers on one occasion, on another preventing a cruel deed to secure themselves from risk as to the prisoners.

For now the supreme moment had arrived. The ship must be stranded, as it was impossible to save it any more than its lading. Making for the beach they fell into a place where two seas met, apparently through the island now called Salmonetta, in St. Paul’s Bay; and there they drove the ship aground (vs. 41). In few spots, save there, could the fact have been as here described, owing to a deep deposit of mud, where the

bow stuck and remained fast, whilst the stern began to break up, exposed as it was to the force of the waves.

The soldiers' counsel was to kill the prisoners (vs. 42). They were responsible under the severest penalties not to let them go, as even this book itself shows on more occasions than one. But the centurion, not so much out of pity for the rest as through regard for Paul, interfered to save him at all cost (vs. 43). "Wishing" is the force, not merely "willing." His order was for such as could swim to cast off and to get to land; as the rest did, some on boards, and some on parts of the ship now going to pieces. They all got safe ashore, as verse 44 tells us. The promise was made good, to God's glory, as a living God and faithful Creator.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 27:14-26

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

The result justified the apostle's advice notwithstanding a fair start. But seamen ought to have remembered how apt a mild southerly breeze, in those seas especially, is to shift to a violent northerly wind. So it was now.

"But not long after there beat down it a tempestuous wind that is called Euraquilo;1 and when the ship was caught and could not face the wind, we gave up and were driven. And running under the lee of a certain small island called Clauda,2 we were able with difficulty to secure the boat: and when they hoisted it, they used helps, frapping the ship and fearing less they should be cast upon the Syrtis, they lowered the gear and so were driven. But as we were exceedingly pressed by the storm, the next day they began a clearance overboard; and the third [day] they3 cast out with their own hands the gear {or furniture] of the ship. And when neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small storm lay on, at last every hope that wished us saved was taken away. And when they had been long without food, then Paul stood forth in their midst and said, Sirs, ye should have hearkened to me, and not have put to sea from Crete and have gained this injury and loss. And now I exhort you to be of good courage, for there shall be no loss of life among you, only of the ship. For an angel of the God Whose I am and whom I serve stood by me this night saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must stand before Caesar; and, behold, God hath granted thee all that sail with thee. Wherefore, sirs, be of good courage; for I believe God that it shall be as it hath been spoken to me. But we must be cast upon a certain island" (Acts 27:14-26).

The hurricane that caught the ship beat down from Crete, which appears to be the true force of κατ αὐτῆς not "arose against it," that is, the ship as in the A.V. This is confirmed by Luke 8:23, though ἔβαλε κατὰ is a far more forcible expression than κατέβη...eis as indeed the case here demanded. Compare also, as Mr. Smith suggested, κατὰ τοῦ κρημνοῦ in Luke 8:33. Other ways of taking the words are unnatural in the extreme. Tyndale, after Luther probably, refers "it" to "their purpose" in verse 13. The version of Geneva (1557) should be noticed: "But anone after, there arose agaynst Candie, a stormye wynd out of the north-east." Now this was not the fact. The wind blew down from Crete, not against Crete, which it could not do. Besides the accusative not the genetive would have been employed in that case. The A. V. with most understood the ship, which however is in the context always πλοῖον, and so ungrammatical. Only in verse 41 is ναῦς employed. The beating of the tornado down the highlands of Crete seems a far more graphic account than its striking against the ship, which was a matter of course in that sea when exposed to a rushing S. N. E. wind. And here it may be remarked that Euroclydon is no known appellation, nor is there any satisfactory source of the word. The more ancient εὐρακύλων is to be preferred, testified by the best MSS. and Vv. J. Bryant's objections to the compound are not well grounded. Earo-Auster is a similar hybrid. A north-easterly wind fully accounts for the course of the ship. "Bear up into" is more literally to "face," a term often applied to the collisions of warfare and of common life. Some have attributed it to the practice of painting an "eye" on each side of the prow, so common of old and not unknown still in the Levant.

The small island to the leeward of which they drove before the wind is now called Gozzo. Chlavda they say on the spot, which is the Romaic pronunciation of Clauda; so that the identification is certain. It was under this lee that they got the boat on board, though with difficulty (vs. 16). When ἄρανυες was used absolutely as in verse 13 (cf. Thuc. 2. 15), it meant weighing anchor; here in verse 17 it has its ordinary force of lifting or taking up. The "helps" in question were means to counteract the violence of the gale, rather than the aid of the passengers as some have thought. "Frapping" is the technical English expressed by "under girding." It is done by passing a large cable four or five times round the ship's hull. It was common of old, but has been practiced in recent times and on British ships, mercantile and naval. The precariousness of mere scholarship in explaining such a thing may be seen in the learned A. Bockh's notion that the cable was applied horizontally. Indeed on his authority Dr. L. Schmitz so gave it in the art. Ships in Dr. W. Smith's Diet. of Greek and Roman Antiquities.

What is rendered in the A. V. "the quicksands" ought really to be "the Syrtis." Two Syrtes are spoken of. This was the greater or eastern, now the Gulf of Sidra, which Admiral Smyth was the first to survey adequately, as shown in his "Memoirs on the Mediterranean ": an object of great and natural dread to ancient seamen. In this same verse occurs one of the most serious of the many mistakes in the older versions, even Meyer and other moderns perpetuating them. Had they "struck sail," the ship must inevitably have been driven directly into the Syrtis. "It is not easy (says Mr. Smith) to imagine a more erroneous translation than that of our A. V. 'Fearing lest they should fall into the quicksands, they strake sail, and so were driven.' It is in fact equivalent to saying that, fearing a certain danger, they deprived themselves of the only possible means of avoiding it." Some sail, as the authorities lay down and as common sense feels, is absolutely requisite to keep the ship steady, and hinder her from pitching about and rolling so deeply as to strain and work herself to pieces. Hence the measures necessary were that storm-sails should be set and the ship go on the starboard tack. "Lowering the gear" is the right translation. Kypke, who was a sensible man and sound scholar, is surprisingly loose in his annotations here. He will have it to be "letting down the anchor"! as βλ. κατὰ in verse 12, and so forth, he illustrates βλ πρός. It is singular that Kuhnol, De Wette, and Meyer followed in this wake, so inconsistent with the context.

In verse 18 we see them reduced to the very frequently adopted resource of getting rid of cargo, ἐκβ. ποτ. being the proper terms employed, as we may see in the Onom. of Julius Pollux. In verse 19 they go farther, and "with their own hands" the seamen threw away — what they would not have done save in imminent danger — the ship's furniture, spare gear, and so forth. The inability to see sun or stars added to their danger, and the violence of the weather so prolonged.

But now leaving the details of the voyage, interesting though they are in the decisive proof they afford at every turn of the absolute reliableness of the divine word, and its incomparable superiority to all the versions and the commentaries of the learned and pious, let us turn to the devoted servant of the Lord, who stands forth in the hour of need and danger and darkness. If he gently recalls their former slight of his counsel, it is neither to pain them nor to exalt himself. Dwelling in love, he dwelt in God and God in him, as every Christian should; and thus he is enabled to use wisely what grace gave. He confesses openly the secret of favor from on high, a favor that extended to them; for the true God despises not any, while He loves perfectly those Whom He adopts as sons to Himself by Jesus our Lord. Yet He does not overlook His offspring, as the same apostle once preached to the Athenians, idolatrous though they were. It is of no small moment that we too should remember this; for evangelical men are apt to think only of the relations of grace. These are of all importance, and only too feebly held by the saints in general. We can scarcely exaggerate what sovereign grace has given us in Christ. But we do not well to slight what scripture reveals of the place man has, as man, and sinner though he be, in the divine mind and compassion. It is the more to be remembered in these days when infidel dreams of development or evolution entice and defile real believers. Truth ignored or neglected by the faithful is the constant resource of Satan for those who know not God and His Son.

Man has a relationship to God which be alone of earthly beings possesses. Other creatures here below began to live when they were organized. Not so man, till Jehovah Elohim breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, the ground of his immortal soul and of his immediate responsibility to God. Therefore, when for him death came in through sin, he alone is to rise again and to give account to God.

Undoubtedly another than Adam was in the counsels of God, the Second Man and Last Adam, infinitely higher than man, even the Son of God no less than the Father, in due time to become the new Head of divine blessing to God’s glory, far, far more than retrieving in obedience unto death what the old head had lost through disobedience; so that mercy might rejoice over judgment, and grace to the sinner be a display of God’s righteousness in virtue of the blood of Jesus.

There are three considerations of no little moment to hold intact and without con fusion. First, the moral nature of God abides in its invisible purity and honor. He loves good and hates evil. His will alone is entitled to guide and govern. The creature is responsible to obey Him. Secondly, the race being alien and sinful (for Adam innocent had no child), grace in Christ alone produces what suits God’s nature according to His word and by His Spirit; as grace alone provided an adequate and everlasting redemption in Christ’s blood and gave that life in Him which is ever holy, dependent, obedient, as He — Himself was in all perfection. But, thirdly, God does not for all this give up His place as “a faithful Creator.” He is the Savior (that is, Preserver) of all men, especially of those that believe. Not a sparrow falls on the ground without our Father, yea, the very hairs of our head are all numbered. Surely there is no reason to fear those that kill the body but are unable to kill the soul. He only is to be feared who is able to kill both body and soul in hell. Not only are others not to be feared, but as the children and servants of God, we are in a position and ought to have the heart to make supplications, prayers, intercessions, thanksgivings for all men; for kings and all that are in high places, no less than for the wretched, and suffering, and degraded, whom their fellows avoid and despise. Grace not only elevates above all the present glory of the world by uniting us to Christ at God’s right hand, but sheds abroad in our hearts the love of God through the Holy Spirit given to us.

All these elements we may see here full and active and in harmony. Christ before the heart delivers from mere and barren theory as well as one sidedness. Not only is there the union of humbleness and dignity, but faith and love with the unflinching confession of Him whose he was and whom he served. There is no seeking to please or win men as his aim. He abides the Lord’s bondman. He testifies a direct revelation sent at that very time. He declares the witness it bore to God’s compassion toward them all, united to His special favor to His servant; and all this in the midst of this busy, blind, selfish, ungodly world.

Two things are to be noticed in that divine message to the apostle, while a prisoner in the hands of the Gentiles through the malice of the Jews. First, he can speak of all his fellow-voyagers given him by God, not of course for eternal life, but for present security. Secondly, he predicts that they must be on a certain island, without pretending to know more. God had not disclosed its name; and he faithfully follows. Revelation was given to exalt not man but God.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 27:1-13

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Thereon follows the voyage of the apostle to Rome, a narrative full of interest in every way. What believer can fail to find refreshment and cheer, as he ponders its details and sees the prisoner as perfectly master of the situation on board ship in a storm and wreck, as before in the presence of judges and a king who attested his guiltlessness? But what reader of any version even if believing could anticipate, what every scholar ought to know, that there is more of real information about an ancient merchant ship, quite simply and incidentally conveyed, than is found perhaps in all the extant remains of Greek and Roman authors? So the late Dean Howson owns in Smith’s Bible Dictionary, as indeed the soundness of the judgment is notorious.

“And when it was determined that we should sail away for Italy, they delivered Paul and certain other prisoners to a centurion named Julius of an Augustan cohort. And embarking in a ship of Adramyttium about1 to sail to 2the places along Asia, we put to sea, Aristarchus of Macedonia a Thessalonian being with us. And the next day we arrived at Sidon, and Julius treated Paul kindly and permitted [him] to go unto the (or, his3) friends and receive attention. And thence putting to sea we sailed under the lee of Cyprus because the winds were contrary. And having sailed across the sea that is along Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came unto Myra [a city] of Lycia. And there the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing for Italy, and put us on board. And sailing slowly many days and coming with difficulty abreast of Cnidus, as the wind did not farther suffer us, we sailed under the lee of Crete abreast of Salmone, and coasting it with difficulty, we came unto a certain place called Fair Havens, near to which was [the] city of Lasea. And much time being spent and the voyage being already dangerous because the Fast was already past, Paul admonished them saying, Sirs, I perceive that the voyage will be with injury and much loss, not only of the cargo and the ship but also of our lives. But the centurion believed the master and the ship-owner rather than the things said by Paul. And the harbor being ill-suited to winter in, the most gave counsel to put to sea thence, if by any means they might arrive at Phoenix to winter in,

a harbor of Crete, looking north-east and south-east. And when a south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, they weighed anchor and coasted close by Crete" (Acts 27:1-13).

We see at once that Luke is with the apostle on his voyage, and Aristarchus also. "One" in this case is quite uncalled for, as in all the Protestant English Versions from Tyndale. The fact is that he has been before us in this book from time to time as the companion of the apostle. See Acts 19:29; 20:4; as he is afterward named in Colossians 4:10, Philemon 1:24. Neither appears to have been at this time a prisoner. Both became partakers with the one that was so used. Love led these to join him in the face of shame and danger. They did not therefore cast away their boldness which has great recompense of reward. Of Julius the centurion nothing more is certainly known than what is here recorded: but we are enabled to see at least his amiability, and the moral respect inspired by the apostle from first to last, hindered one may say perhaps, at one point which must in the sequel have increased it more and more as we shall observe. It would seem that there was no special Augustan cohort; nor does the text say more than that he commanded a cohort which bore that designation. It is known that the emperor Nero had a body-guard organized at this very date, consisting of veterans specially called out for service. Julius may have been an officer among them. They were called Augustani (Tac. 14. 15). Why he was in Palestine does not appear: if there, we can readily understand the prisoners and soldiers under his charge on his return to Rome.

It seems amazing that there should be the least doubt about "Asia" in verse 2. Neither the continent, nor even Asia Minor is meant, but the Roman province, which was but the western seaboard of the latter according to the usage of the book.

"The (or his) friends" were the believers in Sidon, a mode of speech which we find in the Third Epistle of John. Evil times made them manifest: false brethren turned aside, ashamed of the cross. What the "attention" was that is meant is conjectural, and may be expressly left so to meet any case in future.

The lee of Cyprus was in this instance to the north of the island, the winds being contrary. Hence they coasted along the south of Cilicia and Pamphylia. Otherwise the direct course must have been south of Cyprus. But it would seem that the ship had to touch at places (vs. 2) which called them north. Myra lay due north of Alexandria; so that the ship from this port met the one of Adramyttium4 in that Mysian harbor. Both ships were in their right course according to the winds then blowing. Where the first was bound we are not told. But the centurion avails himself of that from Alexandria, which had a cargo for Italy, and transferred all his company accordingly (Acts 27:6).

Greater difficulties speedily follow; but disciples need not be agitated if the Lord seem not to heed. "Scarce" as in the A. V. (vs. 7) does not give the thought intended, but "with difficulty." The wind being about N.W., as Mr. Smith shows in his interesting "Voyage and Shipwreck of St. Paul," made it slow and hard work to bring up the ship from Myra and Cnidus, even though with the advantage of a weather shore and a westerly current. The wind did not allow them to go on (not to put in); so that their course lay under the lee of Crete, and this time its south side, after sailing abreast of its eastern point, Salmone (called Sammonium by Pliny the elder, as by Strabo Σαμώνιον). And it may be mentioned that Fair Havens to this day bears the same name corrupted—Kalolimounias, five miles W. of Cape Leonda, in the immediate neighborhood of which, inland, lie the ruins of Lasma, as distinctly identified by our countrymen lately.

The insurmountable delay from adverse winds and other circumstances brought them to a season of no small peril in that sea (vs. 9); and the apostle gave counsel on which events soon after, but too late, impressed the seal of indisputable value. Nevertheless he seems not to claim divinely given foresight for his warning: the terms employed in verse 10 are rather his own judgment simply, in apparent contradistinction from the prophetic intimation announced in Acts 27:21-26. "I perceive," introducing a general admonition of danger, differs widely from "I believe God" with a precise assurance of the loss of the ship but of no life among the passengers and crew, which last he was unable to guarantee when he first spoke out. But the shipmates and the shipowner were opposed to the warning words of the apostle; and we can easily understand why the centurion paid more heed to the opinion of men accustomed to the sea (vs. 11), themselves no doubt disposed to regard cheaply what a landsman might think or say. Then again, whatever its title promised, Fair Havens was beyond doubt inconvenient for wintering in, as the bay is open to almost one-half of the compass; and as all could see this, the majority advised to put to sea also from there, as from other places before (vs. 12): not that they meant to pursue the voyage to Italy in such weather and at such a time, but hoping to reach the unquestionably better port of Phoenix,5 now identified as Lutro, though well aware of their risk in attempting it.

It may interest some to know that competent men declare Fair Havens to be a better harbor than its exposed look conveys at first sight. Mr. Smith, who studied the whole question on the spot with minute care and professional skill, pronounced it to be "so well protected by islands and reefs, that though, not equal to Lutro, it must be a very fair winter harbor; and that considering the suddenness, the frequency, and the violence with which gales of northerly wind spring up, and the certainty that, if such a gale sprung up in the passage from Fair Havens to Lutro, the ship must be driven off to sea, the prudence of the advice given by the master and owner was extremely questionable" (Smith's Voyage,. 35c, p. 88, second edn.). Hence we may learn that there is such a thing as divine guidance in the ordinary things of life, short of inspiration no doubt, but superior to man's experience and wisdom. Are we so unbelieving as to deny its reality save in an apostle? Blind indeed must we be, if we do, to the facts of every day among God's children.

The value of a close adherence to the text is remarkably shown by the numerous mistranslations of this chapter, which had introduced confusion and insuperable difficulty for exposition. A striking instance occurs at the end of verse 12, where the A.V. represents this haven of Crete, Phoenix or Lutro, as lying "toward the south-west and north-west." What the clause says is that the harbor looks "down" (κατὰ) south-west and down north-west. But looking down a wind means along or with the direction in which it blows, and not to the quarter whence it came. The meaning therefore is that the port of Phoenix looks north-east, and south-east, the points precisely opposite to those which have been understood. Now this (says Mr. Smith) is exactly the position of Lutro, which "looks" or is open to the east; but, having an island in front which shelters it, it has two entrances, one looking to the north-east, which is κατὰ Λίβα, and the other to the south-east, κατὰ Χῶρον.6 Hackett who does not think it safe to give up the common interpretation objects to this view of Mr. S. that it involves two inconsistencies. First, it assigns opposite senses to the same term, viz., south-west as the name of a wind and north-east as the name of a quarter of the heavens. Secondly, it destroys the force of βλέποντα, which implies that the wind and the harbor confronted each other, and not that they were turned from each other. But the reasoning is faulty, because the fact is misunderstood. The harbor in question does look with the wind in each case, so that the force of "looking" is preserved intact; and again the winds in question are preserved in their exact force and not confounded with aught else.

Only looking down, south-west wind and down, north-west wind means in fact looking north-east and south-east. The A.V. confounds κατὰ with πρὸϛον εἰϛ. The direction toward the source of the wind is expressed by the latter; whereas the nautical phrase of down the wind means whither it blows. Hence Phoenix looked north-east and south-east. The look of the harbor signifies the direction to which — not from which — these winds blow. The harbor looked down the S.W. and down the N.W. winds, that is, in both directions; and hence to the N. E. and S.E. quarters, as the resulting force. The winds are only to mark the outlook definitely. Nautical phrases abound in the chapter. Josephus uses κατὰ λίβα just as it is here (Antt. Judges 15:9. 6). See Liddell & Scott on κατὰ B.I.I.

But appearances often deceive, as they did here. For when a south wind blew softly, they thought to gain their purpose, and weighing anchor ("lifting" is the technical phrase), they coasted close by Crete. Here the Vulgate misled Wiclif, Tyndale, and Cranmer to give the imaginary port of Assos (the true place was away in Mysia, compare Acts 20:13-14), instead of "close," rectified in the Geneva V. after Beza who refuted the proper name with ability, and proved the necessity of understanding the adverb.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 26:24-32

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The truth was fairly before the king. The prophets and Moses had told out what was now accomplished in the Christ that Paul preached. If their testimony was divine, He who had suffered and risen from the dead is their sure fulfillment, however much may remain. The question whether the Christ should suffer, and whether He first by rising front death should proclaim light both to the people and to the Gentiles, can admit of no answer but the most distinct affirmation. The Messiah to suffer, die, rise, and so shed light on man universally is the surest force of the law and the prophets. This alone gives meaning to sacrifices, this explains the cleansing of the defiled. No doubt there is the kingdom to come, and the judgment of the world, as well as of the dead; but the basis even of all the rest lay in the dead and risen Messiah, the object of faith for salvation to every believer, Jew or Gentile. Here, however, the apostle does not go beyond present facts.

"And as he thus defended himself, Festus saith with a loud voice, Paul, thou art mad: much learning doth turn thee to madness. But Paul saith, I am not mad, most excellent Festus, but speak forth words of truth and soberness. For the king is cognizant of these things, unto whom also I speak with openness; for I am persuaded that none of these things is hidden from him, for this hath not been done in a corner. Believest thou, king Agrippa, the prophets? I know that thou believest. And Agrippa [said] unto Paul, With little [pains] thou art persuading to make me a Christian.1 And Paul [said], I would to God that both with little and with great [pains]2 not thou only but also all that hear me this day should become as I too am, except these bonds. And3 the king rose up, and the governor, and Bernice, and they that sat with them; and when they had retired, they spoke one to another, saying, This man doeth nothing worthy of death or bonds. And Agrippa said to Festus, This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar" (Acts 26:24-32).

Festus, ignorant of God and His word and bewildered to the highest degree by the assertion of Messiah's resurrection, forgot the gravity of the occasion and of his own office, and branded the apostle as a madman, though softening the term by imputing it to his much reading. Calm in the sense of God's presence and of the truth which alone gives true freedom, Paul shows the only moral elevation discernible in that splendid throng, and so with real courtesy rebuts the senseless charge with words bearing the stamp of the "truth" he testified and of the "sobriety" in which he laid all before others.

Love gives a single eye. With that keen discernment which characterized him, he turns from the benighted heathen who saw nothing beyond the present life and therefore saw it only as a question of power and pleasure and fame, an utter degradation for the undying soul, consistent only in shutting out the light of the true and even the warning of conscience not wholly ignorant of sin — from the heathen he turns to the Jewish king, who, immoral though he was, knew what altogether condemned himself, as well as the glorious visions of which Messiah is the center in Holy Writ. "For the king," said he, "is cognizant of these things, unto whom also I speak with openness; for I am persuaded that none of these things is hidden from him; for this hath not been done in a corner." It was notorious that no man living was more interested in or familiar with all that affected the Jews than the younger Herod Agrippa. But how little such acquaintance with facts avails, unless the Holy Spirit bring the word of God home to an exercised conscience! unless a soul bow to God in the overwhelming sense of its own sin and ruin, yet clinging to the hope of mercy in Him! Still to one that owned scripture as divine the apostle could speak as he could not with the same degree of freedom to another who denied and scorned it.

Therefore he turns in the most unexpected way with an appeal to the king's conscience. "King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest." Surprised out of his imperturbable self-complacency, and endeavoring to cover his confusion by a jest, the king replies, for it is no answer, "With little pains thou art persuading to make me a Christian." This appears to be the sense if we take into account the critical reading μεγάλῳ in what follows. Were the Received Text justified which gives πόλλῳ, "much," this rendering could hardly stand; for the more natural force would then be "in a little while," distinguished from "much time."

It is plain that Agrippa had no answer to what had been shown from scripture and the gospel facts. It is equally plain that the conclusion was irresistible, which he strove to parry. The truth is no question of reasoning but of faith in the testimony of God: only there is no root save in the conscience that owns sin and looks to God's grace in spite of it. And Christ and His work on the cross give the troubled soul confidence; because God sent His Son into the world for the twofold blessing, blessings equally needed by the sinner and flowing from God Himself, that we should live through Christ, and that He should die a propitiation for us. Faith in God's testimony of His love who therefore gave His Son receives these infinite blessings in Christ. But it is not mere mind that makes the discovery; and if it were, it could avail nothing. It is only to the babe, to the broken in heart, to the consciously ruined sinner, that the truth comes from God. For He is calling souls to the knowledge of Himself, not training theologians It is salvation made known in Christ, not religious science which the world builds up for itself out of it.

So the apostle takes up the king's word to escape further parley, and takes it up with a love and dignity suited to the Holy Spirit that dwelt in him. It is the simple but deep utterance of a heart supremely happy in the Savior, and in the assurance of grace in Him that could embrace not Agrippa only but all that composed his audience that day. What mercy to man! What goodness of God! What inexhaustible power and

fullness in the name of Jesus! Even in the most general form such an ardent wish of blessing had been much. But the more clearly we regard his words the wonder grows. “I would to God that both with little and with great pains not thou only but also all that hear me this day should become as I too am, except these bonds.” The largeness of heart suits admirably him who made known God’s righteousness unto all, and upon all those that believe. The readiness to take all pains is in keeping with the debtor both to Greeks and barbarians, both in wise and to foolish, who working night and day not to burden any, preached the gospel to all. But the perfect happiness of his soul flows over when he wishes to God for them that they might be as he too was. What! the man who had been beaten for dead, and in prison for years, known to be innocent by successive governors, yet chained to a soldier night and day to please a people whom these governors despised and hated. Yes, this is the man who wishes for them all, by little pains and by great as the case might be, that they might not be forgiven or saved only, good a wish as this is, but far, far more, that they might become even as he, filled with the conscious joy of being blessed with Christ and enjoying the present cloudless favor of God. Indeed nothing less is normal Christianity. Yet he adds, except these bonds: “this he could not, did not, wish for one of them. Truly it was a soul that kept itself in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

Was there one heart that responded, one conscience pierced? We know not, but only that forthwith the court retired, yet owned that the prisoner’s course deserved neither death nor bonds. Agrippa especially, and he was the most competent to speak, declared that he might have been set at liberty but for his appeal to Caesar. How little the king knew God’s purpose or ways! Paul, as he suffered with Christ, was called in due time to suffer for Him. In due time he was to have his wish, to become conformed to His death (Phil 3:9-11).

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 26:16-23

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The decisive words were uttered, “I am Jesus,” to one who could not doubt the utterer was the Lord; nor this only, but “I am Jesus Whom thou persecutest,” the germ of that mystery (and it is a great one) which the astonished hearer was to develop beyond all others, even of the apostles. Thereon follows what is of the deepest interest.

“But rise up and stand on thy feet; for to this end I appeared to thee, to appoint thee a servant and a witness both of what thou hast seen and of those things wherein I shall appear to thee, taking thee out from the people and from the Gentiles unto whom I send thee, to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness unto light and the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive remission of sins and inheritance among those that are sanctified by faith that is in Me. Whence, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but reported both to those in Damascus first, and in Jerusalem, and through all the country of Judaea and to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, doing works worthy of repentance On account of these things the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to slay me. Having therefore obtained help that is from God I stand unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said should come, whether Christ should suffer, whether He first by resurrection of [the] dead should announce light both to the people and to the Gentiles” (Acts 26:16-23).

Such a vision to such an end stamped on Paul the apostolic title in its highest character. It was from heaven in the power of resurrection life and ascension glory; and this not only by one determining act, but with the guarantee of all that was to be made known from Him personally in the future. We should not know from this account that he was blind for three days and that Ananias was sent directly by the Lord to heal as well as baptize him. Nor have we particulars of his testimony either in Damascus on in Jerusalem, any more than of his going away into Arabia. Each fact is set forth where it was called for; all was stated not only with truthfulness but according to holy and divine design, as is invariably the case in scripture. The Lord led either Luke or Paul according to His will to say what was fitting. Here the apostle gives summarily what was of moment for his audience, and for all that should read and weigh the words afterward.

It was not only to convert and save him that the Lord had spoken to Saul of Tarsus. He was to arise and stand on his feet; for the Lord had appeared to him to appoint him a servant (ὑπηρέτην) and a witness both of what he then saw and of those things in which He was to appear to him. A work lay before him of immense magnitude and unprecedented character. And the Lord’s revelations then and afterward were of all moment. He was to be a typical servant too, though his own calling might be unique; for no such appearing of the Lord was to be the portion of those who should follow in the faith and footsteps of Paul.

Acts 26:17 is not well given by either the Revisers or the A.V. Though the word may bear “delivering,” as it often signified, its simpler meaning of “taking out” is far more suitable to the context and the truth intended and verified in the apostle’s career. It is admitted on all hands that the Lord’s taking Saul out from the people (or the Jews) is suitable; but De Wette and Meyer allege that it does not chime in with the Gentiles. This seems quite a mistake. Separation from both is most appropriate to characterize his position; and there is no need to extend “unto whom I send thee” beyond the latter. He was to be apostle of Gentiles or uncircumcision, and as such magnifies his function in Romans 11. The “I” is emphatic, and the adverb “now” only added by inferior witnesses. The difficulty these scholars feel is owing to their ignorance of Christian position, and even of Christianity according to scripture. For the Jew believing in Christ is not leveled down to a Gentile, nor yet is the believing Gentile raised up to that of the Jew; but the Holy Spirit unites both to Christ in heavenly glory, while at the same the gospel of grace goes forth indiscriminately, but to the Gentile practically, as the once favored nation is given up to temporary blindness in God’s just judgment. Never was there a more striking representative of both than the apostle, minister of the church, and minister of the gospel (Col. 1). Stier has only noticed half the beauty of the contrast; for if Peter declares himself “a witness of the sufferings of Christ and a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed,” Paul was a witness of the glory of Christ and a partaker of His sufferings; and it is him we are called to imitate, though we only by faith see Him glorified. To share His sufferings is the Christian’s and the believer’s moral glory.

Then follows in verse 18 a vivid description of his works among the Gentiles: “to open their eyes, that they may tarn from darkness unto light and the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive remission of sins and inheritance among those that are sanctified by faith that is in Me.” Doubtless Jews needed these operations of grace no less really than the nations; but in the latter case the necessity was far more conspicuous, besotted as they were not only in shameless immorality but by gross superstitions which darkened and demoralized them more than if they had had no religion at all. If, as the Jews say, it was reserved for the Messiah to open the eyes of the blind literally, here we see

how He sent His apostle to do the work, not physically alone but morally. And this was manifested by Gentiles, when they heard the call of the Lord, turning from darkness into light, and (defining yet more their sources) the power of Satan unto God, followed by the great characteristic privileges of the gospel, the reception of remission of sins and allotment among the sanctified by faith in Christ. For there was now a new, deeper, fuller sanctification, not fleshly or by ordinance merely as Israel's was, but living and genuine by believing on Christ, the permanent result of an accomplished separation to God from the Christian's starting-point.

The effect of such an announcement of sovereign grace, not only for Paul himself but in his mission, was immediate and immense. "Whence, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but reported both to those in Damascus first and in Jerusalem and through all the country of Judea and to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, doing works worthy of repentance" (Acts 26:20-21). Undoubtedly it had been not only rebellion, but madness and destruction to have slighted such a vision and call; but this voucher the apostle gave which nothing but self-willed folly could evade or escape, a life of unequaled sufferings as well! as labors in bearing witness of its truth — truth so all-important to every child of man. Hence his burning zeal in reporting to all near or far off that they should repent and turn to God, doing works worthy of repentance. For as the ground of the gospel consists of a person revealed and facts accomplished (not merely a promise as of old), no call to believe can be agreeable to man's heart, and grace only can effect aught vital or acceptable, the conscience being bad and the will estranged from God, yea enmity against Him. There are doctrines infinitely deeper than elsewhere, and beyond comparison nearer to man's heart, to say nothing of their essential furtherance of God's glory. But all the doctrines flow from Christ and His work; and a renewed child can rest confidingly in both and be drawn out in wonder, love, and praise, as well as in a life of devotedness and self-sacrifice. This, however, never can be apart from repentance and turning to God. As surely as there is the faith of God's elect there is a divinely wrought repentance, which through the confidence which Christ inspires wins the soul to God in self-abhorrence and earnest pursuit of His will, doing works worthy of repentance.

It would be incredible if it were not the most certain fact that a faith and life so formed are abominable in Jewish eyes. "On account of these things the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to slay me" (vs. 21). But none of these things swerved or even moved the blessed apostle, save to sorrow over them. "Having therefore obtained help that is from God, I stand unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying nothing but what Moses and the prophets said should come, whether Christ should suffer, whether he first by resurrection of [the] dead should announce light both to the people and to the Gentiles" (Acts 26:22-23).

It is not that the Jews erred in looking for a glorious kingdom of Messiah, of which Israel should be the center on earth, but that the law and the prophets were clear that the Messiah should suffer and die as a sacrifice, as well as in rejection by man and even Israel, and thus risen from the dead bring in blessing of grace and mercy to faith, before the glory be revealed publicly. For it needs no reasoning to prove that the suffering and death cannot be after the glory; "but first must He suffer many things, and be rejected of this generation." "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory?" So Christ, beginning from Moses and all the prophets, interpreted in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 26:9-15

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The apostle returns from argument to the account of his own life, from which he had turned aside for a moment.

"I therefore thought with myself that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus the Nazarene; which things I also did in Jerusalem; and I both shut up many of the saints in prisons, having received the authority from the chief priests, and I railed against [them] when they were put to death; and throughout all the synagogues, often punishing I was compelling them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them I was pursuing them even as far as to the outside cities" (Acts 26: 9-11).

We have repeated allusions in the Epistles to his life before conversion. Thus to the Galatians he wrote, "For ye have heard of my manner of life at one time in Judaism that beyond bounds I was persecuting the church and ravaging it, and was advancing in Judaism beyond many of mine own age in my race, being more exceedingly a zealot of my ancestral traditions (Acts 26:13-14). To the Philippians his language is, "As to law a Pharisee, as to zeal persecuting the church, as to righteousness that is in law found blameless" (Phil. 3:5-6). Lastly to Timothy (1 Tim. 1:13) he says, "Though formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and an insulter; but I obtained mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief."

Here he lets us see how unsafe a guide conscience is for the natural man, no matter what may be his religious helps. He considered it his duty to oppose the name of Jesus and zealously persecute all who called on Him. Nor does God accept such a plea. He had sent His Son with adequate proof of His Messiahship for all who would compare His written word with the facts of Jesus the Nazarene: prophecy accomplished; miracles wrought not only by Himself but by His servants, and of a character quite peculiar, yet harmonizing with a teaching altogether unexampled; and a moral power of holy life ending in a death of deepest shame on the cross, which He ever held out as not man's sin only, but God's grace as the ransom for sinners, to the reality of which all sacrifices pointed from Abel downward. Paul therefore had acted ignorantly in unbelief, as do others who refuse all revelation or misuse one part to reject another still faller and more glorious.

The greater the religious zeal in such a state of unbelief, the farther it carries the devotee from the present testimony of God. Hence it was that Paul gave himself up with all his soul to opposing the faith of Jesus as the Christ in Jerusalem, which he would feel outraged by His claims. Here before Agrippa he does not hesitate to confess to his own shame that he shut up "many of the saints" in prisons. To the Jews he had employed the more vague expression "this way" (Acts 22:4); as Luke in the history spoke of "the disciples of the Lord" (Luke 9:1). How little he so thought when he received the requisite authority from the chief priests! Nor was it only imprisoning. When it was a question of putting them to death, had he not given an adverse vote? Notably it was so in Stephen's case, as this book records. Had he not visited all the synagogues, often punishing souls and forcing out blasphemy if possible? And had he not in his excessive madness pursued them even into cities outside the land?

But a mighty change was at hand. Not a hint of relenting appears here or elsewhere, not one emotion of pity for the victims, not a trace of self-judgment or hesitation in his own course. Who verified so conspicuously the Lord's own words? "They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the hour cometh, that whosoever killeth you shall think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do, because they have not known the Father nor Me" (John 16:2, 3). This is the new revelation of the Messiah come and rejected; and on that rejection bringing to light the Father and the Son, wholly unknown to those who in their zeal for the law broke out into hatred and persecution of what was beyond them and condemned their unbelief.

"On which [business] when proceeding unto Damascus with authority and commission of the chief-priests, at mid-day on the road I saw, O king, a light above the brightness of the sun shining round me and those that were proceeding with me. And when we all fell to the earth, I heard a voice saying unto me in the Hebrew language, Saul, Saul, why persecutest then Me? [It is] hard for thee to kick against goads. And I said, Who art Thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus Whom thou persecutest" (Acts 26:12-15).

Never was sovereign grace so signally demonstrated. I do not speak of the wonder. But now evidently the Lord was giving a typical case, in the letter it would seem for the Jews by and by, in spirit for the Christian now. For what could more completely prove that Christ is all to him that believes? To a man up to that moment blinded by his legal zeal against the grace of God in Christ, that very Christ reveals Himself, sweeping into nothingness all that a Jew boasted of and rested in, and identifying himself in the glory of God with the One Who died, between two crucified robbers, the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world.

On earth Messiah is to be set God's King on His holy hill of Zion. This is the decree. Judgment will surely silence all that oppose, be they kings or nations, rulers or peoples. Their rage is as vain as all their imaginations to the contrary. Execution of judgment will make all plain to every eye. Then will Messiah ask and receive the nations for His inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for His possession. Then will He break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. It will be no longer as now grace preached, but the kingdom established by divine power seen and felt beyond question; and the kings of the earth will be wise, and the judges instructed, serving Jehovah with fear and rejoicing with trembling.

Now Christ sits in heaven on the Father's throne, and has a new object of love and a new testimony carried on here below by the Holy Spirit suited to His glory on high and that object, even the church which is His body. This mystery is great, as it must be, for we speak about Christ and about the church; concurrently with which goes forth the gospel of God's grace to every creature under heaven, all distinctions of Jew and Gentile vanishing meanwhile.

Paul was called to be a minister, both of the church and of the gospel, as he says himself in Colossians 1:23-25. And the special manner of his conversion was exactly suited to it in the wisdom and goodness of God. For it was not only unmistakable grace in its deepest character, but from heavenly glory entirely above the distinctions so important on earth. And Paul alone was there personally favored, though the truth of it was to act most powerfully on souls all over the earth. This may help to show the immense importance of what the apostle recounted that day, in substance recorded now for the third time in the brief book of the Acts.

Impossible to doubt that a divine person speaks out from the brightness beyond that of the sun at mid-day. If all were prostrate and heard but a sound, Paul could not mistake the voice of His lips, saying to him (and in the Hebrew language), "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me" How overwhelming, yet how blessed, to hear in answer to his question of astonishment, "I am Jesus Whom thou persecutest!" Thus even from the starting-point he heard the truth that the saints are one with Him. To persecute them is to persecute Jesus.

Doubtless the blessed apostle had revelations of the Lord, and from Him, not a few afterward; and the bearings of the mystery, as well as its consequences were made known to him by the Spirit. It is, however, full of interest to learn that the germ of all was planted in him, as we see here, from the moment that grace wrought in his soul and brought him into God's marvelous light. He obeyed the truth immediately. It is hard to kick against goads, on the one hand; and on the other the Lord had drawn his heart into the love of the truth, whatever it might cost. He was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, which thenceforth gave its impress to his life, his faith and his testimony. "And straightway in the synagogues he proclaimed Jesus, that He is the Son of God." He was Messiah, but far more; eternally the Son; now exalted and given to be Head to the church in the heavenly places; universal Lord to the glory of God the Father, in virtue of Whose name all things shall bow; as indeed He is our great God and Savior Jesus Christ. Henceforth Saul could say, "For me to live is Christ."

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 26:1-8

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

Luke sets the scene vividly before us. The king, whose opinion the governor sought, and who himself was desirous of hearing, gives courteous leave, and the prisoner enters on his defense with outstretched hand. Orators no doubt used the same action to engage the ear of their countrymen; rhetoricians in their schools; but his heart went out thus in desire over souls about to hear that message from God which, in whatever manner put, is the turning-point of salvation or perdition to all that hear it. No doubt the soul is beyond all price for every one in view of such everlasting issues. But it was no light thing even for the apostle to confront, without his seeking it but at their own desire, the great ones of the earth with all that swelled their train.

"And Agrippa said to Paul, it is permitted thee to speak for1 thyself. Then Paul stretched out his hand and entered on his defense. Touching all things of which I am accused by Jews, king Agrippa, I count myself happy that I am to make my defense before thee to-day;2 especially as thou art skilled in all customs and questions that are among Jews. Wherefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently" (Acts 26:1-3).

"My manner of life then from my youth which was from the beginning among my nation and3 at Jerusalem know all Jews, knowing me before from the outset, if they be willing to testify, that according to the strictest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee. And now I stand to be judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers; unto which our twelve tribes earnestly serving night and day hope to arrive. And

concerning this hope I am accused by4 Jews, O king5. Why is it judged incredible with you, if God raiseth dead [men]?" (Acts 26:4-8).

It may be a small matter, yet it is well to avoid the mistake of confounding the apostle's act here with what he did in the synagogue of Antioch in Pisidia (Acts 13:16), or what Alexander did in the tumultuous assembly at Ephesus (Acts 19:33). This was "beckoning with the hand," quite different in character and aim from stretching it forth, here too with a chain, What a witness of the world's enmity to God's infinite grace in Christ! For, to say nothing of his loving labors, wherein had His servant done wrong? He was sharing the sufferings of Christ.

It will be observed that the apostle graciously passes by the various calumnies of the Jews which had been put forward by their venal orator and the unscrupulous men who supported his charges. He expresses his satisfaction at having to speak before one so exceptionally competent as the king in all the ways and controversies of Jews, as he does not fail even in this acknowledgment to preface it with an allusion to such accusations coming from Jews, not "the" Jews. In this connection there is no article in the text of verse 2, 3, as there should be none in verse 4 and 7, though in verse 4 there is much conflict among the MSS. (even the best uncials), and only Lachmann, and Alford, Tregelles, with Westcott and Hort, following B E, and others, against the rest. Nor is it to be wondered at that Tischendorf, who had dropt it in his later editions up to the seventh, went back in his eighth to that of his earlier issues in 1841 and both of 1842. The fact is that the sense required in this phrase here seems without example in the N. T., where in other cases πάντες οἱ 'I, is the correct form, and the article, as far as I have noticed, could not be omitted without damage. Here there is a distinct and unusual peculiarity; for "all the Jews" are not meant, but all Jews knowing Paul before from the outset. This accordingly requires πάντες Ἰ προγινώσκοντές με ἄνωθεν.

All Gr. T. students know of course the late Dean Alford's note on verse 2, which seems a long-standing reproach to scholars and ought to have been repudiated far and wide: for I cannot doubt there must be not a few besides the late Bp. of Durham, who are aware of the fallacy. "There is no force in Meyer's observation that by the art before Ἰουδαίων, Paul wishes to express that the charges were made by some, not by all of the Jews. That omission is the one so often overlooked by the German critics (for example, Stier, here), after a preposition. See Middl. ch. 6. § 1, and compare κατὰ Ἰουδαιόυς in the next verse, of which the above cannot be said" (Greek Test. ii. 276, fifth ed. 1865.

Now it is admitted that the celebrated German expositor's remark is imperfect, even though in many cases true. The omission of the article is due here and every where to presenting the word or combination of words characteristically, whilst the use of the article presents it as an object before the mind. There may be a very few exceptions, but these only prove the otherwise universality of the rule. And prepositions are in no way an exception, though they admit freely of serving to define the characteristic design of the anarthrous construction, which has been overlooked by English scholars quite as much perhaps as German. This is exactly one of the great defects of Bp. Middleton's able treatise, which has for effect the making imaginary exceptions as numerous as the rule. This of itself ought to have indicated failure in generalization. John 4:9 is a plain illustration of the principle: not only πῶς σὺ Ἰουδαῖος ὤν which every one sees, but Ἰουδαῖοι Σαμαρείταις, where the article for either would be out of place if the object were, as it certainly is, to mark both characteristically.

It is no question of "some" no doubt. And the article might have been with truth prefixed to both; but the meaning would have been altered. The two peoples would then stand contrasted as objects, not characteristically as they now are. Compare for this a selection from the book of the Acts — Acts 2:5,7,9-11; 11:19; 14:1,5,19; 18:4; 19:10,17; 20:21; 25:10. Again, any intelligent examination of the Greek T. cannot fail to convince that the preposition makes no difference whatever. The article is or is not used with the word in question like every other, in accordance with its principle of insertion or omission.

Thus in Matthew 28:15 character is the point and therefore it is παρὰ Ιουδαίοις. In John 4:22 the Jews are the object, and hence it is ἐκ τῶν 'I.: so in Acts 10:19 and Acts 11:54, ἐν τοῖς 'I., in Acts 11:19, ἐκ τὼν 'I.; in Acts 18:38, πρὸς τοὺς 'I. It is really a total oversight of the nice shades of thought in the Greek language to conceive that there is the least laxity or exception after prepositions. Perhaps the notion is due to the difficulty of always representing the distinction in English, which sometimes compels us to use our definite article where there is none in Greek. But this is no right reason to deny that there is invariably an intended difference. Weigh Acts 23:8 where we have Σαδδ. and Φαρ. without the article, though there is no preposition. If οἱ, had been prefixed to each, it would have been true; but the absence of the article makes them characteristic, however hard it may be to express it in English.

And there is an analogous difference in the cases before us, alike when with or without prepositions. "I am accused by Jews" in verses 2 and 7 is far more forcible than if the article had been inserted. It was not lost on Agrippa or Festus or the Jews that heard it. Of all men Jews were the last to have accused Paul for proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection that is from among the dead. Sadduceanism had alas! withered up their old faith. As a fact too, which may have weighed with Meyer and Stier, the Pharisees diverged in Acts 23 from the dominant faction which persecuted Paul. The preposition clearly gives no license, (Inni) Jews, not the Jews, being meant. Nor is it otherwise with κατὰ 'I., however confidently urged. Doubtless "according to the Jews" would have been true in fact; but it is stated characteristically; and here again as "Jews," not "the Jews," is the force intended, so it is evident once more that the preposition does not really affect the question. The article is inserted or omitted with prepositions on its own principle. Lastly, to be correct, π. οἱ 'I. would require οἱ προγιν qualifying the subject, π. 'I. προγιν is correct as it is given; for it means only all such Jews as previously knew Paul from the outset. In a word, it is characteristic and therefore anarthrous. Not only is π. οἱ 'I. the more usual expression, but quite distinct in sense; for it means the whole Jewish people as a known, definite, and complete object, whereas the phrase here means all Jews qualified by the peculiar and described knowledge of Paul.

Returning from this digression, we may note that the apostle begs for a patient hearing from one so skilled as Agrippa, and dwells (Acts 26:4-5) on his known early life under strict Pharisaic belief and discipline "among my nation and at Jerusalem," as all Jews cognizant from its outset could testify if willing.

But the question; he insists, for which he stood for judgment was the hope of the promise made by God unto our fathers (Acts 26:6), onto which our twelve tribes earnestly serving day and night hope to arrive (vs. 7). How strange and flagrant that, of all men, Jews should lay accusation against him for that hope! Certainly his testimony to the risen Jesus did not weaken faith in the promise of the Messiah or in the resurrection of the dead. Yet the whole nation in their public and earnest service of God night and day bore witness of their hope of attaining to that promise. Why is it judged incredible if God raises dead men? The prisoner assuredly did believe what the service of the chosen nation confessed night and day. Were Jews then gainsayers of their own boasted faith?

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 25:23-27

The purposed hearing of the apostle wholly differed from that before Felix and Drusilla. This was private; and the apostle availed himself of it in divine love and holy courage to strip the guilty pair of their vain show, and to let them see themselves as God regarded them, as He will judge by-and-by through our Lord Jesus. Were men not insensate by the wily power of Satan, they would feel how gracious it is of God to send one faithful and able, willing and loving, to tell them the unerring truth, that, believing, they might be saved. But if they hug their sins, it cannot be. True repentance is the inseparable companion of true faith. From both the enemy finds plausible excuses to hold souls back. Conscience may tremble; but there is no repentance till self is judged before God, and faith alone produces this.

Here it was even more public than the indictment before Felix or Festus. And the appeal to the emperor, though it relieved Festus in the main, embarrassed him in that he had no tangible rational explanation of the case to lay before Nero. Hence when Agrippa expressed the desire in person to hear the accused, Festus gladly caught at it, and fixed the next day for the purpose. Agrippa's known familiarity with Jewish affairs was too good to be lost, besides gratifying the wish of so exalted a guest.

"Therefore on the morrow when Agrippa came, and Bernice, with great pomp, and they entered into the audience-chamber with the commanders and the distinguished men of the city, at the command of Festus Paul was brought. And saith Festus, King Agrippa, and all men that are here present with us, ye behold this man about whom all the multitude of the Jews applied to me both in Jerusalem and here, crying out that he ought not to live any longer. But as I found that he had done nothing worthy of death, and as he himself appealed to Augustus, I decided to send him, about whom I have nothing certain to write to my lord. Wherefore I brought him forth before you, and especially before thee, king Agrippa, so that, after examination had, I may have what I shall write. For it seemeth to me unreasonable in sending a prisoner not also to signify the charges against him" (Acts 25:23-27).

Our evangelist as usual presents the scene most graphically; for which reason probably tradition gave out in error that he was a painter, whereas Scripture is positive that he was a physician: a fact abundantly confirmed by evidence in both his Gospel and the Acts. The king and the queen are before us with great pomp; military chiefs add to the show, as well as the most distinguished civilians; the governor gives the word of command, and the prisoner is brought into the hall of audience. Festus opens the proceedings. It is hardly to be allowed that the courteous Roman meant to insinuate a slur on Bernice when he said, "King Agrippa, and all men that are here present with us." Undoubtedly the word is not the general ἄνθρωποι but the precise ἄνδρες, expressive of men as distinguished from women (γυναῖκες). The truth is however that ἄνδρες is used regularly in addresses as more respectful, though women may be present (cf.
Acts 1:16; 2:14; 3:12; 13:16; 15:1; 17:12); and in this sense only is it here employed. Out of courtesy the distinction is ignored for the time. That the queen's presence was implied to be improper is not the thought.

Festus addresses himself directly to the point. "Ye behold this (person) about whom all the multitude of the Jews applied to me, both in Jerusalem and here, crying that he ought not to live any longer." There was no doubt of the general and vehement antipathy of the Jews to the noblest man of their stock and the most honored servant of the Lord. Their cry in the holy city and elsewhere was that he ought not to live longer. He, the governor, found that Paul had committed nothing which deserved death, but does not explain why he himself had occasioned the appeal to the emperor by the proposal that the prisoner should go to Jerusalem for judgment. Paul knew too that worldly religion is of all things least just and most cruel, and, declining such a change from Cæsar's tribunal, appealed to Augustus. To this Festus agreed, as we know, and he repeats, "I decided to send him."

But thereon arose a difficulty. What was he to write with the appellant? "About whom I have nothing certain to write to my lord." This was his main motive for the hearing before Agrippa, versed as he was in Jewish customs and learning and prejudice. "Wherefore I brought him forth before you, and especially before thee, king Agrippa, so that, after examination had, I may know what I shall write." The governor naturally considered it senseless, as he adds, to forward a prisoner without signifying the accusation laid to his charge. We shall find however that the issue was a true and fresh testimony to Christ far more than a solution of the governor's perplexity.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 25:13-22

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

It was Paul's purpose to visit Rome (Acts 19:21) after going to Jerusalem; and God gave effect to it, for it was God's purpose (Acts 23:11). But how different was the way under His hand from the apostle's expectation? He must go a prisoner to Rome. This befell him through his appeal to Caesar — all appeal by no means always granted, as it was evidently liable to abase. If the guilt were manifest, it was refused so also if the case were frivolous enough to be unworthy of the emperor's hearing. Paul, whose innocence was unquestionable, while the case was rendered in the highest degree serious through Jewish ill will, appealed when he saw the procurator trifling with justice to gratify the Jews. This decided matters for the present. But the Spirit of God saw further testimony needed by man, and this was brought about by a visit of distinguished visitors to the Roman governor soon after.

"Now when certain days passed, Agrippa the king and Bernice arrived at Cæsarea to salute (or, having sainted) Festus. And as they were spending several days there, Festus set Paul's case before the king, saying, There is a certain man left prisoner by Felix; about whom when I was in Jerusalem the chief priests and the elders of the Jews filed information, asking for condemnation against him. Unto whom I answered, that it is no custom for Romans to give up any man before that the accused have the accusers face to face, and have had opportunity of defense concerning the complaint. When therefore they came together here, I made no delay but next day sat on the judgment-seat and commanded the man to be brought; concerning whom, when the accusers stood up, they were bringing no charge of such evil things as I supposed, but had certain questions of their own religion, and of one Jesus dead as He is, Whom Paul affirmed to be alive. And I, being

perplexed in the inquiry concerning these things, asked whether he would go to Jerusalem and there be judged of these things. But when Paul appealed to be kept for the decision of Augustus, I commanded him to be kept till I should send him unto Caesar. And Agrippa [said] unto Festus, I also should wish to hear the man myself. To-morrow, saith he, thou shalt hear him" (Acts 25:13-22).

The royal personage here introduced was son of Herod Agrippa I, whose awful fate was described in Acts 12. Too young to reign at his father's death, he was by Claudius given Chalcis, the principality of his uncle, with certain privileges in Jerusalem; and Philip's old tetrarchy and more were added by the same emperor soon after, with the title of king. Bernice was his elder sister, Drusilla his younger, and each of them famous or infamous in that day with reason too grave. As Felix and Drusilla had a most solemn warning from the prisoner, so now were Agrippa and Bernice with Festus to hear an appeal which leaves no soul as it is found. The truth before the conscience carries with it a responsibility which eternity, not to say the judgment seat of Christ, will fully manifest. Yet the man involuntarily forced to feel its power can ask What is truth? and goes out hard and wretched from His presence Who alone can give the adequate answer. But wisdom is justified of all her children; as she learned. who had been till then a child of folly: Jesus was of God made to her wisdom and every other good she lacked. Why was it not so with these high estates?

The governor's motive for bringing Paul before Agrippa appears to have been his own doubt what to report to the emperor. Festus was just a man of the world. Of grace, of truth, he had no notion. The invisible and eternal realities were to him only imaginative ideas. Present things, changeable and fleeting as they are, were his life and all. God was in none of his thoughts; apart from the Lord Jesus He remains unknown.

There was another obstacle in his way, his good opinion of himself, and endeavor to claim from others the highest character for honesty and honor, energy and prudence. This runs through his speech, as we saw it pervading the self-applauding letter of Claudius Lysias in chap. 23. What is man to be accounted, whose breath is in his nostrils? One look at self in God's presence puts in dust and ashes, as in Job's case when approved of Him, for his three friends were not. How can ye believe, said our Lord, receiving as ye do glory one of another, and the glory that is from the only God ye seek not? Where there is no self-judgment, the Savior is but "one Jesus," like any child of man. He who so speaks is a sinner ripening for judgment.

What the sentiments of Festus were about the mythological reveries of the Greeks and Romans, bound up with their paganism, we know not. Skepticism, ever the fatal dissolvent of society and the body politic, as it is the reaction from idolatry, was then all but universal among the educated class. It is clear that, with the contempt usual in such men, they never conceived of the truth outside themselves. Above all appeared the strange tale and great stumbling block of unbelief, Jesus dead and risen, and this in the midst of the busy heedless world, among a despised and subject race. It is just named incidentally as a psychological phenomenon in Paul and as singularly rousing the animosity of the Jews, an ever-turbulent race. Unable to give the emperor any reasonable account of the prisoner who had appealed, he states the case to one whom current report declared to be, on the one hand well versed in all Jewish questions, and in some respects the more zealous religiously because he was not of Israelitish lineage, as on the other he was notoriously devoted to the Roman interest. So indeed he continued throughout the great war that demolished the Jewish polity, their "place and nation," and throughout a long reign to the first year of Trajan. To hear the case might gratify the curiosity of Herod Agrippa and perhaps relieve Festus of some perplexity.

The explanation to the king was not unskillful. It was in truth, as he intimated, a matter of Felix, left over for him. Paul was a prisoner when Festus entered on his province, who could not therefore be expected to know all from the first. Next, it was certain that the leading Jews were grievously incensed against him, which could not but weigh with a governor of little or no experience locally. Roman self-complacency breaks forth in the assertion of their policy of inflexible and impartial equity: an excellent principle by no means the rule in the provinces, any more than at home, but convenient to lay down by a governor as a check on flagrant injustice, which Felix and Festus surely saw in the actual prosecution. Who again could reproach himself with lack of zeal in the public cause? The Jews had been prompt enough in coming down from Jerusalem to accuse in Cæsarea; and the governor had lost not a day in sitting to judge the case, if there had been one according to Roman law. But there was nothing tangible before the court; no infraction of the public peace or propriety, any more than private wrong in violence or corruption. It was absurd to bring before a Roman tribunal such matters as occupied Paul's accusers. Facts there were none; only questions of a visionary nature.

It is improbable that even a Roman procurator of Judea would be so discourteous as to speak of the views in controversy as a "superstition," especially in speaking to king Agrippa; any more than that Paul so characterized the Athenians, when he was setting before them Jesus and the resurrection. It seems better therefore to avail ourselves of the better, or at least colorless, sense which the word undoubtedly bears in authors of that day still extant. "Religion" is therefore here chosen, as "system of worship" has also been suggested in a similar sense.

But when one knows the infinite truth that the Son came to bring God into the world and put sin out of it, how shocking is the dark incredulity that slurs over facts so transcendent in the words, "one Jesus now dead, whom Paul asserted to be alive"! The vindication of God's moral glory, and the display of His love, and the proof of coming judgment, all turn on it. Without it sin reigns in death, and destruction for sinners without exception or hope. There is no kingdom possible of righteousness and peace; only hell filled with the wicked and accursed. Jesus alive from the dead for evermore has changed all. Nor need we wait to see the glorious results. The Christian sees and walks by faith, not by sight. We rest, not only on a God that cannot lie, but on the fact already accomplished that Jesus died as propitiation for our sins; rose from the dead, and has taken His seat at God's right hand in heaven. We rest on the accomplishment of God's will in the one offering of Himself for sins; and now He sits as truly man on the Father's throne, as He came down God to become man and bring in new and everlasting glory to God by His death. He therefore is made unto us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption; and we who believe are of God in Him, as once we were only in Adam, heirs of sin and ruin. When the Lord appears again, the results will appear before the universe; and the creation, all the creation, that now groans in bondage and corruption will be delivered: for He is the Second man and Last Adam, and we shall reign along with Him in glory.

But the wisdom of the world is folly, which slights the grace and truth which came by Jesus Christ, Who came to His own things, and they that were His own received Him not. He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. So Festus showed now, as did Agrippa afterward in the same blindness of unbelief which pervaded other princes of this age: for had they known they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. And Christendom is returning to the darkness of heathenism. Never among the baptized did naturalism so govern men's minds; never before did nominal Christians manifest such incredulity in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, or even in creation. If the

dead Jesus is alive, He has the keys of death and hades; and where is then philosophy? Where is natural law? What has natural law to do with creating? Still less can it apply to grace reigning through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.

But to return: when Festus mentions Paul's declining to go to Jerusalem and appealing to Caesar, Agrippa expresses the wish himself to hear; and an audience is fixed for the morrow. This leads to a yet fuller testimony as we shall see, before not a governor only but a king.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 25:1-12

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

The new governor gave a fresh opportunity to the Jews. Morally more respectable than Felix, he knew not God, and therefore could not be trusted for man. Faith to him was quite unintelligible, an enthusiasm. But he soon learned enough of the Jews do make him guilty in his willingness to gratify them in the sacrifice of Paul. Policy is a sad destroyer of conscience.

"Festus therefore, having come into the province, after three days went up to Jerusalem from Caesarea. And the chief priests and the principal men of the Jews informed him against Paul; and they besought him, asking a favor that he would send for him to Jerusalem, laying wait to kill him on the way. Howbeit Festus answered that Paul was being kept at Caesarea and that he himself was about to depart [there] shortly. Let them therefore, saith he, that are of power among you go down with me, and if there is anything amiss in the man, let them accuse him" (Acts 25:1-5).

The providence of God is still in action. On the one hand the Jews sought under color of favor to have the apostle waylaid on the road to Jerusalem; on the other the governor stood to the dignity of his office, and would not have it lowered. As Paul had already been sent to Cæsarea, he declined moving him back to Jerusalem. It is possible that he knew little or nothing of their murderous designs. If so, it was the secret care of God for one unjustly assailed. But rumors would easily get currency as to any such plot. At this time the governor was not prepared to surrender a Roman citizen to the malice of his enemies, especially of a Jewish sort on a religious dispute. The Lord in any case watched over his servant. The accused was in Caesarea, and if anywhere in that land the supreme seat of judicature was there in Roman eyes. The governor by his decision hindered the execution of their plot. He was returning to Caesarea himself shortly: if therefore any wrong was in question, they had their opportunity to come down and accuse the prisoner.

"And when he had tarried among them not more than eight or ten days, he went down unto Cæsarea; and on the morrow he sat on the judgment-seat, and commanded Paul to be brought. And when he was come, the Jews that had come from Jerusalem stood round about and laid many and grievous charges which they could not prove; while Paul said in his defense, Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I sinned at all" (Acts 25:6-8). The case was as plain as could be. The accusations were without proof; the defense was complete. The Jews were simply bitter enemies. The apostle had not transgressed as to any of the many serious charges they had laid to his account.

But Festus was really little better than Felix. The change of judge was only slightly in favor of justice. There was the same selfishness which had counteracted equity before. Impossible to expect the fear of God in a heathen man, though some may have been more depraved and unjust than others.

"But Festus, desiring to gain favor with the Jews, answered Paul and said, Wilt thou go up to Jerusalem and there be judged of these things before me?" (Acts 25:9). So little can man be reckoned on. Festus had refused this very favor to the Jews in Jerusalem; he could scarcely be in the dark as to the reason why Paul had been hurried down to Caesarea. His motive was to curry favor with the Jews. "But Paul said, I am standing before Cæsar's judgment-seat, where I ought to be judged. To the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou also very well knowest" (Acts 25:10).

The apostle must have had cause for speaking so plainly. "If then I am a wrong-doer, and have committed anything worthy of death, I refuse not to die. But if none of those things is [true] whereof these accuse me, no man can give me up [or grant me by favor] unto them. I appeal unto Caesar" (vs. 11). It is clear that all the righteousness of the case lay with Paul. He therefore avails himself of his title as a Roman citizen against those who would have infringed Roman law. He agitated no change of law, he sought nothing for himself, he employed no lawyer. The law had already ruled, and he pleaded it before one in office to administer it.

Thus so far the difficulty was terminated. The governor was bound by the appeal. "Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, Thou hast appealed unto Caesar: unto Caesar shalt thou go" (Acts 25:12). The king, or emperor, was to hear, no less than subordinate magistrates; and this not by fawning on, or seeking access to, the princes of this world, but as holy sufferers with Christ and for His name (Matt. 10:18).

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 24:22-27

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

The procurator had more now to help him than his considerable experience of the Jews in the past. He had just heard an eminently and transparently truthful reply of Paul to the speech of Tertullus. He could well enough have decided on the merits of it, had it pleased him. But he was a governor as well as judge, and had to do with a people ever refractory. Policy dictated his course, not justice, as too often happens in this world, to say nothing of the heathenism of the Romans and the unscrupulousness of Felix in particular. Bright the day, when judgment shall return to righteousness. Even now, though Christianity has raised the moral standard of men in certain respects, we are far from that

day when a King shall reign in righteousness, and princes rule in judgment.

Nor does the gospel indeed propose any such present amelioration of the world. It is the proclamation of grace to the ungodly in the name of Jesus, which shows us the heavens opened for all that believe made one with Him glorified above. The Christian is called therefore to glory in nothing but the cross of Christ, whereby he is crucified to the world, and the world is crucified to him. There is no common ground therefore possible between the world and the Christian if consistent. For the world adjudged to a death of guilt and shame and suffering Him Whom the Christian confesses as the Lord of glory, alone righteous, holy, and true. The world would cease to be the world if in deed and in truth it confessed Him. Not only so: the Christian sees in the cross not only the world's misjudgment of the only worthy One, but God's judgment of himself as only and altogether evil before Him, but that evil laid on Christ to be not only judged but effaced righteously. And he sees further the unbelieving world judged with its prince, though the inevitable and irreversible sentence be not executed till the Lord Jesus appear in His glory, and we too along with Him in the same glory. Thus separation from the world is alone according to truth for the Christian, as the world abides the sure object of divine vengeance. "Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?"

It was this that made Felix unjust toward Paul as it had decided Pilate to let the Lord Jesus suffer. "But Felix, having more accurate knowledge concerning the Way, adjourned them, saying, When Lysias the commander [or, chiliarch] is come down, I will determine your matter. And he ordered the centurion that he should be kept in charge and should have indulgence; and not to hinder any of his friends from ministering to him" (Acts 24:22-23). The latitude allowed indicated not obscurely the mind of the unjust judge, if he had chosen to judge according to his convictions. But we learn also how God took care of His servant, and, while granting him to suffer for Christ's sake, assuaged the captivity through the judge himself, not on His servant's petition. Truly all things work together for good to them that love God, Who is honored by their faith.

"And after certain days Felix, having arrived with Drusilla his wife being a Jewess, sent for Paul and heard him concerning the faith in Christ Jesus. And as he reasoned concerning righteousness and temperance and the judgment to come, Felix became terrified and answered, For the present go; and when I get a convenient season, I will send for thee, hoping at the same time that money would be given him by Paul; wherefore also he sent for him the oftener and communed with him. But when two years were fulfilled, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus; and Felix, willing to gain favor with the Jews, left Paul in bonds" (Acts 24:24-27).

The essence of unbelief is that, even if God be owned in word or theory, He is in fact wholly excluded. And so it was evident in the next incident, where Felix with the beautiful wife of Azizus, king of the Emesenes, whom he had seduced and taken as "his own," had the apostle before them to hoar of the faith in Christ. Little was the guilty Roman prepared for the many sides of the truth, which the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven turns to deal with the hearer as he is. Paul discoursed, not on the prophets as with Jews, nor on the resurrection as with Athenians, nor on the cross even as at Corinth, but about righteousness, and self-control, and the coming judgment. A bad woman, they say, is more shameless than a bad man. Certainly if Drusilla knew more than Felix, she appears to have felt less. The inspiring Spirit records the alarm of the man, not of the woman. But it was no more than a passing terror. There was no repentance toward God: else he would not have got rid of the searching yet saving word of the gospel; he would not have been content to wait for a "more convenient season," which never really comes. But a baser motive rises up to prompt frequent interviews afterward—that love of money which is a root of all evil. Therefore was it Paul's lot to remain a prisoner for two years of enforced separation from those active and free and wide labors of love so precious to his spirit, because Christ filled him to overflowing. But the same Christ strengthened him to accept his bonds patiently, as Felix fully proved his depravity. Indeed he was only screened from the just punishment of his manifold atrocities by the influence of his brother with the emperor.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 24:10-21

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

The defense of the apostle is characterized by straightforward truth and courteous dignity, as the accusation had been by servility to the governor and abuse of the accused. It is noticed, on the one hand, as the Jews joined in their venal advocate's assault, affirming that his falsehoods were fact (ver. 9), that, on the other (ver. 10), there was no haste to reply till the governor gave the sign to that effect.

"And when the governor beckoned him to speak, Paul answered, Knowing that since many years thou art judge to this nation, I1 cheerfully make my defense: as thou canst ascertain2 that it is not more than twelve days since I went up to worship at Jerusalem; and neither in the temple did they find me discoursing with any one or making a tumult of a crowd, nor in the synagogues, nor throughout the city. Neither can they prove to thee the things of which they now accuse me. But this I confess to thee,3 that according to the way which they call a sect, so I serve the God of the fathers, believing all things that are according to the law and that are written in the prophets; having hope toward God, which these also themselves look for, that a resurrection4 is to be, both of just and unjust. Herein also do I exercise myself to have a conscience without offense toward God and men continually. Now after several years I arrived to bring alms unto my nation and offerings; in which they found me purified in the temple, not with crowd nor yet with tumult5 but certain Jews from Asia, who ought to have been present before thee, and to have accused, if they had aught against me. Or let these themselves say what6 wrong they found in me when I stood before the council, [other] than for this one voice that I cried out standing among them, Touching the resurrection of [the] dead I am judged this day before you" (Acts 24:10-21).

The length of time that Felix had passed in official relation to the Jews was a plain matter of fact, of which the apostle justly availed himself. Their feeling, habits, and prejudices were thus necessarily more familiar than to a new procurator. On this circumstance the apostle grounds his cheerfulness in making his plea. Flattery is wholly absent.

As to himself, it was so brief a space since he went up to Jerusalem that his course there could easily be traced. And when he did go, but twelve days before, it was "to worship," the very reverse of moving sedition or other pestilent conduct, least of all to profane the temple. On the contrary he brought forth alms to his nation, and offerings." Could anything be more opposed, either to riot, or to profanation? He was at

liberty to discourse if he had judged meet; but in point of fact “neither in the temple did they find me discoursing with any one, or making a tumult of a crowd,” common as this was in a people so zealous and so excitable, “nor in the synagogues,” numerous as they were, “nor throughout the city.” What could be less like an agitator? “Neither can they prove to thee things whereof they now accuse me.” More than this distinct challenge, or at best denial, of the vague and general calumny the apostle does not allege. The facts stated, of which the evidence was easy and ample, refuted the talk of Tertullus.

But far from denying what was said of “the sect” (ver. 5), he avows it openly. “But this I confess to thee, that according to the way which they call sect, so I serve the [or our] fathers’ God.” This was of moment for the governor. Tolerant as the Romans were toward the religions convictions of the nations they ruled, they were stern in disallowing innovations, especially such as tended to stir up civil discord. The apostle accordingly prefers here, as on two other occasions not quite similar, to depart from the usual phrase, and says πατρώῳ θεῷ rather than τῶν πατέρων ἡμῶν as Kühnöl and others have noticed. As the heathen without God themselves called the Christians godless or Atheists, because they had no idols, so the Jews called the church “a sect.” Yet was it the only institution on earth that could not be a sect while true to Christ. The apostle goes farther however, and confesses his faith in all things according to the law, and the things written in the prophets. There is no hesitation in declaring boldly his faith in all the ancient oracles before the high priest and the Sadducean party, who notoriously slighted the prophets, as they had no real reverence for the law. If any Pharisees were in alliance with them as “elders” of Israel, what a position in confederating with infidels against a more thorough believer than themselves!

Further, there is nothing left indistinct here. For the apostle adds, “having hope toward God, which they themselves also look for, that a resurrection is to be of both just and unjust.” This could hardly have been said if there had not been then present Pharisees who confessed the resurrection of the dead. They must therefore have made up their difference with the heterodox Sadducees in their eagerness to put down and punish Paul. The tendency among the Jews seems to have been to regard resurrection as the privilege of the righteous simply, which would be sure to degenerate into the reward of Israel in the kingdom of Messiah. But the apostle, guided of the Holy Spirit, shows its universal character, “of both just and unjust.” So it was to be inferred even from a book so ancient as that of Job, and of the deeper interest in this respect as evidence of the faith of Gentile believers before the law. Yet it is certain that in Job 14 Job speaks of man’s resurrection (that is, of man, as such), when the heavens are no more and eternity begins, contradistinguished from the rising of the righteous, like himself, to enjoy their hope when the Kinsman Redeemer shall stand on the earth, which is clearly for the kingdom. Naturally the resurrection of the just, the resurrection from among the dead, the better resurrection, and other kindred phrases, are more frequent as a cheer and incentive to saints in present suffering; but John 5 and Revelation 20 give doctrinally and prophetically the twofold resurrection, severed by a thousand years, to which Paul here alludes as that which had roused so much feeling on the part of his Sadducean adversaries.

Nor this only; for he lets them know by the way that on himself the hope of resurrection was most influential practically. “In this [Therefore, or accordingly] I also exercise myself to have a conscience without offense toward God and men continually.”

Here not only were the Jews, but Christians for the most part are, weak indeed, rising in faith but little beyond thoughtful heathen who reason on the immortality of the soul. No doubt the God-inbreathed soul, the inner man, is immortal; but as this is no security against sin, so neither does it involve immunity from judgment. Indeed it is rather the ground why sinful man, alone of beings on the earth, has moral responsibility, from which he cannot disengage himself; for, if he refuse life eternal in the Son, he must be judged by Him at the last, as Scripture abundantly testifies. The believer of course needs no such awful measure to vindicate the rights of Christ, but, what is far better, honors Him now in the day that follows His cross, honors Him not by that tremendous and irresistible constraint, but with a ready mind, as the One Who for him died and rose that he might live no longer to himself but to Him.

People may reason, as alas! not a few in Christendom have not been ashamed to do, that the blessing of the soul is of a more spiritual nature, and that any hope associated with the resurrection of the body is external. But they are beguiled of the enemy in thus preferring their own thoughts to God’s word, which insists on the fullest blessing for the soul now, even salvation in the richest way, but on resurrection or change at Christ’s coming as our proper hope. Then only shall we be like Him, when the body of humiliation is conformed to the body of His glory. It is this hope which gives power in the Spirit to mortify our members on the earth, instead of indulging the common dream of present ease and honor here before the soul goes to heaven for its glory. Never does Scripture so speak. It does declare the superior blessedness of departing to be with Christ, as compared with remaining here. But it never stops short of Christ’s coming for our everlasting change as the true hope which purifies us meanwhile on the earth.

The apostle next states that after a lapse of several years he arrived bringing alms to his nation, and offerings. Was this the action of a seditious pestilent man “In which [business of the offerings] they found me purified in the temple, not with crowd nor yet with tumult.” Was this again profaning the temple? “But certain Jews from Asia” — they were the true culprits in the matter. It was they whose guilty rashness imputed the false charge. For the four men under the vow were not Greeks but Jews; and with these only was Paul associated in the temple at the instance of James. Why were these Asiatic Jews not here face to face, as Roman law required? “Who ought,” as the apostle here quietly adds, “to have been present before thee, and to have accused, if they had anything against me. Or let them themselves (the Jews then present) say what wrong they found in me when I stood before the council, [other] than for this one voice which I cried out among them, Touching the resurrection of [the] dead I am judged this day before you.”

It was irrefragably and solely the Jews themselves who made the riot (stirred up by the blunder about those brethren from Asia), who were not there to be convicted that day, as Felix could not but see. Even though the witnesses were not present, those actually there were challenged to state any wrong whatever done by the apostle, unless it was his putting forward the great truth of the resurrection: as really embarrassing to the Pharisee elders now as before; for they assuredly would regard such a cry as true and right, and in no way a fault. But “evil communications corrupt good manners”; and those who at first felt sympathy for the truth at stake, now give their support to the enemy against the great representative of the gospel, even when they all were convicted of the grossest mistake, and of unfounded calumny. So hard is it for men engaged in a campaign, above all a religions one, to stop short of glaring injustice when arrayed on an evil side. When men are right, they can afford to be gracious. Wrong-doers and malicious men add turbulence also.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 24:1-9

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

Religious rancor is prompt and indefatigable. Disappointed of its prey by lawless violence, it loses no time in availing itself of legal processes, where unscrupulous abuse may succeed, even if the judge were not venal but only disposed, like human nature in general, to take the popular side against the righteous and godly.

“And after five days came down the high priest Ananias with certain1 elders and an orator, one Tertullus; and they [the which] laid an information before the governor against Paul. And when he was called, Tertullus began to accuse, saying, Seeing that by thee we enjoy great peace, and by thy providence reforms2 are made for this nation, we accept [it] every way and everywhere, most excellent Felix, with all thankfulness. But that I be not further tedious to thee, I entreat thee to hear us briefly in thy clemency. For we found this man a pest, and moving insurrections3 among all the Jews throughout the world [inhabited earth], and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes, who also attempted to profane the temple; whom we also seized [and would have judged according to our law. But Lysias the commander [or chiliarch] came and with great violence took [him] away from our hands, commanding his accusers to come onto thee]; from whom thou wilt be able by examining thyself to take knowledge of all these things of which we accuse him. And the Jews joined in the attack, asserting that these things were so” (Acts 24:1-9).

The importance attached to the trial is evident from the going down of the high priest so great a distance and with so little delay, though we may well receive the more ancient witnesses which speak only of certain elders, instead of the Sanhedrim as a whole as in the Received Text. But the more modern copies in this case present without doubt the more difficult reading. Had the authorities been reversed, the critics would probably have regarded τινῶν as a softened correction of τῶν.

The orator from his name (a diminutive of Tertius like many others so formed in Latin) seems to have been one of the young Romans or Italians found wherever there was a court of justice in the provinces; and the Jews in all probability employed him as being versed in the methods of procedure before the governor. Certainly his opening is as servile as his statement is false and scurrilous. The flattery of Felix is in flagrant contrast with the grave censure of the historian Tacitas (Ann. 12. 54, H. 5. 9, as referred to naturally), while there was enough in the vigorous putting down of plotters and rebels to give some semblance of reason. What the alleged ameliorations or good measures were does not appear. Josephus does not differ from the Romans in an evil report of Felix, who only escaped condemnation for his misgovernment in Syria through the influence of his brother Pallas with Nero.

“Providence” is given here, rather than “forethought,” as it was apparently borrowed from the application of the more high-sounding term, common on the imperial coins, as Eckhel shows in his “Doctrina Vet. Num.” passim.

Having thus and yet more grossly sought to conciliate the governor, Tertullus turns to the calumniating of Paul after verse 4. He represents the apostle, not merely by the vague but most injurious appellation of a pest or pestilent fellow, but more definitely as moving seditions among all the Jews throughout the world, notoriously open to such mischievous excitement beyond all others through their untoward circumstances as well as their presence everywhere since their dispersion. Next, he taxes Paul as an heresiarch, or rather sectarian chief, employing here only in the N. T. against the Christians that name of contempt which they fixed.

The bracketed passage may be questioned fairly. It is omitted by the witnesses of chief value, and consequently is not received by the Editors, Griesbach, Lachmann, Tischendorf, Tregelles, as Mill and Bengel before them. Alford writes andecidedly. Undoubtedly the variations are great in the manuscripts which have the substance. De Wette represents a class of men usually bold; but here it is admitted that it is hardly to be supposed that Tertullus should have said so little, or that Luke should have omitted if he said more; and again it is plain that to stop at the seizure of Paul by the Jews, without explaining how he got rid of them and came into the custody of Lysias before being taken to Caesarea, leaves the speech remarkably abrupt. But Alford sees in verse 22 a strong argument for the genuineness of the words in debate, because παῤ οὗ, if the words be inserted, refer, naturally to Lysias, and we find Felix there putting off the final hearing and decision till the arrival of Lysias. If the words are not genuine, παῤ οὗ would rather refer to Paul which the Dean considers unlikely. Others on the contrary allow that at an anacrisis, or first hearing, this is quite correct, and altogether independent of torture, which in the case of a Roman was of course illegal. More might be added in evidence of the uncertainty which hangs over the bracketed words; but it seems unedifying to say more, if one cannot adduce proof enough to clear up the question either way. Abridgment is at least a rare fault in the copyists, who were more prone to venture on insertions in order to ease the sense when it seemed obscure.

It is sad to see how contemptible the Jewish party, high priest and elders, made themselves, even in Roman eyes, through spite against the gospel (Acts 24:9). There they all were not only assenting to the base servility and downright falsehood of Tertullus (indeed they had instructed him), but now they joined in his attack against all truth and justice. And so the Lord had forewarned His followers. “Remember the word that I said unto you, A servant is not greater than his lord. If they persecute Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you for My name’s sake; because they know not Him that sent Me” (John 15). Yes, there is the secret. The people who claimed to be His witnesses, and were so responsibly, knew Him not, and proved it by rejecting Him Who is the image of the invisible God, the True and Faithful Witness, His only and Beloved Son. Hence their enmity against a servant of His, who made their consciences feel the truth they could not overthrow and would not believe or confess. Deadly hatred ensues: the way of Cain against the accepted and righteous Abel, which stops not short of death. Therefore the Lord went on to say in John 16, “They shall put you out of the synagogues; yea, the hour cometh, that whosoever killeth you shall think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do, because they have not known the Father nor Me.”

It has been not otherwise in Christendom, and from the same source. Men have gone back to Jewish elements (now no better than Gentile idols, as the apostle tells us in Gal. 4), and lost all true knowledge of the Father and the Son, as well as of all gospel privilege and blessing. This has ever led to enmity against those who abide in the grace and truth which came by Jesus Christ. For man is at bottom the same every where and at all times. But far be it from the Christian to glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to him, and he unto the world. For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. And as many as shall walk by this rule, peace be upon them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God (Gal. 6:14-16).

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 23:23-35

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

The commander was prompt in action, as we have seen him considerate with Paul's young kinsman. "And he called unto him some two of the centurions and said, Make ready two hundred soldiers, that they may go as far as Caesarea, and seventy horsemen, and two hundred spearmen,1 at the third hour of the night. And [he bade them] provide beasts that they might set Paul on and bring [him] safe through unto Felix the governor, having written a letter in this form: Claudius Lysias to the most excellent governor Felix greeting. This man when seized by the Jews and about to be slain by them, I coming up with the soldiery rescued, having learned that he was a Roman. And wishing to know thoroughly the cause for which they accused him, I brought [him] down unto their council, whom I found to be accused about questions of their law, but to have no charge laid worthy of death or bonds. And when it was shown to me that a plot would be against the man, I forthwith sent [him] unto thee, charging his accusers also to speak against him before thee. [Farewell.]" (Acts 23:23-30).

How the letter became known to the Evangelist we cannot say; but there it is with every mark of genuineness, and so much the more, because we can readily see that the commander was not scrupulous as to truth, and sought to commend his zeal and services to the governor. God is not straitened as to means, knowing all without means, and ever and anon communicating what is good for us to know as He sees fit. The commander in fact only learned that Paul was a Roman after he had caused him to be tied up for scourging: a serious infraction of the law as against a citizen. But it is quite natural that he, a heathen, should do what he could to hide his past fault by professing zeal exactly where he had failed. Little did he anticipate that a letter meant only for the eyes of Felix was to stand on the indelible page of Holy Writ with the falsehood rendered evident by the history without a word of comment, as is the manner of Scripture. Nor was there the smallest wish in the blessed prisoner to expose the wrong. But God would give us to learn thereby what man is, and what God is, confiding in His care in abhorrence of evil and cleaving to good.

The immense guard provided for the safe conduct of a prisoner, confessedly not guilty of punishment, proved the commander's estimate of Jewish perfidy and violence; and this on the night when his information of their plot was received. How sad to see vindictiveness and deceit in the Jews abhorred and thwarted by heathen resoluteness to stand by earthly righteousness and order. Truly the foundations were out of course: not that the Romans were not evil, but that God's people, the Jews, were yet more deplorably bad.

Nor was Felix the procurator of Judaea ignorant of their moral state, though himself a man of more than usually mean, cruel, and abandoned character. Not only was he married to a Jewish wife, but he seems to have been a joint-governor for years before his promotion to the sole dignity, though herein Tacitus and Josephus clash not a little. During his office he had ample experience of insurrection and of intrigue, of bloodshed and of plots, in dealing with which his servile origin gave only, as is usual, a haughtier tone and stronger impulse to his ruthless policy. Still he easily understood on what slender grounds the Jews might pursue to death an object of their unrelenting animosity. A Roman governor too was not to be less firm in upholding Roman law in the presence of Jews who boasted of a divine revelation. All this God's providence used in favor of His servant. The notion that so large a retinue was intended as a special honor of Christ's minister is a blunder, from not seeing that the true glory of the Christian is in conformity to Christ's cross.

"The soldiers therefore, as it was commanded them, took up Paul and brought [him] by night unto Antipatris. But on the morrow they left the horsemen to go with him and returned to the castle; and they, when they entered into Caesarea and delivered the letter to the governor, presented Paul also to him And when he had read [it] and asked of what province he was, and understood that he was of Cilicia, I will hear thee fully, said he, when thine accusers also are arrived. And he commanded him to be kept in Herod's praetorian" (Acts 23:31-35).

The description is vivid, as we ordinarily find in the narrative of Luke. Kefr-Saba was the ancient name of the city whence the foot-soldiers returned, as all danger of ambush or pursuit was then past. When Herod rebuilt it, he called the new city Antipatris, in honor of his father. It was some twenty-six miles from Caesarea, but considerably more from Jerusalem, even by the direct route through Gophna, discovered by Dr. Eli Smith, with many a mark of Roman use. The Jerusalem Itinerary makes the distance of Caesarea from Jerusalem sixty-eight miles, but this was the more circuitous route by Bethhoron and Lydda. Nowhere did Herod lavish such effort to render a city magnificent. It is now an utter ruin. There the apostle remained a prisoner for years before he was sent on to Rome. But of this we are to hear more in the history that follows.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 23:10-22

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

"And when there arose a great dissension, the commander, fearing lest Paul should be torn in pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him by force from among them and bring [him] into the castle. And the night following the Lord stood by him and said, Be of good cheer,1 for as then hast fully testified concerning Me at Jerusalem, so also must thou testify at Rome" (Acts 23:10-11).

The Gentile in chief command was not used to the gusts of violence that blew among the Jews when a question of religions difference sprung up and roused them. At this time indeed religious indifference prevailed excessively among the heathen. It was not so among the Jews, though their moral condition was wretched in the extreme. The chiliarch, therefore, being alarmed at the agitation, had Paul removed from the midst of men who seemed excited enough to tear him in pieces.

It was a time when the apostle might have been much tried. He had appealed to orthodox feeling against the Sadducean unbelief that sought his destruction, but he was a prisoner still, though safely guarded by Roman soldiers. It was not the happiest position for one who valued

nothing but Christ. So much the more gracious was that which we last read, “And the following night the Lord stood by him and said, Be of good cheer; for as thou didst fully testify the things about Me at Jerusalem, so must thou also testify at Rome.” Truly the Lord is good: not a word of blame; nothing but assurance of help, and this by so remarkable a manifestation at the very time when discouragement would have been natural. The apostle’s visit to Jerusalem had not resulted in the least as he himself desired. He might have regarded it as only a failure. The Lord noticed nothing but his faithful testimony; and He adds, that so he must testify at Rome also.

This was evidently then the corrected and proper scope of Paul’s allotted sphere: Jerusalem was outside it. For Peter had been entrusted with the gospel of the circumcision, as Paul was beyond all controversy, with that of the uncircumcision; under which came Rome as the then metropolis of the world. Thither the apostle was to go, not free but in bonds, a prisoner, as suited the Lord, whilst it was a part of His moral government because he would go to Jerusalem. The greatest representative of the gospel was to enter Rome in a chain.

Has the gospel ever been otherwise at Rome ? It is not that God had not work there already done. Many souls there were before this calling on the name of the Lord, both Jews and Gentiles, as the Epistle to the Romans lets us see; but the great witness of the gospel was to enter Rome a prisoner. If released afterward, he returned, a prisoner again, to die at Rome for Christ. It was indeed a solemn type, as foreshadowing what Rome would ever prove to the gospel of God.

“And when it was day the Jews, having made a combination, put themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. And those that made the conspiracy were more than forty, who therefore (οἵτινες) came to the high priests and the elders, and said, We have put ourselves under a great curse,2 to taste nothing until we have killed Paul. Now therefore do ye, with the council, signify to the commander that he bring him down unto you,3 as though ye would judge his cause more exactly. But we, before he come near, are ready to slay him” (Acts 23:12-15).

It is sorrowful to read the dark conspiracy of the Jews at this time. They were no better than the heathen, but rather worse as knowing better. So it ever is where light shines in measure without grace; it becomes deeper darkness. Deceit and violence characterized them, especially where the gospel was concerned, and none was so identified with it as Paul. God’s word in the Law and the Psalms and the Prophets, was too truly verified in their case. Their feet were swift to shed blood and with their tongues they used deceit. They did not know the way of peace, but hated most him who preached and lived it. Alas! there was no fear of God before their eyes. And it is evident that the ecclesiastical chiefs were quite as much implicated as the blood-thirsty rabble, the prey of crafty leaders who taught that religion sanctifies murder (John 16:2). It is therefore said to be “the Jews,” not merely “some of the Jews,” as in the softened words of the Received Text. Accordingly when the conspirators told the religions leaders their plot to murder Paul on his way to the council, not a word of remonstrance or horror. The high priests and the elders were really therefore the more guilty. Dr. Hackett, and others, cite from Philo a passage which remarkably illustrates such conduct as a principle calmly laid down without the smallest sense of its atrocity. Now Philo was a contemporary Jew of Alexandria.

But God knows how to defeat wicked efforts against His servants. As he had comforted Paul’s heart privately, so now He wrought providentially and, singular to say, through a relative of Paul himself who was there. “But Paul’s sister’s son heard of the ambush; and having come and entered into the castle, he reported it to Paul. And Paul called to [him] one of the centurions and said, Bring this young man to the commander; for he hath something to report to him. He therefore took and brought him to the commander, and saith, The prisoner Paul called me to [him] and asked me to bring this young man to thee, as he hath something to say to thee. And the commander took him by the hand, and going aside privately asked, What is that which you have to report to me? And he said, The Jews have agreed to ask thee to bring down Paul to-morrow into the council, as though they would inquire somewhat more exactly concerning him. Do not thou therefore yield to them; for there lie in ambush for him more than forty men of them, who put themselves under a curse neither to eat nor to drink, till they have slain him; and now they are ready, looking for the4 promise from thee. So the commander let the young man go, charging him, Tell no man that thou didst show these things unto me” (Acts 23:16-22).

Whatever may have been the haste of Lysias at first, he appears to have waked up thoroughly to his duty on behalf of the prisoner against his relentless enemies, and to have sought at last to make up in kindness for the wrong then done.

It is instructive also to observe how far the apostle was from fanaticism in his proceedings. For, although the Lord had miraculously guaranteed his preservation that he might have the desire of his heart in bearing witness of Christ in Rome, he did not count it beneath him to advertise the military chief of the plot against his life. Confidence in the word of God does not despise or dispense with legitimate means. Perhaps men are not wanting who flatter themselves that they may be more faithful or spiritual than he.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 23:7-9

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The high priest Ananias was too truly a representative of the people as a whole. They were no better than a whited wall; and they too in due time afterward fell under the smiting of God. The apostle turns to the audience, as we saw, when he perceived that the one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, and cried out in the counsel, Brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees; touching the hope and resurrection of the dead I am judged. “And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and Sadducees; and the assembly was divided. For Sadducees say that there is no resurrection neither angel nor spirit; but Pharisees confess them both. And there arose a great clamor, and some of the scribes of the Pharisees’ part stood up and strove, saying, We find no evil in this man; and [what] if a spirit spoke to him, or an angel?” (Acts 23:7-9.)

We have seen all through the Acts of the Apostles that the Sadducees were as prominent in opposition after the resurrection of Christ and the descent of the Spirit, as the Pharisees had been while the Lord was on earth. There seems a certain fitness in this. The Righteous One was intolerable to the earthly-minded champions of human righteousness, ever found wanting when weighed in God’s balances. When He rose from the dead, the Sadducees were naturally roused to action, more especially as they were at the time in outward power. The high priests

successively seem to have been of that party. The resurrection of Jesus was a deathblow to their system, as it is to infidelity at all times. For it is God's intervention in power whilst the world goes on as it is, the pledge that the risen One will come and judge it; for He it is who is of God ordained Judge of quick and dead.

Resurrection is the sole and final condition of man which answers to the counsels of God, and will manifest His glory.

Paul, therefore, perceiving that if one part of his audience were Sadducees, the other were Pharisees, avails himself of the truth held by the Pharisees, which ought to have lifted all above personalities and prejudices. In all cases grace loves to do so; as flesh finds its wretched pleasure in continual strife and self-seeking. Here too it was of moment to press resurrection as a conditional truth of Christianity—resurrection not merely at the end but before the end comes. Not that the apostle here opens resurrection as specifically from the dead; he is content to speak of that which every God-fearing Jew acknowledged the hope and resurrection of the dead, which was certainly not for judgment of the wicked. Resurrection was not disputed but held from the beginning. Old Testament saints waited for it, not merely Israelites but those who were outside like Job, as may be seen in Job 19, when the Redeemer stands on earth at the latter day. Christ personally becomes, as every believer in Christ knows, the seal of the truth of resurrection, for in His case it is not only the dead man raised but raised from among the dead; and so it will be at His coming.

No Pharisee doubted the resurrection of the dead. Paul was not only a Pharisee but a son of Pharisees, a stronger expression than that which obtains in the received text or the A. V. He belonged to a family of Pharisees, who rejected free-thinking and held to the common faith of God's people.

The effect was immediate. There arose a dissension between the Pharisees and Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. No doubt the apostle was not here preaching the gospel nor rendering that testimony to which his heart turned habitually. Christ resorted to no such measures when He was being judged; but it was surely righteous in itself if not according to the height of grace in Christ. But it was the means of no deliverance to Paul; on the contrary his adversaries were divided, but power was on the side of those who felt the blow struck at their infidelity. "For Sadducees say, that there is no resurrection, neither angel nor spirit, but Pharisees confess them both." The Sadducees were the skeptics of that day and of the lowest kind; they were blinded by materialism, the poisonous error which is now prevailing everywhere throughout Christendom. How solemn that the worst unbelief of Judaism should now pervade an immense part of the baptized in Christendom! Catholic or Protestant, high church or low, or dissent, makes little difference. The great expansion of experimental science has fed this distemper far beyond the effect of pure or mixed sciences in past days. Even the discoveries which have added so much to personal ease and selfish enjoyment, all tend to help it on. Man in his present life becomes everything: God is excluded, not to say denied, because He is unseen.

The resurrection of the dead, and yet more from the dead, is the grand weapon of faith against prevailing error and in favor of souls in danger of destruction. The God Who raised up Jesus from the dead is sending remission of sins through His name. To Him give all the prophets witness (how much more the gospel?), that everyone who believes on Him shall receive both the forgiveness he needs, and the life in Christ without which there can be no living to God. This alone is the true deliverance from Sadduceeism then, or from that which is akin at the present time.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 22:30 and 23:1-6

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It would appear that what excited the alarm of the commander and the centurion was the tying up Paul with the thongs. This was a great offense against a Roman citizen. "Because he had bound him," I understand to be for this purpose, for in an ordinary way it appears that he was not absolutely loosed. "But on the morrow desiring to know the certainty why he was accused of the Jews, he loosed him, and commanded the chief priests and all the council to come together, and brought Paul down and set [him] before them. And Paul, fixing his eyes on the council, said, Brethren, I have lived before God in all good conscience until this day. And the high priest Ananias commanded those that stood by him to smite his mouth. Then said Paul unto him, God is about to smite thee, whited wall. And dost thou sit judging me according to the law, and breaking the law commandest me to be smitten? And those that stood by said, Revilest thou God's high priest? and Paul said, I did not know, brethren, that he was high priest; for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of a ruler of thy people" (Acts 22:30-23:5).

It is scarcely supposed that this was a regular assemblage of the Sanhedrim; it was done hurriedly to meet a crisis. A military commander had no authority so to assemble the religious chiefs of the Jews. This may serve to explain what ordinarily would seem scarcely intelligible. Paul appears not to have known that the high priest was present. Had he been in his official robes, this could scarcely be understood; especially as we are told that Paul looked steadfastly at the council. If it were an informal meeting, neither high priest nor other may have worn any distinctive raiment.

Ananias is quite distinct from Annas the high priest in the earlier days of the Gospels; nor had he been so long appointed that Paul must have remembered him. He may have been a comparative stranger to the apostle, especially in his official capacity. But, what is of more importance to remark, the apostle's testimony was that he had lived before God in all good conscience unto this day: not a word about Christ or the gospel. It was thoroughly true. Even in his unconverted days we know that he could say, "Touching law, a Pharisee....touching righteousness that is in law, found blameless" Of this he thinks and speaks as he confronted the council. Surely it was not according to his new calling and that which was his life now. For Christ was all to him. He was thinking of the Jews; he declared what seemed thoroughly calculated to meet their thoughts. But it utterly failed, and the high priest Ananias commanded those that stood by to smite him on the mouth. This was an injurious insult, perpetrated by the judge, and in the teeth of the law. But it is not surprising that the apostle's words provoked the high priest; and none the less, because he was as far as possible from the conscientiousness of a Gamaliel.

But the apostle resented the contumely and reproved it severely. “God will smite thee, whited wall.” In every respect this was true. Ananias was no more than a hypocritical evildoer. Our Lord had made an allusion in Matthew 23:27 which will help us to understand this; and it appears that God did smite the hypocrite not long after.

As high priest he was sitting to judge Paul after the law, and there contrary to the law he commanded him to be smitten; but did Paul rise in his quick rebuke to the height of grace any more than of truth? The apostle is thoroughly righteous, but he descends rather to the same ground on which they stood; he had spoken with warmth however truly, so that the bystanders could say, “Revilest thou God’s high priest? And Paul said, I did not know, brethren, that he was high priest; for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of a ruler of thy people.” The apostle hastens to acknowledge the error, as far as it was such, whatever might be the unworthiness of the conduct and of the language that occasioned it. Still Ananias was high priest that day. This Paul owns. He ought not to have spoken so of one in that position. The word is plain, “Thou shalt not speak evil of a ruler of thy people.” Overruled of God and prophetic, was it Christ-like? Was it not rather the immediate resentment of a righteous man at an unrighteous deed? He at once apologizes, when he learned the official state of the judge however unjust. “I wist not,” and so on. But God loves to guide those who are kept immediately dependent on Him, even when they know nothing of the circumstances.

The apostle throughout scarcely seems to be breathing his ordinary spiritual atmosphere. This comes out still more plainly in what follows. “But when Paul perceived that the one part were of the Sadducees and the other of the Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees;1 concerning the hope and resurrection of [the] dead I am judged” (vs. 6). Here the root of the matter appears. The apostle avails himself of a rent between the two great parties of the Jews, to take the ground which would enlist the more orthodox and God-fearing in his favor, “I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees,” he cried. Was this again according to the height of the truth he preached and loved? It was incontestably true; but was it Christ all in all? was it not rather a prudent appeal sure to split up the crowd before him, for himself to fall back on a ground altogether lower than his wont? Nevertheless there was truth and important truth before all here. “I am judged concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead.” This thoroughly falls in with the book of the Acts. Luke begins here as his Gospel ends, with the resurrection and ascension, and gives full scope to the testimony of the risen Lord throughout. The apostle every where consistently urges the hope and resurrection of the dead. It was bound up with Christ, the Son of man; but he does not directly introduce the fall truth of His person any more than he puts forward at this time the resurrection “from” the dead. The resurrection “of” the dead is ft great and needed truth notwithstanding; and to this, not the Sadducees who now were in power, but the Pharisees in their way held firmly.

The apostle knew resurrection in an incomparably larger measure. To him it was inseparable from the glorified Christ, the Head of the church, who really was his life and his testimony; and for this he endured habitual rejection and suffering. But in Jerusalem the apostle is not found in the same power as elsewhere. The spirit of the place had its influence; in all this business we find him by no means according to that heavenly light which so shines throughout his accustomed orbit.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 22:23-29

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Early in this book we had in Peter a beautiful instance of a conscience purged by blood (Acts 3:13-14). So complete was it that he could openly tax the Jews with denying the Holy One and the Just. Had he not been guilty of this very sin himself in a more direct way than any other? Yes; but it was now wholly blotted out through the blood which cleanseth from all sin; and so conscious was he that it was gone before God, that he could without a blush charge the Jews with the sin, without a thought of himself save of infinite mercy towards him.

Similarly in the verse we had last before us the apostle Paul is another instance, if possible more touching, and no less instructive. He says to the Lord in his desire to preach the gospel to them, “They themselves know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue those that believed on Thee; and when the blood of Stephen, Thy witness, was shed, I also was standing by and consenting, and keeping the garments of those that slew him.” Not a trace of the guilt remains on his conscience. As Peter proved in preaching to others, so he, Paul, publicly states to the same people how he had spread it personally before the Lord as the ground on which he wished to be sent as a witness to his brethren after the flesh. But the Lord knew all perfectly. Paul was His chosen vessel, not to Jerusalem, but far hence unto the Gentiles. His conscience was perfectly purged; but the mind of the Lord alone is perfectly right and wise; and so here it was soon proved. “They gave him audience unto this word, and they lifted up their voices and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth; for it is not fit that he should live” (Acts 22).

Intimately familiar as the apostle was with the feelings of the Jews, he was at this time scarcely prepared for their implacable jealousy of the Gentiles. Yet was it what he himself was too conscious of in his unconverted days: the people were now where he was then. The change in him was so complete that he seems to have failed in realizing their condition. Christ was all to him. That they should so abhor the grace of God, rising above all man’s sin, whether Jewish or Gentile, is indeed astonishing, and the clearest proof that man is lost. Hatred of grace is in no way mitigated by intelligence, learning or religiousness. All these had united in Saul of Tarsus; and they might be found more or less in some of the Jews of Jerusalem. But the same pride of nature and abuse of God’s promises, which had led the nation to crucify the Messiah, hardened them now to reject and hate the gospel, above all the sending it to the Gentile no less than the Jew. “And as they cried out and threw off their garments and east dust into the air, the commander ordered him to be brought into the castle, directing that he should be examined by scourging, that he might know for what cause they had shouted thus against him And when they had tied him up with the thongs, Paul said unto the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful to scourge a man that is a Roman and uncondemned? And when the centurion heard it, he went to the commander and told him, saying, What art thou about to do? For this man is a Roman. And the commander came and said unto him, Tell me, art thou. a Roman? And he said, Yes. And the commander answered, With a great sum I obtained this citizenship. And Paul said, But I am (so) born. They then that were about to examine him immediately departed from him, and the commander also was afraid, when he knew that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him” (Acts 22:23-29).

The exasperation of the Jews is manifest in this striking scene. They were roused to the highest degree of feeling on behalf of their religion as they considered it. It is only the faith of Jesus which gives us to see things in God’s light. Had they measured themselves by this standard,

they must have been in the dust themselves, and owned that it was all over with them as a people. It was not only that they had failed in righteousness; they had rejected God come down among them in infinite love. Repentance, therefore, of the deepest kind alone became them. They would then have seen that it was not for a guilty people to judge of God's ways. They would have learned how admirably suited grace was, now that they were ruined in the last trial that God could make: Jehovah rejected of old by His own people, the Son come in love rejected, the Holy Spirit, with the gospel, all rejected. It is in vain to talk of law, or even promises, before the cross. Yet God is now free to save the lost who believe in Jesus, whatever they may be. Granted that the Jews had exceeding privileges and a distinctive covenant; but the Jew had been foremost in slaying Him in whom all the promises center, their securer and their crown. All relationship with God for man on the earth, and we may say for Israel especially, was broken and gone; but grace could shine from heaven, and call to heaven all who believe in Christ; and this is exactly what the gospel is now making good. There is a new head and a new calling; but all is in Christ above; and consequently earthly distinctions, as well as disabilities, are alike vanished away. If man universally, Jew or Gentile, is lost, the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which is lost. This, by the gospel, is effected for those who believe; and Paul's mission, being both the highest and the widest, was pre-eminently to the Gentile world. It was for this heavenly and indiscriminate task he was really fitted when awakened to see his intensely Jewish zeal, now judged in the light of, not only the cross, but the heavenly glory of Christ. He was the apostle of the uncircumcision. It was therefore a mistake to put himself forward specially before the Jews in Jerusalem, as before with the Lord in the vision.

But there is another element of interest in the passage. The commandant had given orders to examine the apostle by scourging, in order that the cause of the clamor against him might be found out. Paul has resort to a plea most natural, in order to escape pain and ignominy; for it was a serious breach of law that he a Roman, and uncondemned, should be tied up for scourging. Nothing can be calmer too than the manner in which he put it forward. There was no excitement, still less the smallest approach to the assertion of right, which was not unknown then, but has taken such a hold of men in our days. The centurion names it to the commander, who inquires and learns that, whilst he had bought, his own citizenship, Paul was a Roman born. This of course put an end to all thought of torture, and the commander was afraid because he had bound him. But was it the accustomed height of Christian truth on which the apostle stood? Where do we find an approach to it in his Epistles? and where does heavenly and suffering grace shine as in these? Present oneness with Christ effaces all our natural conditions: Jew or Greek, Scythian or barbarian, bond or free, what matters it? Christ is all, as He is in all that are His.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 22:17-22

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The remarkable vision with which Paul first began was by no means the only one; we learn here of another on his return to Jerusalem. 2 Corinthians 12 speaks of them also in a more general way. But what happened in Jerusalem he himself now proceeds to tell in detail. "And it came to pass that when I had returned to Jerusalem, and while I prayed in the temple, I fell into a trance and saw Him, saying unto me, Make haste and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem, because they will not receive of thee testimony concerning Me. And I said, Lord, they themselves know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue those that believe on Thee; and when the blood of Stephen Thy witness was shed, I also was standing by and consenting,1 and keeping the garments of those that slew him. And He said unto me, Depart, for I will send thee forth far hence unto the Gentiles. And they gave him audience unto this word; and they lifted up their voices and said, Away with such [a fellow] from the earth; for it is not fit that he should live" (Acts 22:17-22).

The incident at Jerusalem is full of interest spiritually, because it communicates the perfect ease and intimacy in which scripture sets forth the relations of the servant with the Master. It would have been easy to have suppressed the account, if it had not been of standing moment and general value. The statement of it had the most distressing effect on the Jews who had listened till then. This excited their indignation to the highest. Nevertheless, as we see, the apostle brought it plainly out to vindicate the direction of his labors without limit as apostle to the Gentiles. We may be quite sure that naturally he had as great a reluctance to go at the word of the Lord on such an errand as the Jews had to hear about it. Traditionally the Jew was everything in the matter of religion; all this feeling and the ground of it was overthrown in the cross of Christ. How true, as the apostle wrote to the Corinthians in his Second Epistle 5:17, "The old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new; and all things are of God, Who reconciled us unto Himself by Christ, and gave unto us the ministry of reconciliation." The power of such a ministry is especially shown, not in abiding at Jerusalem, but in going out toward the Gentiles wherever they may be; for we are not Israelites, nor yet the lost sheep of that house. We are not the people, but rather in comparison "dogs" according to the law. Now, however, all is changed. It is the gospel; and all things are become new. As the mission of our apostle is for heaven, so is his direction towards the Gentiles.

No wonder that he himself shrank even in the presence of the Lord; but so Paul is to learn in his trance at the temple of Jerusalem. "Make haste," said the Lord, "and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem, because they will not receive of thee testimony concerning Me." This was very painful to the apostle's heart; others had tasted similar sorrow even before Christianity. Moses knew it in early days, though the stiffneckedness of the Jews then was as nothing compared with what it was proved at the cross. And afterward Jeremiah and others of the prophets drank enough of this cup to feel the bitterness and grief. But Paul was as remarkable as Moses for the love of Israel, and tasted the bitterness of the Jew more than any of their prophets. In divine ways he was just the more to be sent as Christ's ambassador to the Gentiles. Had he loved Israel less, he had not been so fit for the new and heavenly mission. In everything it must be above nature to represent grace in any measure aright.

How little those that saw or knew of Paul evangelizing the Gentiles appreciated the feelings with which he had entered on the work! "And I said, Lord, themselves know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believe on Thee." His heart yearned over Israel, his burning desire was to have labored in their midst. When the Lord had told him to retire from Jerusalem, because the Jews would not receive of him testimony concerning Christ, he even pleads that he was just the man to go to Jerusalem, that themselves knew how he had hated the way, how he had imprisoned and beat in every synagogue the believers. Yea more, he summons up the most terrible tale of persecuting zeal as the crowning reason to be allowed to preach to the Jews, and as a reason why they must surely welcome him if no other preacher of the gospel. "And when the blood of Stephen Thy witness was shed, I also was standing by and consenting, and keeping the garments of those

that slew him." It is evident that Paul used all this as standing him in good stead to labor among the Jews. But He that made the heart knew best, better far than Paul, and He said unto him, "Depart; for I will send thee forth far hence unto the Gentiles." The determining word was spoken: whatever might be Paul's feeling, he now learns the will of the Lord concerning his labors. It was not merely now, Get thee quickly out of Jerusalem, but "I will send thee forth far hence unto the Gentiles." No Israelite more fervently sought to commend the gospel to the Jews; no servant pleaded for it more earnestly with his Master. The freedom with which he appeals is a standing lesson to us of the liberty into which the gospel brings us. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." But we should also learn that the gospel leaves no uncertainty for the path and the service. The true light shines. Christ is the way, as well as the truth and the life, and He is not mere truly the way to the Father than in Paul's case toward the Gentiles. The gospel is heavenly light shining into the heart and on the path here below.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 22:11-16

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We have already seen in commenting on Acts 9. what an important event took place that day: a distinct and fresh step in the ways of God for bringing out the church (already formed, it is true) into manifestation by his ministry who was then converted so extraordinarily that divines treat it as one of the standing and most striking evidences of the truth of Christianity.

Still all was not done even as regards. Saul of Tarsus; the basis was laid, but no more. The blindness physically which had come upon him was to be taken away; and assuredly very much more light spiritually was yet to shine into his soul; but the principle that was to be folly developed in due time was already involved in the character of the word of the Lord to him. "And as I could not see for the glory of the light, being led by the hand of those that were with me, I came into Damascus; and one Ananias, a pious man according to the law, borne witness to by all the Jews that dwelt there, came unto me, and standing by said to me, Brother Saul, receive thy sight: and in the very hour I looked upon him. And he said, The God of our fathers hath appointed thee to know His will and to see the Righteous One, and to hear a voice from His mouth. For thou shalt be a witness for Him to all men of what thou hast seen and heard. And now, why tarriest thou? Arise, and get baptized, and have thy sins washed away, calling on His name" (Acts 22:11-16).

As Paul was to be, beyond all others, a witness of Christ to the Gentiles, so God took special care to remove from every fair upright man all suspicion of collusion on the part of any Jew. Outwardly the vision of glory was unmistakable before many witnesses. What passed between the Lord and His servant was necessarily confined to Saul alone of the company. But divine wisdom apprised Ananias of what had happened, independently of Saul and of every other on earth. We are not told here of his fasting for three days and nights; but the fact was patent that by the hand of those that were with him he had to be led into Damascus. That blindness furnished occasion for a fresh display of divine power. The channel of it was a simple disciple; yet was he a devout man according to the law, and well reported of by all the Jews that dwelt there. Unsought, he came; and standing by him who was blind he said, "Brother Saul, receive thy sight"; and the word was with power: Paul received his sight and looked upon him. In Acts 9, we hear of the vision that Saul had, preparing for the visit of Ananias, as the same chapter lets us know that Ananias had a vision in which the Lord sent him, by no means willing, without delay to Saul. For it was well known at Damascus, as well as Jerusalem, what a zealous persecutor of the church was the learned Jew of Tarsus—now a man of prayer.

Here again, we have the beautiful fruit of confidence in the word of the Lord. "Brother Saul" —how refreshing it must have been to the heart of the converted zealot! The key to what is here stated, and to what is omitted, is the design: the apostle recounts his conversion to the Jews. "The God of our fathers" appears here alone. It was He, as Ananias said, and not another, Who had appointed him to know His will, and to see the Righteous One, and to hear a voice out of His mouth. It is much more than simply that the Lord, even Jesus, had appeared to him in the way which be came. Here we learn, too, that Ananias told the apostle before he was baptized that he should be a witness for Christ unto all men of what he had seen and heard. This ought to have prepared the Jews for the direction given to Paul's ministry. Would they have him resist the "God of our fathers" and His known will? There were two witnesses, by whose mouth every word should be established. In Acts 9 his commission is named to Ananias by the Lord; but the historian does not there mention that this was repeated to the apostle. Here we learn that it was so, for he repeats it himself. Everything comes exactly in place and season.

In Acts 9 we are told that when he received his sight, he arose and was baptized, and took food and was strengthened, as well as that all-important fact that he was then and there filled with the Holy Spirit. There is no apostolic succession in this case assuredly. Ananias was but a disciple. God was acting extraordinarily in the case of Paul. Jewish order was quite set aside for the apostle of the Gentiles; yet none but the enemy of grace and truth could deny that he was an apostle, with a calling at least as high as the twelve, and called to a work incomparably more vast and profound.

Here also we have the interesting fact of the terms in which Ananias called him to submit to baptism, on which a few words may be well, as to some there is no small difficulty. The reason of the departure from the A.V., as well as the R.V., however slight, is an endeavor to express the force of the Middle Voice, as it is called in Greek. This however is independent of the doctrinal difficulty to some in calling on the apostle to have his sins washed away in baptism. Why should this seem hard? It is what baptism always means, though indeed it means yet more, even death to sin, as the apostle himself treats it in Romans 6. Baptism is the sign of salvation, as another apostle teaches, who carefully lets us know in the same context that the effectual work rests on Christ's death and resurrection (1 Pet: 3.). Without faith no doubt all is valueless before God; but however precious may be that which faith receives through the word, the outward sign has its importance. So much is this so, that no one stands on the external ground of a Christian, who has not been baptized with water to the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. To refuse baptism is to despise the authority of the Lord, as unbelief slights His grace. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; he that believeth not, even if baptized, shall be damned (or condemned).

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 22:6-10

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The apostle now recounts his own marvelous conversion; and as it was addressed to Jews, it is presented in a way suited to disarm their prejudices, if this were possible.

“And it came to pass, as I was journeying and drawing near to Damascus, that about mid-day there suddenly shone out of heaven a great light round about me; and I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying to me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me? And I answered, Who art Thou, Lord? And He said unto me, I am Jesus, the Nazarene, Whom thou persecutest. Now they that were with me beheld the light,1 but did not hear the voice of Him that was speaking to me. And I said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said unto me, Rise up, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which it hath been appointed for thee to do” (Acts 22:6-10).

Thus here the intimation is that it was about mid-day, still more precisely than we were told in Acts 9:3. This makes the vision far more striking. It was not a trance, but an open fact. The light which shone round about him out of heaven transcended the sun at mid-day, in the presence of men who were traveling with him. Deception was impossible. As far as we know, he, and he only, was converted thereby. The voice addressed no other at that time; and here it is particularly said that the rest heard not the voice of Him that was speaking to him. The same historian, who gives this as the distinct statement of the apostle, had himself told us that his fellow-travelers stood speechless, hearing the voice but beholding no one. This to a casual reader looks like a discrepancy; but a reader must be careless indeed, or bent on evil, who does not perceive that the two statements are altogether in harmony beneath the surface. In chap. ix. we learn that his companions heard a sound, and no more; and in our present chapter2 we learn that he alone heard the voice of Him that spoke to him. To the others it was inarticulate; to him it was not only intelligible, but the turning point of a life beyond all others rich in testimony to His grace who spoke to him.

For the time was now fully come for a new step in God’s ways. The heavenly glory of Christ was to be seen by a chosen witness called by Him in sovereign mercy from on high, the persecutor from the midst of his religiously rebellious career. It is grace no doubt in every case where the soul is brought from darkness into the marvelous light of God. But here all the truth shines with the utmost brilliancy. Stephen closed his testimony with a sight of Jesus in the glory of God. Saul begins his testimony for Jesus with Him seen in the same glory. It reminds one somewhat of the two prophets of old, one of whom ended his course with being taken up to heaven, whilst the other commenced it from that glorious sight which gave him thenceforth such a mighty impulse. It was none the less remarkable in the present case, because Saul had been privy to the death of Stephen, and kept the clothes of the false witnesses who stoned him whose spirit went up to the Lord Whose glory he had just seen and testified.

And if a brief interval elapsed after Stephen’s death, it was filled up by Saul still breathing threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord. Nevertheless the light out of heaven suddenly shone out round about him now. Smitten to the earth, he heard the voice say to him, “Saul, Saul, why persecutest then Me?” Embittered though he was with tradition and prejudice, he could not but ask with astonishment, “Who art Thou, Lord?” No man was ever more assured that he was rendering service to God in patting out of the synagogue, or even killing, the disciples. He had a good conscience according to the law, in the zeal that persecuted the church (Phil. 3). As yet he knew neither the Father nor the Son. The True Light had never entered his soul. But now the light which shone round about him was but the harbinger of a better glory invisible to human eyes, “the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” His companions saw the outward brightness; they did not behold that which none can see, unless they are, by the power of God, brought out of darkness into it.

To his amazement he learned that He Who spoke, whom he could not but acknowledge to be the Lord of all, was the very Jesus Whom he was persecuting. For thus He was known in the persons of His own: Christ and the church are one. Immense discovery! and so much the more, in circumstances so unparalleled. The enemy broken down and henceforth obedient to the heavenly vision, he has Christ in glory, God’s Son, revealed, not to him only, but in him. See Gal. 1:16. He is life, and the Christian is one with Him. If it was true of the disciples whom he persecuted, it was no less true of their persecutor, now himself a disciple. “He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit.” When we see the Lord at His coming again, we shall be like Him, even in body changed into the same image. If we are being transformed now, even as by the Lord the Spirit, we shall be conformed then to the Lord and by the Lord; for we shall see Him as He is (2 Cor. 3, 1 John 3).

These great principles were all involved in the apostle’s vision, though of course it is not meant that they were all unveiled to his spirit at the moment. But in due time no one knew better, nor so well; though these truths were thus conveyed, and in the most powerful way, in that great fact, incalculable in its bearing on the church, and even for the world. For who of all men ever made good a commission so unlimited as the apostle’s? It was felt and acknowledged by the twelve, that he was the apostle of the uncircumcision, as truly as they of the circumcision. This in no way precluded their seeking the good of the Gentiles; still less did it hinder him from labors abundant among the Jews, as every place, we may say, testified where there were Jews. But it did mark the characteristic breadth of his mission. He might seek to build up the church in entire and heavenly separation from the world; but it was his beyond any man to fulfill the word of his Master, “Go out to all the world, and preach the gospel to all the creation.”

What an appeal, too, his own account of his conversion was to the crowd of Jews that were then listening! None could deny the facts; the high priest could not but bear witness; all the elderhood of Israel in Jerusalem would have gladly contradicted if they could. The letters he received to his Jewish brethren could not be gainsayed, any more than his own bitter persecution of the Christian way unto death, as well as prison. The companions of his journey to Damascus, why were they silent? If they heard not the words of Jesus, they were not deaf to the preternatural sound; they did see the light above the brightness of the sun shine round about them all. But all wonders fail to convert the heart to God. It is the voice of Christ that quickens the dead; and now is the hour for quickening souls; as by and by there will come another hour, when the voice of the Son shall summon from the grave those that have done good to a resurrection of life, and those that have done evil to a resurrection of judgment, which last act of Christ solemnly closes the history of this world. But sovereign grace is now awakening the souls that hear the word of the Lord; and as this was manifested in the most extraordinary manner to Saul of Tarsus, so was he called in the highest degree to be a minister of God’s sovereign grace, and of Christ’s heavenly glory. “And I said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said unto me, Rise up, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which it hath been appointed thee to do.” Here again was a singular break with all the apostolic antecedents. The Lord commanded no return to Jerusalem. Saul must enter Damascus and there, not through a previous apostle, still less the apostolic college, but, through a disciple set in no high position, learn what it had been appointed for

him to do.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 22:1-5

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

In the earlier part of this book we had the history of the apostle's conversion in its historical order, bearing profoundly upon the progress of the gospel, and the revelation of Christian truth. Here we have it as a part of his defense before the people of Israel. It has therefore a specific object, marked by the use of the Hebrew language, which accounts for its other peculiarities. Discrepancy there is really none, any more than in other parts of scripture; the appearance is due solely to the difference of design, which here is most obvious, as it undeniably is later in the book. In Acts 26 we have a short account modified by the fact that it was addressed to the king, Herod Agrippa the younger, as well as to the Roman governor. Whatever peculiarities have been observed, they are due to the same cause. The same principle in fact applies to the treatment of every object among men of intelligence. Scripture only adopts the same rule, but in a perfection to which men are unequal. Our place as believers is to learn by that which offends incredulity against all reason. "Brethren and fathers, hear ye the defense that I now make unto you (and when they heard that he spake to them in the Hebrew language, they were the more quiet, and he saith), I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, and brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, instructed according to strictness of the law of the fathers, being zealous for God even as all ye are today. And I persecuted this way unto death, binding and delivering unto prisons both men and women, as also the high priest beareth me witness, and all the elderhood, from whom also I received letters from the brethren for Damascus to bring those also that were there, bound to Jerusalem that they might be punished" (Acts 22:1-5).

There was a providential training in the apostle's case as in others, but strikingly manifest in him who was a Jew, not a Gentile proselyte. He was born in Tarsus, a renowned center of letters and philosophy at that day. But he was brought up in Jerusalem, at the feet of the most celebrated Rabbi of his day. Yet if Gamaliel was learned and strict as an orthodox Pharisee, we have already had remarkable proof, quite apart from the apostle, of his singular moderation; when the Sadducees began to persecute the faith. It is not often erudite men are equally known for prudence, still less for the wisdom which brought in God, not formally, but with conscience; and God used it completely to turn away the council from their unbelieving and sanguinary thoughts. It was at his feet that he was brought up who was to be the Holy Spirit's witness to the grace of God in our Lord Jesus as no other man was since the world began.

His early training in Jerusalem would have conveyed no such presentiment to mortal eyes: he was instructed according to the strictness of the law of the fathers. If the Pharisees of Jerusalem were zealous beyond all others, he was yet more so; but in truth when faith came, he could all the better realize the complete change from law to grace. Those who never pierced below the surface of the one fail to appreciate the other; they are apt to mingle the two—the great bane of Christianity, whence law is no more law, and grace is no more grace. Law is the demand of human righteousness. Grace has now revealed God's righteousness, and this only is what the apostle designates the righteousness which is of faith; for Christ is the end of the law to righteousness for every one that believeth. It is not a question of man's effort, still less of his performance. He is not called to ascend to heaven, any more than to descend into the abyss. It was Christ Who came down, even as Christ risen from the dead is gone up, and we become God's righteousness in Him. Salvation is wholly of Christ; it is what God loves to do—cannot but do consistently with His character in virtue of the work of Christ. The word therefore is nigh thee in thy mouth, and in thy heart, not the word that man prepares for God, but the word which God sends to be preached. "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." Thus has God indeed dealt, and can afford to deal, with sinners. It is His grace, but it is also His righteousness.

Now the more deeply Saul of Tarsus studied the law, and entered into its righteous inexorable claims on man, the more he felt himself awakened to the impossibility of salvation ender law. It was weak through the flesh, and must be bondage; bitter hopelessness could only result when conscience became enlightened. For salvation is altogether a question for God, Who, sending His own Son, in the likeness of sinful flesh, and as an offering for sin, condemned sin in the flesh. Thus only could there be salvation. The law was able to do nothing but condemn the sinner. The gospel proclaims sin condemned, root and fruit, and the believer saved, and set free to walk, not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. It was exactly therefore such a zealot of law, who, when his eyes were opened by grace, could see and appreciate to the full, the deliverance of the gospel. The same principle applies even now, though there is no doubt an incalculable distance between the apostle and other saints howsoever blest, in our day or any other. Still the men who most enjoy and are best fitted to set forth the gospel, are often those who were deeply attached, in the days of their ignorance, to law and ordinances, which necessarily gender bondage, where there is the exercised conscience.

And this must have told powerfully upon the Jews who weighed the apostle's address. The apostle had never been a careless light-hearted Israelite; as his training was most strict, so his personal zeal was thorough. Indeed he had given the fullest proof, for he persecuted this way unto death. None like Saul of Tarsus, who was so active in binding and delivering into prisons both men and women. He was just a sample in the highest degree of those that have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. Who could speak therefore like him for personal experience to men ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own? So much the more did he now subject himself to the righteousness of God.

Nor could the high priest himself ignore the fact, but rather bear witness, and all the elderhood too; for he reminds them that he also received letters to the brethren, that is, the Jews elsewhere, and journeyed to Damascus to bring also those that were there to Jerusalem in bonds, in order to be punished. He who was to go out to all the world with the gospel, could not rest in his legal zeal within the bounds of Jerusalem or Judaea.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 21:27-40

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

It was a singular sight, Paul purifying himself to show that he walked orderly and kept the law. He was evidently walking according to the thoughts of others, which no more glorifies God than it satisfies man. “And when the seven days were almost completed, the Jews from Asia when they saw him in the temple stirred up all the multitude and laid hands on him, crying out, Men of Israel, help. This is the man that teacheth all everywhere against the people, and the law, and this place; and moreover he brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath defiled this holy place. For they had before seen with him in the city Trophimus the Ephesian, whom they supposed that Paul brought into the temple.1 And the whole city was moved, and the people ran together, and they laid hold on Paul and dragged him out of the temple; and forthwith the doors were shut. And as they were seeking to kill him, tidings came up to the chief officer (chiliarch) of the cohort, that the whole of Jerusalem was in confusion, and immediately be took soldiers and centurions, and ran down upon them; and they, when they saw the chief officer and the soldiers, ceased beating Paul. Then the chief officer came near and laid hold on him, and commanded him to be bound with two chains, and inquired who he might be, and what he had done. And some shouted one thing, and some another, among the crowd. And when he could not know the certainty because of the uproar, he commanded him to be brought into the castle (literally, camp). And when he came upon the steps, so it was that he was borne upon the soldiers, because of the violence of the crowd. For the multitude of the people followed after, crying out, Away with him” (Acts 21:27-36).

No more devoted servant of the Lord ever lived. This however did not hinder the effects of a mistaken position. He had departed from those to whom the Lord sent him, out of his excessive love for the ancient people of God. At the instance of others he had sought to conciliate them to the uttermost, but the effect in no way answered to the desire either of James or of Paul. Can we say that in going up to Jerusalem, there was such a following of Christ as he loved to commend to the saints? “Be ye imitators of me, even as I also am of Christ.” When the Lord went up for His last and fatal visit, how great the difference! He cast out all them that sat and bought in the temple, He overthrew the tables of the money changers, and of them that sold doves; He healed the blind and lame that came to Him. There He confounded those that demanded His authority, He laid before them—the proudest—their inferiority to the publicans and harlots whom they despised, and set out their past and present history in the light of God, so that they could not but own the miserable destruction which impended over their wickedness, and the passing away of God’s vineyard to other husbandmen, who should render to Him the fruits in their seasons. And whatever their enmity, they feared the multitude because they took Him for a prophet. And when the chief religions leaders came in succession to tempt Him, He silenced them, Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians; and wound up the entire scene by the great test question for the Jews, how David’s son could be, as He incontestibly is, David’s Lord. A question which no Jew was able to answer then, any more than from that day to the present. Hence He could only pronounce woes upon their actual state, and on their proved rain prophesy of the kingdom which He is Himself to bring in as the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory.

Undoubtedly, none the less was He rejected and crucified, but He was the faithful witness. There was not a shadow of a compromise: He said nothing, did nothing, seemed nothing, but the truth to the glory of God. He witnessed a good confession before Pontius Pilate, the high priest of Israel having shown himself baser and more cruel than the most hard-hearted heathen, who condemned the Lord to be crucified.

Yet assuredly the apostle loved the Lord, and answered to His mind as no man did, even among the apostles; still he was a man; and human feeling in its most estimable shape betrays him into, I will not say, a contrast with, but, a deflection from, our Lord in Jerusalem. For Christ, whatever the depth of His humiliation, oh! what triumph hung on His decease which He accomplished there.

For Paul it was not death at Jerusalem, but the hatred which threw him into the hands of the Gentiles to be, as yet a prisoner only, not yet to die, though ultimately what befell him among the Gentiles was his true glory, and there he suffered simply and solely a witness for the truth. He had his heart’s desire, the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings, becoming conformed unto His death. “And as Paul was about to be brought into the castle, he said unto the chief officer, May I say something unto thee? He said, Dost thou know Greek? Thou art not then the Egyptian who before these days stirred up to sedition, and led out into the wilderness, the four thousand men of the assassins (or Sicarii)? But Paul said, I am a Jew of Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city; and I beseech thee give me leave to speak unto the people. And when he had given him leave, Paul standing on the steps beckoned with his hand unto the people, and when there was great silence, he spake unto them in the Hebrew tongue, saying” (Acts 21:37-40).

Here again Paul takes very different ground from that which was his wont, he pleads his Jewish race to the commander. Elsewhere who so firm to hold to the grand truth that Christ is all? who more completely above any human distinction or plea in the service of the Lord? It was Paul the apostle indeed, yet not here in the Gentile province assigned him, but in Jerusalem, seeking to reconcile the irreconcilable. There is the weakness of one who was strong by grace beyond all others on his own ground.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 21:21-26

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

The apostle could say, “If any man preacheth any gospel other than this which we preach, let him be anathema” (Gal. 1:9). A different gospel is not another. It is the abandonment of what Paul preached, or a human substitute for it. It may be questioned whether any other apostle could speak so absolutely. Paul preached what they preached, but one may fairly doubt that they preached all that Paul preached. If we bear in mind the special manner of his conversion and truth therein revealed, it helps to understand this. He commenced with a Savior in glory, and had the wondrous truth communicated to him from the first, that Christ and the Christian are one. “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?” A saint now is also a member of Christ’s body. This the others learned; but the apostle Paul had it revealed to him from the starting point, and was the Lord’s special instrument for carrying it out in the world. It was not “the gospel of God” only, rich as this expression is, but “the gospel of the glory of Christ.”

It was Christ, known no more after the flesh, but risen and glorified. Gentile darkness and Jewish law were left behind, and even promise was eclipsed by a brightness far beyond it. It was grace in its fullest exercise and highest splendor in the person of Christ, with Whom we are associated in the closest relationship, Christ the Head over all things, but the Head given to the church which is His body. The church is not among the "all things," but united with Him Who is over all things, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all. Hence the apostle preached the gospel of the glory of Christ as none other is reported to have done. This comes out very distinctly in 2 Corinthians 3-5. Substantially it appears in the Epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians; but there it is rather called the mystery of the gospel. "This mystery is great," says he, "but I speak of Christ and of the church." He being the exalted head, she being His body and bride, the church is even now one with Him. For the church He gave Himself up, that He might sanctify it, having cleansed it by the washing of water by the word, that He might present the church to Himself glorious, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish.

The glory of Christ on high is the answer to His humiliation below, whatever else may follow. Nor is there any witness to it so bright. Hence the apostle speaks of "my gospel," and "our gospel" where he names his companions along with himself. It was given him to preach it in all its height of blessedness; and hence the danger of letting it slip, if even one that once knew it begins to preach grace at a lower level only, true as it may be. Nothing so completely lifts above the tradition and the thoughts of men.

Hence the danger even to the apostle himself when in Jerusalem. Another atmosphere was breathed there. It is not that they did not confess Jesus to be the Christ, and look for His kingdom and glory; but out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. "And they said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many myriads there are among the Jews of those that believe, and they are all zealous for the law. And they have been informed concerning thee, that thou teachest all Jews that are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs" (Acts 21:20-21). This witness was true as far as they themselves were concerned; but what they were informed of Paul was an exaggeration. Whatever his sense of Christian liberty, none was more tolerant of Jewish conscience; on the other hand, none more resolute to teach the Gentile believers that they had nothing to do with law, but with Christ dead and risen. What on earth had Gentile believers to do with circumcision, or the other institutions and customs of Israel? For heaven, as in heaven, all this was unknown.

As the full grace of God preached by the apostle startled not a few of the saints in Jerusalem, a gloss was sought to prove that he was a good Jew notwithstanding. "What is it therefore? They will certainly hear that thou art come. Do thou this that we say to thee: We have four men with a vow on them, these take and purify thyself with them, and be at charges over them, that they may shave their heads, and all shall know that there is no truth in the things whereof they have been informed concerning thee, but that thou thyself also walkest orderly keeping the law" (Acts 21:22-24).

This was not strange advice for the Christians in Jerusalem to give, but it seems a descending path for the apostle Paul to follow. No one knew better than he to walk as dead with Christ and risen with Him; no one better than he to please the Lord without fear of the opinions of men, or even of his brethren. With him it was a very small thing to be examined of others or of himself. Had he looked to the Lord for His guidance now, perhaps he would have advised James and the rest to judge nothing before the time till the Lord come, Who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the heart; and then shall each have the praise from God. Indeed it is doubtful whether anything done as a witness to ourselves (and this seems the gist of James' counsels to Paul) is ever blest of God or satisfies man. We shall see what the issue was in this instance. In their past dealings with the Gentiles who believed (Acts 15), they had acted with divine wisdom. So it is here added, "But, as touching the Gentiles which believed we wrote, giving judgment, that they should keep themselves from things sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication." These injunctions were clearly understood, before the law was even given to Israel. It was not natural religion which ignores sin and the fall. For God man needs revelation; but in such things Christianity only confirms the broad principles God had laid down before Israel existed.

"Then Paul took the men, and the next day purifying himself with them went into the temple, declaring the fulfillment of the days of the purification until the offering was offered for every one of them" (Acts 21:26).

The apostle yielded to his Jewish brethren. It was in no way a step which flowed from his own judgment before God; and we shall see that it was wholly in vain as far as the Jews were concerned. No doubt there was misunderstanding on their part; but we can scarcely say, whatever one's reverence for the apostles, that the light of the Lord shone upon the course that was then recommended or pursued. Their conduct might not be without failure in this or that particular; whilst their teaching, beyond all doubt in what was written in the Spirit for the permanent direction of the church, was perfectly guarded from the least error. "We are of God" (said one of them): "he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth us not. By this we know the Spirit of truth, and the spirit of error" (1 John 4:6). This is stringent, but it is the truth; and, if so, it is really grace to let all saints know that there is such a standard not Christ's person only, but the apostolic word. If we truly confess Him, we shall surely hear them: if we refuse them, we do not really own Him Who sent and inspired them. If we reject Him and them, we are irretrievably lost, and guiltier than Jews or heathen, who had not such privileges. For the true light now shines. God is fully revealed in Christ, and the written word makes both known.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 21:15-20

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The apostle now passes on to that city which had so large a part in his affections, or at least the saints there, little as it might be conceived by those who saw in him only the apostle of the uncircumcision. "And after these days we took up (or made ready) our baggage, and went up to Jerusalem" (Acts 21:15). "Our carriages" would convey a mistaken impression to ears familiar with modern English only. It is possible that at the time of our Authorized Version, the word was used in a double sense, as has been suggested; not only as now for the vehicle which carries, but also for what was carried in it. The Old Testament likewise contains the word in its old meaning, which of course is found in profane writers of that day also. "And there went with us also (certain) disciples from Caesarea, bringing one Mnason of Cyprus, an early disciple, with whom we should lodge" (vs. 16). An "old" disciple is certainly not exact, and may not even be true, ἀρχαίω expressing not his

age as a man, but his discipleship from the beginning. It is interesting thus to find incidentally that Cyprus had been blest of God, not only through the visits of Paul and Barnabas, but even before.

“And when we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly; and the day following Paul went in with us unto James, and all the elders were present; and when he had saluted them, he explained one by one the things which God wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry; and when they heard it, they glorified God” (Acts 21:17-20). Here we see in full vigor the love and honor which reigned among the saints. Not that there were not trials and special trials in those days: it could not be otherwise. In this world no difference of a religious character could compare for depth with that which severed Jews from Gentiles. God Himself under the law had maintained the separation to the full, as our Lord did up to the cross. This closed the old to introduce the new—the order of grace and of the new creation in Christ which the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven carried out in power and joy and intelligence. Thenceforward Christ becomes all, and indeed He is worthy, as He is all; so is He in all; and the distinction of Jew and Greek, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, bond and free, vanish in Him before God. Yet is there nothing which Christians find so difficult to apprehend and enjoy and practice as Christianity. Nevertheless the Spirit given to every Christian is not a spirit of fear nor of bondage, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind, with Christ before our eyes. The path may be difficult, but as it is true, so is it the exercise of love; and it is all a question of appreciating Christ, and of applying the truth in a spirit of grace. As the law was given by Moses, grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. We have only to believe, not to fear man, any more than to pursue our own thoughts!

The word of God is now revealed as a full answer to Christ, and by the Spirit will be found to solve every difficulty in detail. In no place, however, were the difficulties greater than in Jerusalem, the natural focus of extreme Jewish feeling. Thither the apostle had come, animated by strong feelings of love and pity for his nation, as he himself explains in Acts 24:17. “Now after many years I came to bring alms to my nation, and offerings.” This was hardly his proper calling, though the love which led to it always wrought powerfully in his heart, as we know from Galatians 2 and other scriptures.

But there was another reason which made it critical for the apostle. His assigned province was toward the Gentiles (compare Gal. 2:7-9); and certainly the Holy Spirit had given many warnings through prophets along the road. No man, no apostle even, is strong, save in dependence on the Lord; as he said himself, “When I am weak, then am I strong.” For Christ’s “strength is made perfect in weakness.” And Paul above all could say, “Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.” But it is instructive to see that Antioch proved a dangerous place for Peter, as Jerusalem did even for Paul. The Lord wrought effectually in Peter, yet it was mainly and conspicuously for the apostleship of the circumcision. He wrought by Paul also assuredly with the Gentiles, if He ever wrought mightily by man on the earth.

But we anticipate. The arrival of Paul and his party in Jerusalem received a hearty welcome from the brethren. It would appear that James’ house was the known place for any special gathering of elders at any rate; as we heard of a meeting for prayer at the house of Mary, mother of John Mark (Acts 12). “The following day accordingly Paul went in with us,” it is said, “unto James”, and all the elders were present,” There must have been very many groups of Christian Jews in Jerusalem, where their numbers were now to be counted by thousands. Large buildings, appropriated to the assembly, were as yet, it would seem, unknown. The present occasion however was not for the meeting of the assembly; only the elders were present. They no doubt came from those many groups, and their meeting together as elders would powerfully contribute to keep up order and unity, without in the least degree superseding, while truth governed in a spirit of grace, the responsibility of the assembly. We can readily understand that James’ house was a suited place for such to meet. The verse does not give us the impression of an assemblage on this occasion only, though it was very likely that the news of Paul coming and come might account for “all the elders” being present at this time. There are constant wants which would call for the meeting of the elders ordinarily; but this occasion of course had the extraordinary element of Paul’s presence.

“And when he had saluted them, he explained one by one the things which God wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry.” There was perfect openness on his part. No effort to put prominently forward what God had wrought among the Jews or in the synagogues. He spread before them particularly what had been given him to do among the nations. Doubtless this was intended of the Lord to enlarge their hearts. They were accustomed in Jerusalem to see or hear but little of their Gentile brethren. The apostle put it forward carefully; and when they heard it, they glorified “God” —for this appears to be the true reading, rather than “the Lord.”

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 21:8-14

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

What we have see1 was the voyage of Paul and his companions; that which follows is their land journey. “And on the morrow we departed and came into Caesarea; and entering into the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, we abode with him” (Acts 21:8).

The words of the inspired writer are full and distinct. From their precision one might think it impossible that any intelligent mind could fail to discern the person meant; yet no less a one than the father of ecclesiastical history contrived to misunderstand the verse, and to confound Philip the evangelist with Philip the apostle. It is no pleasure to point out a lapse so strange and unaccountable in an intelligent reader of scripture; but it becomes a duty to notice the error, and urge its importance as a warning to those who cry up the authority of patristic tradition. Indisputably Eusebius was neither better nor worse than most of the Christian fathers. For superstitious eyes he has the advantage of holding a decidedly early place amongst them; for he flourished in the days of the Emperor Constantine. No ancient MS. of the Greek New Testament that survives was written before his day; and but two can pretend to be as early. Yet it is plain that, with the text as it stands before him, he grossly erred, not on a point of nice doctrine, but in a plain matter of fact. For we are here told that the Philip, with whom the apostles’ party stayed, was not the evangelist only, but one of the seven i.e. one of the seven men appointed by the apostles for diaconal service during the days of first love, soon after Pentecost.

If the unquestionable meaning of scripture could be thus overlooked, and so serious a mistake find its way into his history, what confidence ought to be reposed in any alleged facts or statements outside the scriptures? Not that any evil object is imputed to that historian; but the circumstance proves that in those days, as in our own, there is deplorable ignorance of God's word where one might least expect it. Patristic authority in divine things is no more reliable than modern systematic divinity. The value of scripture practically as well as dogmatically is incalculable. It is the standard as well as source of truth.

"Now this man had four daughters, virgins, who did prophesy; and, as we tarried many days, there came down from Judaea a certain prophet named Agabus; and coming to us and taking Paul's girdle, he bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, so shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and deliver him into the hands of [the] Gentiles" (Acts 21:9-11).

The fact stated in the 9th verse deserves full consideration. Philip had four unmarried daughters, of whom it is declared that they prophesied; that is, they had the highest form of gift for acting on souls from God. Such prophesying was yet more than teaching or preaching. We cannot doubt, therefore, that they used their gift on the one hand; and on the other that it was forbidden to use it in the assembly. "It is shameful," had Paul written in his First Epistle to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 14:34-35), "for a woman to speak in [the] assembly." At Corinth it seems that some were bold enough to attempt this and other innovations; but it also seems to have been at that time a very unusual and unheard of notion. In general, Christian women understood their place better in these early days. Still there might arise some such desire here or there. At any rate the apostle felt it necessary in his First Epistle to Timothy to write (chap. ii. 12), "I permit not a woman to teach, nor to exercise authority over a man, but to be in quietness." The word αὐθεντεῖν does not convey the "usurpation," but the possession or exercise, of power, where it does not mean committing murder. The woman is not set in authority, nor is she to act as if she were. As to this there can be no dispute for subject minds. "If any one thinketh himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize the things which I write unto you, that it is the commandment of the Lord" (1 Cor. 14:37). The Lord's will is on record unmistakably, if indeed we respect scripture.

But these maiden daughters of Philip did prophesy, if not in the assembly, somewhere else. Decorum would have forbidden it still more in public, if God's order prohibited it for the assembly. No place can be conceived more suitable than one's father's house. 1 Corinthians 11 renders it plain that the woman, in praying or prophesying, was to see that she bore the mark of subjection; for even in prophesying she must not forget she is a woman, and that the head of the woman is the man, as the head of every man is Christ. The woman, therefore, should be veiled, while the man was not so to be. "Every man praying or prophesying, having [anything] on his head dishonoureth his head; but every woman praying or prophesying with her head uncovered dishonoureth her own head, for it is one and the same thing as if she were shaven. For if the woman is not covered," says the apostle, "let her also be shorn; but if it is a shame to a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered; for a man indeed ought not to have his head covered, being God's image and glory; but woman is man's glory." Both have their place respectively in the Lord, Who, if He give power, maintains order no less; but each has a place He has assigned of its own, as all things are of God. So His word regulates all; and we should remember this the more in days when man's voice is loud, and God's word exposed and subjected to increasing slight.

We are not told whether these maidens predicted anything about Paul; but we do hear that Agabus the prophet added to the warnings already given by others. Not only so, but, he came and took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, "Thus saith the Holy Spirit, The man to whom this girdle belongs shall the Jews thus bind in Jerusalem, and deliver him up into the hands of the Gentiles." It was quite in the symbolic manner of the ancient prophets; and it filled those who beheld and listened with sorrow for the honored apostle. "And when we heard these things, both we and those of the place besought him not to go up to Jerusalem; then Paul answered, Why do ye weep and break my heart? For I am ready, not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done" (Acts 21:12-14).

It is clear that the apostle did not understand that the Lord meant him to turn from Jerusalem. He only heard reiterated by Agabus, as he had been so often warned by others, what he must suffer there. Indeed from his conversion it was intimated how many things he must suffer for the Lord's name's sake. Paul clearly must have concluded that the Holy Spirit spoke, not to dissuade him from his perilous path, but rather to prepare him in it—certainly for prison, and perhaps death. The brotherly kindness of others would have screened him from all that was to await him in Jerusalem; but love goes beyond brotherly kindness. So it was working in the servant, as with all perfection in the Master.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 21:1-7

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

The public course of the apostle was closed so far as scripture informs us. The remaining chapters of the Acts are occupied almost entirely with the personal history of the apostle, especially his collision with the Jews publicly, and through them with the Gentiles. In the first and last of these chapters we have a little of his relations with the Christians. The book closes with him, the Lord's prisoner, in Rome, though not without liberty to see all who sought him, to whom he preached the kingdom of God and taught the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. Considerably later traces appear in the last of His Epistles. It was important in the mind of the Spirit to give us the early ministry of Peter, chiefly in Judaea and Samaria, as well as in opening the door to the Gentiles. After that Paul fills up the entire scene to the close of the book.

"And when it came to pass that we were parted from them and had set sail, we came with a straight course unto Coos, and the next day unto Rhodes, and from thence unto Patara; and, having found a ship crossing over into Phenicia, we went on board and set sail; and as we had sighted Cyprus, leaving it on the left, we sailed unto Syria and landed at Tire, for there the ship was to unlade her cargo. And having found out the disciples, we remained there seven days; and these said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not set foot in Jerusalem. And when it came to pass that we had completed the days, we departed and went on our journey, and they all with wives and children brought us on our way, till we were out of the city, and kneeling down on the beach we prayed and took leave of one another, and we went on board ship, and they returned home. And when we had finished the voyage from Tire, we arrived at Ptolemais and saluted the brethren, and abode with them one day" (Acts 20:1-7).

Such is the succinct account of the voyage. On the day after (as we shall see) they took their land journey through Palestine; in the previous verses now before us, it was sailing. Nothing more simple; yet on the journey of such a man and his companions the Spirit of God loves to dwell, and that we should dwell. We wrong His grace in thinking that the Holy Spirit has only to do with extraordinary matters, as striking utterances, strange tongues, miraculous signs, and sufferings still more fruitful when unostentatiously borne. Undoubtedly He is the power for all that is good and worthy of Christ; but as Christ Himself lived much the greater part of His life in the utmost obscurity as regards man, perfectly doing the will of God, before and to Whom not a moment was lost, so does the Spirit of God enter into all the details of life in those who are Christ's. Surely if anything could give dignity to the passing circumstances of each day, this must; but do God's children, do we, believe it? If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit; let us not be vain-glorious, provoking one another, envying one another. Let us associate the commonest things with Christ's will and glory. Certainly there is nothing more closely approaching the animal than eating and drinking; yet the word of God would have us appropriate even these things to the highest purpose; and there is no way so simple and sure as by that faith which, looking upward, partakes of them in His name. "Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." Thus shall we give no occasion of stumbling either to Jews or to Greeks, or to the church of God. Grace avoids questions, as it abhors sin and teaches us to please all men in all things, but not with a view to one's own profit, but rather in divine love to the many that they may be saved. It was so Christ walked in the ungrieved power of the Spirit; it is so we are called to walk, though alas! we too often grieve Him. But there is no rule of life so true, so full, and so direct; and here therefore the path becomes of deep interest. "To me to live is Christ underlies what we are told of the great apostle." And when it came to pass that we were parted from them." The last verb may be softened down sometimes; but the natural meaning implies a wrench. Christian affection is a reality on earth: in all the narrative what an absence appears of turning aside for objects of natural interest! "We came with a straight course unto Coos, and the next day unto Rhodes." We may be sure from the character and the capacity and the attainments of the apostle, that he had an eye for natural beauty, and a mind for every historic association that presented itself here below. "But this one thing I do" was not more his word to others than his own life "to me to live is Christ." The claims of the new creation altogether outweighed those of the old. So when we saw him alone at Athens, with ample leisure to look around on the remains which have attracted men of the old world as well as moderns beyond most spots here below, what was the effect on him? His spirit was provoked within him, as he beheld the city full of idols. It was not sculpture that enchained him, nor architecture that blinded him. He measured all around by the glory of Christ, and yet none could show more tact in discoursing to them. If he probed their idolatry to the bottom, he availed himself of the least point of truth which the vain city confessed—the altar with the inscription, "To God unknown." Truly he walked by faith and not by sight: should not we? Is it really come to this, that, because we have not apostolic authority or miraculous powers, we are to abandon the life of faith? Is not the Holy Spirit sent down, and sent down to abide with us forever? It were humbling indeed to answer like the twelve men at Ephesus (who could not speak truly otherwise): "We did not so much as hear whether there is a Holy Spirit." If we Christians say so now, it is guilty unbelief of the sure and standing privilege of God's church. All we want is to judge ourselves and walk in faith, truth, and love: He will then manifest His gracious power.

"And having found a ship crossing over unto Phenicia, we went on board and set sail." It is good to notice the providential dealings of the Lord. The same heart that abides wholly unmoved by, the most violent and dangerous storm, ought to be thankful for a fair wind and a quiet journey; and so it was and is. Circumstances never create faith, though God may use unlooked for facts to deal with conscience. But the same simple faith it is, which, in rough weather or in smooth, can alike give thanks to God. Certainly it is not indifference; but the known will of God is always good, and acceptable, and perfect; and the heart is kept up in the confidence of His love. So His hand would be seen in their finding a ship crossing over to Phenicia. It would appear that the vessel in which they first set out did not proceed beyond Patara in the desired direction; and now, having found one bound for Phenicia, "we went on board and set sail." Thus in the outward but gracious ordering of God there was no loss of time.

"And when we had sighted Cyprus, leaving it on the left, we sailed unto Syria, and landed at Tire, for there the ship was to unlade the cargo." No doubt the term "sighted" is technical for mariners; but can we conceive that the apostle passed the island without recalling the scene of his early ministry, and of his elder brother Barnabas, and his younger, John Mark, whom they once had as their attendant? We have already had proof of the goodness of Barnabas, and the Holy Spirit has pronounced upon it; and it was proved at a still later day, when he left Antioch, from the midst of an active work of the Lord, to seek for Saul of Tarsus, and brought him to labor with himself at that great city of Christian blessing. But Barnabas and Mark had parted from the apostle; yet the apostle's heart sought them both, and felt a love that rose above all their failings, as he proved, not only by word, but by deed to the last.

And surely Syria and Tire where they landed must have recalled deep reflections to the apostle. Here the Lord Himself had withdrawn daring His earthly ministry, and from those borders came to Him the woman of Canaan who drew out from Him, not merely an answer of mercy that she wanted for her daughter, but that praise of her own faith which will never be forgotten.

Here the delay of the ship was no less ordered of God at Tire than the finding it at once had been at Patara. The unlading of the cargo gave the apostle and his companions the time, not exactly to find disciples as in the A. V., but to find "out" the disciples. We cannot as in the Greek idiom say, "found up," though we do say "hunted up." It would appear hence that they were the object of search, not of casual discovery. They were the disciples, and "so they tarried there seven days." This we have seen before and remarked on, as giving an opportunity to spend at least one Lord's day for the communion of the Lord's Supper.

From an incidental statement we learn how full the early church was of the power of the Spirit. "And these said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not set foot in Jerusalem." Assuredly the apostle lacked not warning, as he said himself to the elders from Ephesus, "Behold, I go bound in the (that is, my) spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there, save that the Holy Spirit testifieth to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me." Evidently however the apostle regarded it rather as a note of danger that awaited him, than of personal direction which he must obediently follow. His own mind was made up, whatever the danger, whatever the suffering, to go through with it; as the Master had done in matchless perfection for His infinite work at all cost.

"And when it came to pass that we had completed the days, we departed and went on our journey; and they all with wives and children brought us on our why, till we were out of the city, and kneeling down on the beach we prayed and took leave of each other; and we went on board ship, but they returned home" (Acts 21:5-6). It is another beautiful peculiarity of divine affection—the family as well as social character of Christians in early days. This ought to be of great price now, if we are wise. In this cold world the saints are peculiarly exposed to grow chilly, if kept from fleshly excitement and worldly frivolity.

“And when we had finished the voyage from Tire, we arrived at Ptolemais, and we saluted the brethren and abode with them one day” (Acts 21:7). Here at a port called Accho in days of yore, now St. Jean d’Acre, they arrived; and though it was but for one day, how gladly they spent it with the brethren, for such there were at Ptolemais, apparently already known.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 20:29-38

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

Taking heed to themselves as well as to all the flock of God was the more necessary because of the sure and dark prospect which the apostle now puts before them. “I know that after my departure grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves shall men arise speaking things perverted to draw away the disciples after them” (Acts 20:29-30).

On earth it has been always thus. So Moses warned Israel, when he was about to depart. Those under grace, we now learn from the apostle, would behave themselves no better in the house of God than the people under law. And so it came to pass, as the Old Testament shows us: Israel utterly ruined, everywhere dispersed, despised outcasts, no where more than in their own land; and so the New Testament everywhere warns as to Christendom.

The Lord Himself, in the great parabolic series of Matthew 13, sets forth its corruption from the beginning. The tares once sown were never to be rooted up until the harvest; and the time of the harvest will be the judgment of the quick on earth. So, in His great prophecy on the Mount of Olives (Matt. 24; 25), the Lord does not hide the sad future. The evil servant was to say in his heart, “my lord delayeth,”&c. and would begin to beat his fellow servants, as well as to eat and drink with the drunken. There cannot be, there is not, recovery, or general progress for good. Christ’s appearing in judgment will deal with the evil effectually. It is not otherwise in the beautiful picture of the ten virgins, five wise and five foolish. Was not failure apparent and complete, when all slumbered and slept, while the bridegroom tarried? Grace assuredly awakes the wise, who had oil in their vessels, to trim their lamps, and go in with the Bridegroom to the marriage. As for the foolish, who had no oil and are therefore busied here and there in procuring it in vain, the door was shut. So with the servants that traded with the talents given: nothing but judgment will rectify the wrong done to the Master. Not only is there to be no such thing as universal prevalence of the gospel, but within its own limited range of profession misrepresentation of Christ, and opposition to His will, characterize it to the last. No one denies that there will be, till He comes, as there ever has been, a witness of Christ and truth in life and suffering for His name; but there is also the sad and ever swelling succession of the evil done to that name, not merely by persecution from without, but still more painfully and shamelessly by every spiritual pravity within.

The Epistles entirely confirm and fill up the dark outline presented by our Lord. Of this we have spoken perhaps sufficiently elsewhere; but surely 2 Thessalonians 2 is the adequate testimony, and from an early day: 1 Timothy 4, and 2 Timothy 3 fall in with this preparatively. Peter in his Second Epistle (chap. 2), and Jude announce the same in yet more sombre colors; and none goes more to the root of the matter than John, not only in his Epistles, but prophetically in the Revelation.

Here however we have the inroad of the declension stated as a marked starting point. “I know that after my departure grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among,) our own selves shall men arise speaking things perverted,” and so on. There is much unbelief as to this, even among Christians otherwise well disposed. They fail to see that the power of Christianity lies in the ungrieved guidance of the Spirit of God according to His word; and His Spirit can alone freely work in Christ’s name to God’s glory. When men act on human principles, where the spirit of the world prevails, ruin is the necessary result. As long as the apostle was here, the spiritual power and influence was immense. There was the most vigilant and the most decided resistance to evil of every kind. He knew that after his departure spiritual energy would decay more and more, and that the glory of the Lord would thus be swamped. So easy, so deadly, among the saints of God is compromise, to which amiability, prudence, desire of peace, love of numbers, and so on, would expose.

The commentators tell us that grievous wolves are not persecutors, but rather false friends. Real foes should enter in among those who bear the name of the Lord and spare not the flock. But the commentators are surely wrong in identifying the grievous wolves with those described in verse 30, “From among your own selves shall men arise speaking things perverted.” Surely these are manifestly different classes of evil men, the first more violent, the second more subtle; the first seeking their own gratification and advantage, and the second doing the deadlier work of speaking things perverted to draw away the disciples after them. To take advantage of the flock for selfish means is wicked; to set up self and error in the place of Christ is yet worse, if more seemly in appearance.

Here it may be noticed that the Authorized Version fails to represent the malignity of the evil. Every party leader seeks to draw away disciples. Here it is the more aggravated effort to draw away “the” disciples after them. It was to mislead them all, to subject all saints to themselves. “Wherefore watch, remembering that by the space of three years I ceased not admonishing each one night and day with tears. And now 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 among all that are sanctified” (Acts 20:31-32).

The ministry of Paul in Ephesus at this latter day was just an answer to what it had been among the Thessalonians earlier, first as nurse, then as father. It was for the elders now to watch and not to forget that loving example of love; but love will never abide, never bear the strain, without real faith in God for that work; and therefore the force of his “commending them” to God and to the word of His “grace.” It is not to one only but to both. Without God before the heart the word becomes dry and sapless, and we grow discouraged and impatient; without the word to direct the life, we are in danger from the will and the wisdom, or the folly, of man. The word of His grace becomes the grand test and resource, while looking to God for every step and in every question. So we find the apostle laying it down by the Holy Spirit in 2 Timothy 3, which also, by the way, helps to decide the true reference of what has been questioned: should it be, “which” is able, or “who” is able, to build you up? The comparison strengthens the former.

The apostle had thus set before the elders a prospect most grievous, which lapse of time has only but fully confirmed. Indeed, before his departure the signs of coming evils were already everywhere apparent, so that when his later Epistles more especially prophesied not merely of decay, but of utter ruin, even then he had to speak of the seeds of these evils as already grown. No greater error than that which ere long began to prevail, and most extensively in modern times, the dream of progress. It is directly opposed to these apostolic testimonies, and no less to the plainest possible facts in Christendom. Even on the loose estimate of bare profession, how far is the Christian faith from having title to that triumph of which men fondly speak? Indeed, if these vain hopes were realized, would they not present a glaring contrast to all that the Bible teaches us of that which is committed to human responsibility? From Adam downwards the history of man is the history of failure. Not that grace has not wrought, and wrought wonders, in the narrow path of Christ here below; but as the rule everywhere and always, ruin has followed every fresh trial of man, and every fresh testimony of God because of man. Look at him in Eden or out of Eden, before the deluge or since it: have truth and righteousness prevailed for the mass? That God has wrought by individuals, that He has blessed families, that He has owned righteousness in a people, as well as faith wherever His own grace made it good in the elect, is clear. As the race as well as head broke down, none the less did Israel, notwithstanding the singular favor which God showed; and as the people, so the priests, and so the kings, till there was no remedy, and God swept them from His land, not only by the Assyrian and the Babylonian, but still more by the Roman. That Christendom is no exception we have already seen, and this not from experience only, but from the distinct, and repeated, and complete testimony of the inspired men who laid its foundation; and yet men venture to hope— “to hope”! Is it that the apostolic words will prove untrue? Is it that men, so utterly fallen as they are now in Christendom, will do better than those in whom the Spirit of God first wrought with a power as much beyond consequent as precedent? But alas, poverty in its lowest state is apt to be the proudest. God will surely be true, and every man a liar who opposes Him. This then was briefly and profoundly set forth by the apostle about to depart from Ephesus.

Let me notice again how the ordinary translation weakens the force of the last words. It is not merely to draw away “disciples” after them: every heretic seeks and does this; but the object of the enemy through these perverse men is to draw away “the disciples,” the body of those that confessed the Lord on the earth. Not less was the blow aimed at the glory of Christ. He only is entitled to all the disciples, and if it is a serious thing for any disciple to be drawn away from Him, from His will about His own below, how much more to seek the misleading of all! But self will is blind to all but its own will, and soon learns to confound itself with the will of the Master. But think of the dishonor which is thus cast upon His name!

“Wherefore watch ye,” says the apostle to the elders, “remembering that for three years night and day I ceased not admonishing each one night and day with tears.” This little glimpse, which necessity wrung out from the apostle’s heart, lets us see his entire devotedness. It was not business, nor the spread of truth even, still less the prevalence of his own opinions for good. It was one who loved Christ, and pressed this above all on those who took the lead. Untiring, tender, watchful, care filled his heart, with the deepest feeling habitually and at all cost. Such he would have us feel, as those he addressed that day. Who is sufficient for these things? The sufficiency is in and from God.

So he continues, “And now 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 among all that are sanctified.” Whatever be the days of danger, difficulty, and ruin, God abides faithful, the Savior unchangeable, Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever. If all the apostles, since they and the prophets laid the foundation, have passed away, the words of His grace remain, as does the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven. He only had divine power even when apostles were there. There is no excuse therefore for unbelief. Faith shines the more in a dark day, and devotedness is called out by the sense of His dishonor Who is dearest to the heart.

Nor is there anything in comparison with the word of His grace in ability to build us up. Boldness of thought and beauty of language are all vain, if there be not the truth; and the truth is never so sure, and strong, and holy, as in His own word, which is truth. This searches the conscience, this strengthens the heart, this nourishes faith and makes the blessed hope abounding and mighty in the love which is the strength of all that is good. For love is of God, and God is good, and as His word builds us up now, so it gives us the inheritance among all that are sanctified. The word of God truly received delivers from the love of this present age, from the world and the things of the world.

Hence adds the apostle, “I coveted no man’s silver or gold, or apparel; yea, yourselves know that these hands ministered unto my necessities and to those that were with me.” Life in Christ is infinitely blessed, and it is the portion of the believer by the grace of God; a life wholly and absolutely different from that old Adam life, which meets its doom, not in death only, but in judgment without end. For the Christian our old man is crucified with Christ, that the body of sin might be annulled, that we might no longer serve sin, so that each can say, “I am crucified with Christ, and no longer live I but Christ liveth in me, but in that I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, Who loved me and gave Himself for me.” It is ruin no doubt to set aside the grace of God, as the re-introduction of the law must do. But how terrible to give a false unworthy testimony to the grace of God by allowing the desires of that life which should be buried in the cross of Christ. The old man covets silver and gold, or apparel. All these minister to the lusts of the body as well as of the mind. Love serves others, love with faith alone glorifies God; and it is well when those who teach these things are living ensamples of all they urge on others. How few can say truthfully and throughout with the apostle,” I coveted no man’s silver and gold, or apparel, yea, yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities, and to those that were with me. In all things I gave you an example, how that so laboring ye ought to help the weak, and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He Himself said, It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:33-35). Then let no one who seems or claims to be a leader now forget them; yea, let us all remember these ways of the apostle and these words of the Lord Jesus. This is certainly not after the manner of men, nor yet of Israel, nay, nor of Christendom. They are the words of Christ, and His life here below is the most blessed comment upon them. It certainly is not enjoyment, or present honor, but His love in tending and feeding the sheep of His pasture, looking for the day of reckoning when the Chief Shepherd shall be manifested, and the faithful shepherds receive the crown of glory that fadeth not away.

Yet the account is not complete without the parting scene, which proves that faith in the unseen hinders not, but imparts, the love which is of God in this world of sorrow and selfishness. “And having thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all. And they all wept sore, and falling on Paul’s neck, fondly kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the word which he had spoken, that they should behold his face no more. And they brought him forward unto the ship” (Acts 20:36-38). Such was the bearing of the greatest of apostles. Oh! how fallen from its reality are those who vaunt themselves his successors. How far short are any of us who abhor such pretensions! As truth and love receded, hierarchy in every shape made for itself a throne, as far from the mind of Christ as earth is from heaven. But let us beware lest love grow cold

in presence of abounding iniquity.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 20:28

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

Having thus solemnly set before them his own ministry, he now turns to the elders and their work. “Take heed1 to yourselves and to all the flock in which the Holy Ghost set you overseers to tend the assembly of God, which He purchased with His own blood” [or, the blood of His own one] (Acts 20:28).

The first of all duties is to take heed to our own selves, whatever may be our position; and this an overseer is more particularly to weigh. For what can be more dangerous than activity with others and where there is carelessness as to ourselves? It is not from the word abstractedly, but from its shining on the path of our own experience, that most is learned practically. Undoubtedly we may learn from others, and through others; but how can there be reality, unless we take heed “unto ourselves”?

Still the object in appointing elders was to oversee the flock and all the flock. There might be, and in general were, several overseers; but the duty of the overseer is to take head “to all the flock” where he lives. This is the more important, as it humbles the spirit while it enlarges the heart; for who is sufficient for these things? It tends to neutralize the self-importance of “my people,” as well as the rivalry when one thinks of another, and “his people.” It was a new thing then; it is absolutely unheard of in modern Christianity. The saints had to learn that God had but one flock here below. There was unity whether in each place or all over the world. Yet the elders had to do with all the flock where they resided, not elsewhere. Eldership was a local charge. In this the elders are wholly distinct from “the gifts” (Eph. 4), which are in the unity of the body of Christ. They themselves of course were members like others, and as such consequently belonged not to “a body,” but to “the body.” But the office of eldership was within definite limits; the charge did not run beyond the particular assembly or city wherein they were appointed. It is admitted, nay pressed, that no one could claim to be an elder unless he were duly appointed; and it is plain from scripture that none could appoint save the apostles, or one positively commissioned by an apostle for the purpose. In other words the bishops, or elders (for they are identical in God’s word), depended for their due installation on an apostle, directly or indirectly; but when thus appointed, it could be said, as here, that the Holy Spirit set them as bishops or overseers; His sanction accompanied apostolic nomination.

The A. V. has gone a little beyond what the inspired word really says, “Over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers.” It is rightly rendered in the R.V., “in the which.” They were thus made to feel that they were in and of the flock of God like every other saint. Nevertheless no one ought to deny that the responsibility of every elder was to rule. For, as the apostle says to Timothy, “Let the elders that rule well be accounted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and in teaching” (1 Tim. 5:17). They might not all labor in teaching; but they were all set to “rule,” or preside, and they were responsible to rule “well.” They were expressly appointed to the lead, as that which pertained to their office. They were in the flock, but in the Lord they were over their brethren, though they were by no means the only persons who were. This in no way interfered with the gifts in the body. Some may be pastors and teachers, others evangelists; but both were on a quite different footing from the elders. The business of the gifted men was the ministry of the word, whether to those within or to those without; and they were accordingly to labor entirely apart from designated charge over any circumscribed or particular spot. Ephesians 4 is decisive for this principle and fact. It is not only that apostles and prophets had all unrestricted field of work; the lesser gifts, who were the fruit of Christ’s grace to the church, had a similar title, though in a humbler way. Thus all gifts as such are in the unity of Christ’s body; none of them is merely a local official (as we have seen the elder to be); though he might also be appointed to a charge, his gift otherwise goes beyond it.

The overseers then are exhorted by the apostle to tend or shepherd the assembly of God. Here again we see how strong is the contrast of scriptural truth with the system, which reigns to day, of this congregation for one “minister” and that for another. For of old the elders were all as overseers to tend the assembly; and here the whole of it in Ephesus. No doubt their duty was to carry on oversight where they resided; but it was to shepherd the church of God there, and not each one a part of it only.2 The largeness of the scriptural truth is as evident as the contractedness of men’s arrangements ever since apostolic days. Men, in their wisdom, may have judged it necessary to allot a portion to this one, and another to that one in the same city; but earthly prudence, however respectable and useful for present interests, is ever to be distrusted in divine things. When in fact the breakup of the flock of God came to pass, the clerical order which had crept in could not but pave the way for not schisms only, but sects, each with their governing functionaries. So completely are the children of God fallen from His mind that the various denominations of Christendom are now supposed even by saints to be a providential arrangement, which only enthusiasts could wish to disturb. But as this is not the word of the Lord, so it is far from the path of faith. Human reason can never overthrow the plain, sure, and abiding revelation of God’s will as we have it in scripture, the especial safeguard in the difficult times of the last days (2 Tim. 3), as the apostle tells us. Difficulties may be enormous, dangers increase, the trials be immense; but obedience is of all things the most lowly for man and the most acceptable to God. Let every believer weigh these things as in His sight: His will should be dear to all the children of God.

The apostle gives the more seriousness to the task which the overseers had before them, by the consideration not only that the assembly was God’s rather than theirs, which it is never said to be (however common may be the word in man’s mouth), but “which He acquired to Himself with” &c. “His own blood” is beyond controversy a difficult expression, and especially in the best representation of the text, which deserves careful examination. It is not meant that there is the least cloud over the truth that He Who shed His blood for us was God. If the Savior here was not God, His purchase would have only a creature’s value, and must be wholly insufficient to acquire on God’s part the assembly as it was, yea, is. Being a divine person, His gaining it to Himself by blood has an infinite and eternal efficacy.

But the expression, as it stands in the A. and R. Versions, is unexampled in scripture; and what is more, as already remarked, it is peculiarly embarrassing for the Christian scholar, because the form of it, now most approved on the best grounds, is extremely emphatic, instead of being general. Indeed it would be easier to understand the sense as commonly understood, if the form had been, as in the vulgar reading, τοῦ ἰδίου αἵματος. The critical reading, though at first sight it may add to the difficulty, seems however the right one, τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ ἰδίου. But it is suggested that we should take τοῖ ἰδίου in government rather than in concord. The meaning that results from this would be “the

blood of His own One," that is, of Christ, His Son, rather than "His own blood." This if certain would make all plain.

It was in all probability the perplexity here felt which led some copyists in early days to substitute the church "of the Lord," for that "of God." But this reading, though externally well supported (A C D E, and more) is at issue with New Testament usage, and thus on the whole inferior to that of the common text, though as far as "God" goes no one need be surprised that Wetstein and Griesbach adopted it; but it is not so intelligible why Lachmann, Tischendorf, and Tregelles are not here found rather with Mill, Wolf, Bengel, Scholz, Alford (in all his Edd. since his 1st and 2nd), Wordsworth, Westcott, and Hort, who hold to τοῦ θεοῦ. It is Alford's mistake that Matthäi prefers the same; for in both his editions he follows his Moscow copies, and has the same conflate reading as the Complutensian, τοῦ κυρίου καὶ θεοῦ; (C3HLP, some 110 or more cursives). Other varieties there are scarce worth noticing on any ground, as τ. κ. θ. (3. and more), τ. θ. κ. κ. (47.). Some ancient versions represent τοῦ χπιστοῦ, one old Latin "Jesu Christi," and the Georgian—του κυρίου του χριστου.

Dr. Scrivener therefore fairly enough says that our choice evidently lies between κυρίου and θεοῦ, though Patristic testimony may slightly incline to the latter, as he does himself. But why he should consider that the usus loguendi of the apostle, though incontrovertibly sustaining θεοῦ against κυπίου, "appears little relevant to the case of either," is to my mind unintelligible. For the utmost that can be said for its immense weight on one side is that it may not have been impossible to have said the other in this sole instance. Scripture beyond doubt is larger than man's mind; but assuredly he is rather bold or careless who could slight an expression invariably found for one never found elsewhere, and here easily understood to be a change in order to escape a sentiment extremely harsh and unexampled if taken as it commonly is.

It may not be without profit to conceive how the discovery of the Sinai MS., and a clearer knowledge, not only of the Vatican copy, but of other weighty authorities, must have modified, if not revolutionized, the judgment of Griesbach.

"Ex his omnibus luculenter apparet, pro lectione θεοῦ ne unicum quidem militare codicem, qui siv vetustate sive interna bonitate sua testis idonei et incorrupti laude ornari queat. Non reperitur, nisi in libris recentioribus iisdemque vel penitus contemnendis, vel misere, multis saltem in locis, interpolatis. Sednec versionum anctoritate tueri se potest. Nulla enim translatio habet θεοῦ praeter Vulgatam recentiorem, (quam redarguunt antiquiores libri latini,) et Philoxenianam syriacam, &c. Tandem neque apud Patres certa lectionis istius vestigia deprehenduntur ante Epiphanium, & c. Quomodo igitur salvis criticae artis legibus lectio θεοῦ, utpote omni auctoritate justa destituta, defendi queat, equidem haud intelligo" (N. T. Gr. ed. sec. 2:115, Halae Sax. et Lond. 1806) It is now certified, not by Birch only, who might have been more heeded, notwithstanding the silence of the collation for Bentley, but by the personal and expressly minute examination of Tregelles, who rather looked for an erasure, but found no sign of it in B, but Bea, as also in N. Now no sober and intelligent mind can doubt that the weight of N and B is at least equal to A C D E. Among the cursives, as usual, some may be of slight account, but others are really valuable and undeserving of so sweeping a censure. As to Versions, none can be produced of greater value than the Vulgate, and the most ancient and excellent copies, such as the Amiatine, Fuldensian, Demid., Tol., &c., as well as the Clem. ed., have "Dei." It is rather audacious to begin with Epiphani us among the Fathers with the well-known allusion of Ignatius (πρὸσ Ἐφ. i.) which this verse alone can account for. Greek and Latin Fathers cite the common text, or refer freely to it (as Tertullian ad Ux. ii. 3, Clem. Alex. ii. 3, 44), though no doubt there is a vacillation which answers to the various readings.

Griesbach also argues on the improbability that Athanasius could have read the text as it stands and deny as he does against Apollinarius that αἷμα θεοῦ occurs, ascribing such an expression to the Arians; indeed many besides Athanasius objected to such language. And it would have been truly impossible if διὰ τοῦ ἰδιόυ αἵματος had been the true reading. But it is not. The majority of later copies may support it, as they do the unquestionably wrong τ. κ. κ. θ., but all late critics agree to follow אA B C D E, &c. It would appear then that the great champion of orthodoxy must have understood τοῦ ἰδίου to be expressive of Christ, as God's "own" One. Otherwise the emphasis, if we take τοῦ ἰδιόυ in concord, renders the phrase so intolerable that nothing but necessity could justify it. Is there any such need? In other words, if the true text were διὰ τοῦ ἰδιόυ αἵματος, we must translate it as in the Authorized Version and all others which were based on that reading now recognized as incorrect; and we could only then understand the phrase as predicated of Him Who is God by what theologians call κοινωνία ἰδιωμάτων. And Meyer considers that the true reading was changed to the common but incorrect one because τοῦ ἰδίου), as it ought to be, might be referred to Christ. Doederlein, Michaelis, and other moderns, when they so refer τοῦ ἰδιόυ, may have had low thoughts of Christ; but certainly not such was Athanasius, who, it seems, must have so understood the passage. Can it be questioned that the emphatic contrasting force, if we take it as God's own blood, brings the phrase under what he calls the τολμήματα τῶν Ἀρειανῶν?

It is easy to ask for justification by Greek usage. This is exactly what from the nature of the case could hardly be; for in all the New Testament, as there is no other instance of a noun followed by τοῦ ἰδίου, there is no distinct matter for comparison. But it is to be noticed that, where Christ goes before, what follows is διὰ τοῦ ἰδίου αἵματος (Heb. 9:12; 13:12). It is reasonable therefore to infer that, as the emphatic contrast would be dogmatically extravagant, the rendering most entitled to our acceptance is "through the blood of His own One." Dr. Hort indeed suggests "through the blood that was His own, that is, as being His Son's" (The N. T. in Greek, 2. 99). It may be doubted whether this will commend itself more than Mr. Darby's. The general truth is untouched. The question is how best to solve the very real difficulty. The suggested version seems ranch less objectionable than Dr. H.'s conjecture at the close of his note, that via may have dropped out of the τού ίδίον at some very early transcription affecting all existing documents. Conjectural emendation3 in New Testament scripture has never approached a proof of its need or value in a solitary example. He who gave us His word has watched over it; and we need not distrust Him here.

The reasoning of Bp. Middleton (Greek Article, Rose's Ed. 291-5) is founded on the erroneous vulgar text, and directed mainly against Mr. G. Wakefield, whose version and notes are here as ever devoted to the confirmation of his heterodox views. But Michael is was not so ignorant as to translate the common text as the Bp. says he did; nor ought a writer on the Greek article to have overlooked an emphasis in the repeated article, as compared with the ordinary form, which would be hard indeed to predicate of God as such, when the unemphatic only is applied to Christ's own blood. It is to be doubted therefore whether Bp. M., or those who cite him in this connection, did really comprehend or see the conditions of the true question. For on the one hand the common deduction involves us in thoughts and expressions wholly foreign to scripture; on the other hand, if the Greek can honestly mean by the blood of His own One, the balance of truth is at once restored, and the utmost that can be alleged against the construction is that its seeming ambiguity might be supposed improbable for the apostle's mouth. That it is sound Greek to express this meaning will scarcely be disputed save by prejudiced persons, who do not sufficiently bear in mind the

graver objections to the other version.

Returning then from the consideration of the passage, one may conclude that the Text. Rec. is right in reading church or assembly “of God,” but wrong in following that form of expression at the close of the verse which would compel us to translate, contrary to all the phraseology of scripture elsewhere, “through His own blood.” The reading of all critics with adequate information and judgment might, and ordinarily would, bear the same meaning with the force of a contrasting emphasis, which is never used even of our Lord: if said of God, it is wholly unaccountable. It seems that this moral improbability made Athanasius deny the phrase (found in Ignatius, Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian) to be in scripture; which nevertheless has it, and has it in the most pointed form, if we are bound to render διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ ἰδίου as scholars usually do, without speaking of the Oriental Versions, which cut the knot by giving “the Lord,” “the Lord and God,” and “Christ.” But it seems only prejudice to deny that τοῦ ἰδίου may be as legitimately in regimen as in concord; if in regimen, the sense would be “of His own One,” and the difficulty of the right text is at an end. In this case the apostle employs unusually touching terms to enforce on the elders to shepherd the assembly of God, which He acquired to Himself through the blood of His own One, special personality being merged in a purchase so beyond measure near and precious. That the Savior is the Son of the Father from everlasting to everlasting is certain to the believer; but the Book of the Acts habitually presents the truth from a broader point of view with which the apostolic charge would here coalesce.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 20:22-27

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Next the apostle turns from his ministry at Ephesus to the prospect before him. He was well aware that the severest trials awaited him (compare Rom. 15:30-31), and, it would appear, with no slight presentiment that Jerusalem would prove the source of much that was imminently hanging over him. “And now, behold, I go bound in the (or my) spirit1 onto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: save that the Holy Spirit testifieth to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me” (Acts 20:22-23).

Though he was not aware of the precise shape, he thus lets it be known that he went with eyes open to that coming pressure of troubles, which was only interrupted for a little while before all terminated in a martyr’s death. He knew further that, whatever might be the close, bonds and afflictions intervened; and what could be more serious for the testimony of the Lord and saints generally to the heart of one who loved the church? Nevertheless God was in it all; for during these very bonds he wrote the Epistles which furnish, we happily know, the fullest and brightest light of Christ and on heavenly things, which was ever vouchsafed for the permanent instruction and comfort of the saints of God. We shall see that loving remonstrances did not fail on every side, which must have added so much the more to his grief in resisting all appeals to the contrary.

Indeed the apostle here gives the pith of his answer to every entreaty and dissuasive. “But I hold not my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may accomplish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus to testify the gospel of the grace of God “2(vs. 24). Nothing could frustrate such a resolve. It was no question to him of success, as men speak, or of present effects, however promising. His eye was on the glory of Christ, his ear only for the will of God. Suffering or death as a sequence he would not allow to deter him for an instant. His Master had shown him, in the highest degree and for the deepest ends, how in a world of sin and misery suffering glorifies God. Undoubtedly there was that in the cross of Christ which belongs to none but Himself. The expiation or sin falls exclusively to Him, the Infinite Sacrifice; but sacrifice, though the deepest, is far from being the only element in Christ’s death. There were other sufferings which the saints are permitted to share with Him to be despised, to be rejected, to suffer for love and truth, as well as for righteousness. These sufferings are not confined to Christ, as it was to suffer for sin; and Paul perhaps more than any other was one who could rejoice in his sufferings for the saints, as well as fill up that which was behind of the tribulations of Christ in his flesh, for His body which is the church. The sufferings of the gospel also were for him to glory in; and no mere man before or since ever won so good a title of those honorable scars (Gal. 6:17).

Most truthfully, therefore, could he say that he made no account of his life as dear to himself: nor is it merely before the elders that he felt transport, or on any transient occasions of like kind. He had it before his heart to finish his course with joy, and the service which he had received of the Lord Jesus to testify the glad tidings (or gospel) of the grace of God. The large-heartedness of the apostle is as refreshing as instructive. Who had such a crowd of daily pressure on him? Who like him bore the burden of all the assemblies? If he had to do with weak consciences, who could be weak like Paul? Who went out in heart toward one who stumbled as he did? Nevertheless the gospel was as near to his spirit as to the most earnest evangelist. There was no one-sidedness in this blessed servant of the Lord. He was here simply to carry out all the objects of His love, to promote His glory wherever His name penetrated; and Christ is not more the Head of the church than the sum and substance of the gospel.

It will be noticed that the gospel is here designated “the glad tidings of the grace of God.” This appears to be the most comprehensive title given to it in scripture. Elsewhere the apostle speaks of it as “the gospel of the glory of Christ,” where its heavenly side is meant to be made prominent. Again, he speaks of it as “the gospel of God,” where its source in divine love is pointed to. Furthermore we hear of “the gospel of Christ,” where He is in view through whom alone the glad tidings become possible from God to man. In the Gospels we hear of “The gospel of the kingdom,” looking on to Messiah in power and glory: in the Revelation, of the “everlasting gospel,” the revelation of the bruised Seed bruising the Serpent’s head. Each has its main or distinctive meaning; but as none can be apart from Christ, so none of them appears to be so full as “the gospel of the grace of God.” Nor is any other designation of it more than this last in keeping with the Acts of the Apostles, as well as with that apostle’s heart, who was now addressing the Ephesian elders. The person and the work of the Lord Jesus are fully supposed although not expressed in it; for in whom, or through whom, can God’s grace shine out, save in Him or by Him.

“And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom3 [of God], shall see my face no more” (vs. 25). It is his farewell. His work, as to presence in their midst, was ended.

Here we have another and distinct topic, and one that is apt to be overlooked in modern preaching, “The kingdom.” He who examines the Acts of the Apostles will find how large a place it occupies in the preaching not of Peter only but of Paul, and, we may be assured, of all the other servants of the Lord in these early days. It is a grave blank where the kingdom is left out as now. Nor is it only that the future according to God is habitually lost to the faith of saints through the unfaithfulness of modern preachers, but thereby the gospel of God’s grace also suffers. For in that case there is sure to be confusion, which, mingling both characters, never enjoys the simple and full truth of either4: for the kingdom will be the triumph of righteousness by power when Christ appears in His glory. A truth it was most familiar to those who were bred in the constant and glorious vision of O. T. prophecy. Christianity, though it open to us heavenly things, was never intended to enfeeble this prospect; rather should it enable the believer to taste its blessing more, as well by imparting a deeper intelligence of its principles, as by bringing in the heavenly glory. We can enjoy it in an incomparably larger and more distinct way; and we have its principles explained by a deeper and fuller view of its basis in the reconciling work of the Lord Jesus on the cross.

“Wherefore I testify to you this day that I and pure from the blood of all. For I shrank not from announcing to you all the counsel of God” (Acts 20:26-27). The apostle could thus solemnly attest his fidelity to the trust the Lord had confided to him. (Compare Ezek. 3:18-20.) Twice at least (vss. 20, 27) he disclaims expressly that reserve which some bearing the Christian name have not been ashamed to avow as a merit learned from Him Whose death rent the veil, and Who puts all true followers of His in the light of life, the light which makes everything manifest. Walking in darkness, now that the True Light shines, is a walk in the flesh without God. With such no wonder that “the hungry sheep look up and are not fed.”

It is a mistake that “all the counsel of God” means no more than the plan of God in saving men unfolded in the gospel. “The gospel” is indeed the preaching of salvation in a dead and risen Savior; “the kingdom,” whether morally or in, its tally manifested form, has its own distinct force in God’s reign, as we have seen; “all the counsel of God” rises still higher and embraces His purpose in its utmost extent.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 20:18-21

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It is the more important to notice the fact that the elders were of “the church in Ephesus,” because the old error of Irenaeus reappears among other moderns in Dr. Hackett’s commentary on this book. “Luke speaks only of the Ephesian elders as summoned to meet the apostle at Miletus; but as the report of his arrival must have spread rapidly, it could not have failed to draw together others also, not only from Ephesus, but from the neighboring towns where churches had been established” (pp. 334-335). The truth is, that ancient and modern arrangements are alike inconsistent with scripture. Irenaeus was embarrassed by the prejudice of episcopacy, as were the authorized translators; but the plurality of elders or bishops from the church in Ephesus is not a whit more compatible with the “minister” of the dissenting bodies. It is certain that neighboring towns or churches are here wholly ignored, and that the presbyters of Ephesus only were summoned, and are alone addressed. Verse 25 is quite consistent with this. But it will be noticed that the apostle summoned them with authority, and that they responded to his call without question. To lower the apostle to the place of an ordinary minister is wholly unscriptural. “And when they were come to him, he said to them, Ye know from the first day that I came to Asia how I was with you all the time serving the Lord with all lowliness of mind, and tears, and temptations, which befell me by the plots of the Jews; how I kept back nothing of what is profitable, so as not to announce to you and to teach you publicly, and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 20:18-21).

Here the apostle does not refrain from reminding them of his own service in their midst. This was a habit of his, as we see very particularly in the First Epistle to the Thessalonians and elsewhere; burning zeal and a good conscience before God alone account for it. Nothing could be farther from his character than liking to speak of himself. He calls it his folly in reminding the Corinthians of his labors and his sufferings; never would he have said one word of either, had it not been of the utmost moment for the saints. They knew very scantily what the glory of Christ demands, what the walk and service and devotedness of the Christian should be. They had been conversant only with the gross darkness of heathenism, or with the hollow and pretentious hardness of the Jews. They needed not precept only, but, what is so much more powerful along with it, a living example to form and fashion the ways of Christ. Unswerving fidelity characterized the apostle’s course habitually, as he says, “Serving the Lord with all lowliness of mind, and tears, and temptations which befell me by the plots of the Jews.” Such an one could well appeal to others who knew him, as he does now with peculiar solemnity to the Ephesian elders. It is not learning or success in ministry which he puts before them, but serving the Lord with all lowliness of mind. How often that service puffs up the novice! What dangers surround even the most experienced! Lowliness of mind is of all moment in it, and the Lord helps by the very difficulties and griefs which accompany it. Paul was not ashamed to speak of his tears any more than of the temptations which befell him through the plots of the Jews, the constant adversaries of the gospel, animated with special bitterness against Paul.

Further, he could say that they knew how he kept back nothing of what is profitable. This needs faith without which fidelity will fail; for the apostle was altogether above the fear of man, and withheld in nothing what was for their good, so as to announce to them and to teach them publicly, and at their houses, testifying both to Jews and Greeks repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

Naturally the subject-matter points to his work from the beginning of his arrival at Ephesus, but also to that which every soul needs as the first testimony of the gospel. Hence we hear of testifying to Jews and Greeks. It is what man wants that he may come to God. Repentance and faith are inseparable where there is reality, and the language is as precise as we are entitled to expect from one who not only had but expressed the mind of God like the apostle. As there is no genuine repentance without faith, so there is no faith of God’s elect without repentance. Repentance toward God is the soul judging itself, and confessing its ways as in His sight. Faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ is the soul receiving the good news God sends concerning His Son. “Repent,” said Peter on the day of Pentecost, to the Jews already pricked in heart who accepted the word and set to their seal that God is true. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, thou and thy house,” said Paul and Silas to the Philippian jailor and to all that were in his house. How unfounded it would be to imagine that in the one case there was repentance without faith, or in the other, faith on the Lord Jesus Christ without repentance toward God! In a divine work both are given and found.

The Holy Spirit, Who works all that is good in the soul, takes care that repentance and faith shall co-exist. There may be difference in the outward development. Some souls may manifest more deeply the sorrow of repentance; others may be abounding in the peace and joy of faith; but wherever it is a true operation of God, there cannot be but both. We must allow for the different manifestations in different persons. No two conversions present exactly the same outward effects, some being more simple, others going through the dealings of God more thoroughly. It is well when the repentance toward God is as deep as the faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ is unhesitating. All then goes happily forward with the soul. But this is far from a common case. In most, as far as we can see, faith may be somewhat feeble, and consequently the soul is not a little tried with the sense of its sinfulness before God. In such circumstances self-occupation is apt to cloud the heart.

The spiritual eye is to be set on Christ as the object of faith, but with scrutiny of self subjectively before God, and hence comes a real judgment of sins and sin. There may not be peace, and there is not when this self-judgment with sorrow of heart begins; but faith in a God revealed to the conscience is surely there, though not yet rest by faith in the accepted and appropriated work of redemption. When Christ's work and God's grace are better and fully known, the self-judgment of repentance is so much the more profound. In this case the judgment-seat of Christ, however solemn, is no longer an object of dread. All is out already in conscience, and the flesh is judged as a hateful thing, and so evil really that nothing but the cross of Christ could be an adequate dealing with it; but there it is now known that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away (not merely our sins be forgiven), so that we should no longer serve sin; for he that died is justified from sin. As surely as death has no more dominion (sin never had) over Christ, Who, having died to sin once for all, lives unto God; even so we also may, and should, reckon ourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. We died with Him.

Repentance toward God then is not the gospel of His grace, not is it remission of sins, but that inward work in the conscience by the Holy Spirit's use of the word, without which the privileges of the gospel are vain and only hurry on the soul the more rashly to destruction. The low views which make repentance a human work as a preface to faith are no less objectionable than the so-called high views which merge all in faith, making repentance no more than a change of mind. Neither legalism nor anti-nomianism are of God, but the grace and truth which came by Jesus Christ. Truth does not spare the flesh or its works; faith and repentance bow in self-loathing to Christ; and grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Repentance then is not mere regret or remorse, which is expressly μεταμέλεια; μετάνοια is that afterthought, or judgment on reflection, formed by God's working through His word to which conscience bows, as self and its past ways are judged before God. It is never apart from a divine testimony, and hence from faith; God's goodness, not His judgment only, leads to it; and godly sorrow works repentance onto salvation not to be regretted, as the sorrow of the world works death. "I have sinned against heaven and in Thy sight"; "God be merciful to me the sinner"; such is its confession and cry in a broken and contrite spirit. The gospel, the good news of grace, is God's answer.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 20:13-17

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

Such was the close of the visit to Troas. At this time the apostle appears to have been deeply impressed that his ministry, in the east at any rate, was soon to close. So he had intimated to the saints in Rome a little before, for he lets them know that as he had been hindered these many times from coming to them, so now that he had no more any place in these regions he hoped to see them (Rom. 15:22-23).

He was bent on his ministration of the contribution from Macedonia and Achaia for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. This done, his purpose was to go on by Rome into Spain, assured of coming to the saints in the capital with the fullness of the blessing of Christ. This deep feeling appears to have affected his ministry wherever he went. It was no doubt in the earnestness to which it gave rise that he had discoursed so long the last night of his stay at Troas.

But now the journey must be entered on. "But we, having gone before on board the ship, set sail for Assos, there intending to take up Paul, for so he had arranged, intending himself to go on foot" (vs. 13). Here was another effect of the same solemn feeling. There is a time for social intercourse, there is a time also for isolation; and the apostle who enjoyed fellowship of heart with his brethren as no saint ever perhaps equaled, realized that it was now a season to be alone. One can hardly doubt that this was by no means an unfrequent thing for one so actively engaged in public work as Paul. His habitual piety would dispose him now and then to seek such an opportunity of unburdening his spirit, and of renewing, in a marked and fall way, his sense of dependence on the grace of Christ. These secret dealings with the Lord were so much the more needful, because the exigencies of the work called for energy and prominence before men. At this juncture, beyond any question, we see that he had appointed to be apart from his beloved companions, who went on board ship, even though it involved his own more laborious progress by land. It is left for us to judge its motive and meaning,1 and we cannot but think that what is here suggested is a better key than the mere notion of a visit to one and another by the way. The general context rather adds to the conclusion that Paul was avoiding all but indispensable visits just then, and that having but a short time for his journey, he gave what time he could spare to the most important objects before his heart. Unnamed visits would scarcely have furthered this aim. "And when he met with us at Assos, we took him up and came unto Mitylene; and having sailed thence on the morrow we arrived over against Chios, and on the next day we touched at Samos, and [having remained at Trogyllium] the day after we came unto Miletus. For Paul had determined to sail past2 Ephesus, so that he might not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hastening, if it were possible for him, to be at Jerusalem the day of Pentecost" (Acts 20:14-16).

There is no spiritual reason to dwell upon the associations which Assos or Mitylene, Chios or Samos, Trogyllium or Miletus might suggest. They are here brought before us simply as the varying points of the apostolic journey, from which it would divert as if we occupied our minds with historical questions interesting enough as to each of them.

Suffice it to say that, although Paul had his heart filled with that which was of the deepest importance for the saints in Ephesus, Miletus was the point of approach, rather than the capital of Asia. Here too the motive seems plain. Had he gone to Ephesus itself, with a strong affection,

and the many ties he had with the numerous saints there, he could not have left them without a considerable delay. He therefore preferred to sail past Ephesus, that he might not frustrate the object of his journey to Palestine. If one so known and loved and loving as he was, had visited Ephesus, he could not have avoided a stay of some length among them. He therefore made Miletus his place of passing sojourn, in order that nothing should hinder the fulfillment of his desire to be at Jerusalem for the day of Pentecost.

On the other hand, it was of the utmost moment that the saints at Ephesus should receive words of wise and gracious counsel at this moment. The apostle therefore adopts a method by no means usual. “And from Miletus he sent unto Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church” (vs. 17). These presbyters were the fitting medium. They had the regular and responsible ecclesiastical charge in that city. We can hardly doubt from the general impression of the rest of the chapter, that they were not a few in number. As this does not fall in with the usual habits and thoughts (not to say, selfishness) of men, the notion slipped in even from ancient times that the elders of all the churches round about are meant. But such a tampering with the word of God is not to be allowed for a moment. The apostle sent to Ephesus and called to himself the elders of the church, not of the churches around. There may have been many meeting-places in Ephesus; but, as is well known, scripture never speaks of the assemblies, always of the assembly or church, in a city. Hence, however numerous, they are here styled, the elders of the church; and they no doubt cared for the affairs of all. Whilst local responsibility was also preserved in its place, unity was not therefore forgotten. Common action would be the natural and proper result. So it was in Jerusalem, as we know from the revealed notices of that assembly, which consisted of many thousands of saints; and so we see it here in Ephesus, though no details are given. The grand principles of the church prevailed and were the same everywhere, though at first there were Jewish elements at work in Jerusalem, if some of them indeed did not linger still. But such unity was of and for heaven, not of Judaism, being preeminently of the Holy Spirit. “There is one body and one Spirit.”

Another matter may claim brief notice here, though it may seem somewhat of an anticipation. The elders of the church are designated “overseers” or “bishops” by the apostle in verse 28. “Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock in which the Holy Spirit hath made you bishops, to feed the church of God, which He purchased with His own blood.” This identification falls in with every scriptural notice we possess. Such is the genuine inference from 1 Timothy 3 as well as from 1 Timothy 5, and still more plainly from Titus 1:5-6, compared with 7,9, as well as Acts 11; 14; 15; 16, and 21, and from 1 Peter 5 and James 5, no less than Philippians 1:1. The great distinction which soon reigned between bishops and presbyters is wholly unknown to the word of God. Not one, but more, were appointed in each assembly or city, where charges were conferred at all. There was regularly a plurality of elders and bishops. They might be men of gift, teachers or evangelists; but the indispensable work was to “rule” or “preside.” This was the object of their appointment; for appointed they certainly were by apostolic authority, direct, or indirect when an apostle could not be there (as for instance by Titus commissioned for the purpose by the apostle Paul). The gifts, on the other hand, were given by Christ without any such intervention. A pastor, teacher, or evangelist, as such, was never nominated by an apostle or an apostolic delegate. The distinction from elders or deacons, it is well to bear in mind. “The seven” at Jerusalem, who rendered diaconal service, were chosen by the multitude of the believers, before they were appointed by the apostles. That this election by the church does not apply to elders is plain from every scripture that treats of their appointment, which lay exclusively with apostles or their expressly authorized deputies. Still less was there an election by men of those so-called gifts: in their case Christ chose. As Christ gave them, they preached or taught on their direct responsibility to Him. Where Christians gave of their means, they were allowed to choose dispensers in whom they had confidence. Such is the uniform teaching of the New Testament, and the only legitimate inference from it. The painful departure of Christendom, rationalists or dissenters, Catholics and Protestants, is so glaring that one only wonders how godly men can overlook the facts in the word which make the will of God manifest, or, how, if they apprehend them, there can be indifference to the truth and the inalienable duties it involves.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 20:7-12

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That the stay of seven days had a special and spiritual aim appears from what follows.

“And on the first [day] of the week, when we1 were gathered together to break bread, Paul discoursed to them, about to depart on the morrow; and prolonged the word till midnight. And there were many lights in the upper room where we were gathered together. And a certain youth, by name Eutychus, as he was sitting2 in the window, being overpowered with deep sleep, as Paul was discoursing yet longer, fell overpowered by the sleep, and even from the third story, and was taken up dead. But Paul went down and fell upon him, and clasping him round said, Be not troubled, for his life is in him. And when he went up and broke the3 bread and had eaten, and conversed with them a long while till daybreak, so be departed. And they brought the boy alive and were not a little comforted” (Acts 20:7-12).

There is no real difficulty or doubt as to the day intended. It was not the Sabbath or seventh, but the first, day of the week marked out to every Christian by the resurrection of our Lord. So we find the disciples meeting on that day, the first of the week—the very day that Jesus came and took His stand in their midst risen from the dead. So it was eight days after, when Thomas was with them and was delivered from his unbelief. It was the day of new, not old, creation, of grace and not law. There was no transfer from the seventh day to the first, nor is the first ever called Sabbath day; but as the apostles and others who had been Jews availed themselves of the Sabbath and of liberty to speak in the synagogue, so the first day was unequivocally the special and honored day of the Christian assembly. When they were all together from Pentecost and onwards in Jerusalem, we can understand their being day by day in close attendance with one consent in the temple and breaking bread at home. Here we find among the Gentiles, when time had passed over, that the first day called the Christians together as such. This is made the more marked in the passage before us because it is said that Paul discoursed “to them.” Twice over it is said that “we” gathered together. The constant duty for all the family of God as distinct from the Jews was to assemble on that day to break bread; the special object of Paul’s discourse was found in the saints who lived at Troas.

This is entirely confirmed by 1 Corinthians 16:2. “Every” first day of week let each of you set by himself a store according as he may thrive, that there may be no collections then when I shall come. “The first day” of the week was clearly a settled institution for the Christian body.

Not it but the Sabbath was the memorial of creation rest, which the law imposed in due time as a most holy commandment peculiarly bound up with God's authority and honor. The resurrection of Christ has brought in a new creation, after having by Himself purged our sins on the cross. Hence it is the day of manifest and triumphant life in Christ, our life, when our hearts go forth in worship, communion and service. A bodily rest which one shared with the ox and the ass certainly does not rise up to the blessed associations of Christ risen from the dead, nor does the canon of the New Testament close without stamping this day as the Lord's day (Rev. 1:10). Efforts have not been wanting on the one hand to make it a prophetic day with which it really has not one idea in common, for "the day of the Lord" will be one of ever increasing and solemn judgments from God on the earth, whereas "the Lord's day" is one of heavenly grace, bringing us into the victory of the Lord's resurrection already, the pledge of our own resurrection or change at His coming.

On the other hand it is to lower the character and authority of the first day of the week beyond calculation, to treat it merely as the day appointed by the church. Thus neither creation nor law nor human arrangement had to do with it. It is a day marked out by the Lord's repeated appearing, by the inspired sanction of the Holy Spirit, and by the final sanction of it as devoted to the Lord in the one great prophetic book of the New Testament; just as the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:20) alone shares as distinct from all other suppers the same striking and distinctive designation.

Again, some have sought to lower the breaking of bread here spoken of to the love-feast; but there is no ground whatever for such a notion. From the first, breaking bread was appropriated to the Lord's Supper: so we see it from the beginning (Acts 2:46). It is there clearly distinguished from partaking of food with rejoicing and singleness of heart. Earlier in the chapter, verse 42, the breaking of bread or loaf refers solely to the Lord's Supper. This is shown by its surroundings, the teaching of the apostles and the fellowship, the breaking of bread and the prayers. These constituted the united holy walk of the saints. No doubt they had the most powerful influence on their ordinary habits and necessary wants of every day; but it is plain that the verse distinctly speaks of that which was most sacred. Nor is it denied that breaking of bread might be said of an ordinary meal, when the context so demands. So we find on a most impressive occasion where the Lord Himself taking the loaf blessed it, and, having broken, gave it to His disciples (Luke 24:30-35). It remains true however, that, where the context speaks of the communion in the breaking of bread, the Lord's Supper alone is meant. So it is here; and in this most interesting way, the Lord's Supper and the Lord's Day were thus bound up together. It was no doubt a time when the assembly enjoyed the exercise of gifts, as here Paul discoursed to them, not "preached" as the A.V. says, which might convey the thought, of the gospel proclaimed to unconverted souls. Discourse is clearly a word of more general bearing, and quite as applicable to those within as to any without.

But the circumstances of this moment were peculiar. Paul was about to set out on the morrow, and extended his discourse till midnight. This gave occasion to the painful incident which befell Eutychus. It was not done in a corner; for "there were many lights in the upper room where we were." The youth so named was sitting on the window seat; and being borne down with deep sleep, as Paul was discoursing at great length, he fell, overborne by the sleep, from the third story to the bottom, and was taken up dead. It must be acknowledged that the inspired physician who wrote the account was a most competent witness. It is not merely that he appeared dead, or that he was taken up for dead, as some have said. He was really dead, but Paul went down, fell upon him, as the prophets notoriously did of old, and clasping him said, "Trouble not yourselves, for His life (soul) is in him." Assuredly the apostle in these words had no desire to make light of the power of God which had wrought in this miracle.

It may be well to compare with this Luke 8:49-56, where "the spirit" of the Jewish maiden had departed. But the Lord's words were enough; and "her spirit returned." Here it was not so: "his soul is in him," said the apostle, though divine power alone could retain it or hinder the proximate breakup.

Some have supposed that when Paul had gone up and broken the loaf and eaten, it was the interrupted celebration of the Lord's Sapper. This appears to me opposed to the intimations of the context. Scripture describes it, not as fellowship, but solely as the personal act of the apostle. No doubt it was "the loaf" of the Lord's Supper; but it was that loaf now partaken of by the apostle for his own refreshment, after so long speaking and circumstances so trying, about to go forth on his journey. This seems borne out by the word, γευσάμενος, rightly translated "eaten," or literally "tasted." We can readily understand therefore why the Lord avoids such a word in calling on His disciples to "take, eat," in the institution of His supper. The word φαγεῖν could be and is used in the most general way, but it is here γεύομαι. Again, the apostle's "conversing" with them a long while, till daybreak, much better suits a meal than the assembly. So, we are told, he departed; as they brought the boy alive and were not a little comforted. The joy much exceeded the sorrow.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 20:1-6

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It would appear from the Epistle to the Corinthians, that the tumultuous meeting in the theater was but one incident of a dangerous crisis at Ephesus. Certainly the apostle did not quit the city till there was a lull.

"And after the uproar had ceased, Paul having called [or sent1] for the disciples, and exhorted and saluted [them], departed to go into Macedonia. And, having gone through those parts and exhorted them with much discourse, he came into Greece. And having spent three months, and a plot being laid against him by the Jews, as he was about to sail for Syria, he determined to return through Macedonia.2 And there accompanied him (as far as Asia3) Sopater, a Berean, [son] of Pyrrhus; and of Thessalonians Aristarchns and Seciundus; and Gains of Derbe, and Timothy; and of Asia Tychicus and Trophimus. These going before waited for us at Troas; and we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened [bread], and came onto them to Troas in five days, where we tarried seven days" (Acts 20:1-6).

In this passage, as in many others of scripture, we have a living testimony to the joints and bands which operated so efficaciously in apostolic times to preserve the saints in unity, fellowship, and love. There was no lack of missionary zeal; but, besides, the Spirit of God wrought much in the exhortation and encouragement of the saints. Thus was the body of Christ built up. It is here that we see the most manifest contrast of modern times with the primitive. If the converts are guarded from turning aside, it is in general the most that is attempted. Zeal habitually

goes out towards the conversion of sinners, and those devoted to that work are regarded as eminently faithful and enlightened if they do not yield to superstition on the one hand, or to philosophy on the other. Growth in the truth is rare and practically unknown even among the teachers, not to speak of the converts. The consequences are deplorable: teachers and taught in these circumstances are ever liable to the many misleading influences around.

In these early days we see on the contrary the utmost care and zeal in visiting afresh those who had been already brought to God, and gathered to the name of Jesus. Nor was it only by oral instruction. That new and characteristic form of Christian instruction which expressed itself in the apostolic Epistles was now fully in operation. No composition admits of greater candor and intimacy; none gives such scope to the affections of the heart. It was from Ephesus that the apostle wrote the First Epistle to the Corinthians, as grand a development of Christian and church truth as was the Epistle to the Romans, written not long after as we shall see, on the great foundations of grace in justifying the ungodly, and on the reconciling of the indiscriminate gospel with the peculiar promises to Israel, as well as on the practical walk of the believer in view of all this.

There is no fresh inspiration going on now; but these two modes of seeking the edification of souls ought surely both to proceed. Preaching and teaching have a most unquestionable importance in reaching souls more simply and directly than any other; but there is an exactness as well as a fullness of treatment, which are best conveyed in a written (and, we may add, a printed) form. There is another object also of great value attained in the latter way that souls can be reached thereby all over the world, most of whom neither could nor would listen to oral instruction of distinctive weight.

In these early days then we see not only the principle of both oral and written teaching, but the highest form of either ever reached on the earth. The apostles and prophets were the foundation on which the church was built. By the gracious power of the Holy Spirit they had immunity from error. It was not men doing their best, but God conveying His mind perfectly through chosen instruments.

Their writings alone constitute the Christian standard. Others at the present day may be raised up to recover what is forgotten, and to propagate this and all truth; the Spirit may work energetically by them, and give indefinite accuracy to their thoughts and words in unfolding revealed truth; but they are in no wise a standard. Their writings are not God-inspired; and, as they are not entitled to issue their convictions under the authority of “Thus saith the Lord,” for every or any word of theirs, so the saints are responsible to judge all they say or write, and still more what they do, by unerring scripture. Here then, after the uproar had ceased, Paul sent for and exhorted the disciples, and, after bidding them farewell, departed to go into Macedonia, the scene of his former labors. There too we find him passing through those quarters; and, after exhorting the saints with much discourse, he came into Greece. It was during the three months spent there that he wrote the Epistle to the Romans. He had long desired to visit Rome in person, but was hindered hitherto. Urgent duties detained him elsewhere; and God had it in His purpose that His servant should enter Rome only as a prisoner. It was not so that even the apostle would have ordered matters, still less the saints themselves. It is good however to learn and accept God’s profound wisdom in all these dealings of His. In weakness, and fear, and trembling, he at first testified at Corinth. After much danger and persecution he had left Ephesus. An ill-understood man, his deep spirituality and zeal ran athwart much prejudice at Jerusalem. He could only go at length to Rome with a chain. Such were the ways of God in the unequaled path and service of the blessed apostle.

Nevertheless thorough sobriety pervades the action of Paul. When there was a plot on the part of the Jews against him, as about to sail into Syria, he avoids it by adopting the resolution of returning, not from Achaia direct, but through Macedonia. The Jews had enormous influence in that great commercial entrepot, Corinth; and injury or death could easily have been, humanly speaking, inflicted upon him as a passenger in one of the numerous ships of that day. He therefore changed his plan and returns through the northern province. And there accompanied him Sopater, Pyrrhus’ son, a Berean, and of Thessalonians Aristarchus and Secundus, and Gains of Derbe, and Timothy, and of Asia Tychicus and Trophimus.

It was not merely therefore that the apostle labored in all directions. Here we find not less than seven companions in service, who were in no way restrained to one fixed local sphere. The presbyters or elders labored and took the lead locally. There were many others besides the apostles who moved about with perfect liberty, seeking the blessing of the faithful and the spread of the gospel. Of these laborers we may discern at least two classes. Some few attached themselves as much as possible to the companionship of Paul. Of these we have a sample before us. But there were others like Apollos who labored in a more independent way and enjoyed less of his society, though they had his entire love and confidence.

In verse 5 we learn of another deeply attached personal companion, Luke, the inspired writer of this very book. “And these having gone before awaited us at Treas.” Thus quietly does this honored man intimate that he too was with the apostle at this time and at Philippi. It will be remembered that it was in these regions that Luke had first become the companion of Paul (Acts 16:10-11, and so forth).

“And we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened [bread], and came unto them to Troas in five days; where we tarried seven days” (vs. 6). Why the party did not move together, why the others went before, and Paul and Luke waited till after the feast, we can only conjecture. But we see the special association of Luke with the apostle and utterly reject the vain key to it that Wieseler suggests, that Luke traveled with him as his physician! If men cannot trace below the surface of the word with spiritual insight, how sad that they should exercise their wits in such degrading ingenuity! And will even saints learn how deeply the church is fallen when such thoughts are repeated instead of provoking indignation?

The delay of seven days furnished the ever desired privilege of partaking the Lord’s Supper together.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 1:12-26

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

Thus we have clearly set before us the position and expectation of the disciples in these early days. They knew, on the word of the Lord, that the promise of the Father was shortly to be fulfilled in the gift of the Holy Spirit. Instead of the restoration of the kingdom to Israel, they were to be witnesses of Christ everywhere to the uttermost part of the earth; and they were assured that the Lord Jesus, who had just ascended, should so come in the manner in which they beheld Him going to heaven.

“ Then they returned unto Jerusalem from the mown called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day) journey off. And when they came in, they went up to the upper room where they were abiding; both Peter and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas Bartholomew and Matthew, James [son] of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas [brother] of James. These all with one accord continued steadfastly in prayer, with [certain] women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, am with his brethren” (ver. 12-14).

Thus did these saints spend their time in the exercise of continual dependence on God. They had been the chosen witnesses of the Word of Life, as He had manifested Himself here below and in Himself the Son has shown them the Father. And now they were waiting for that blessed Divine Person who was to be in as well as with them, as the Lord had prepared them for it “I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter.” So now they all give themselves up will one mind to persevering prayer.

Believing women were with them. How different their place, even now, from that which Jews or Mohammedans accorded them! from that of mediaeval flattery or superstition! There were others beside wives, and hence the general form of the phrase; and one was among them specifically named, to whom sinful folly was afterward to bow down in worship, professedly subordinate to, practically more absorbing than, that paid to the Son or the Father.

It is the first mention of Mary, in this the only sure and divinely inspired history, that follows our Lord's departure to heaven. Highly favored she had been blessed among women, all generations thenceforth calling her blessed; yet was she found in all lowliness of mind with other women, as the Apostles were with them at waiting on God for the gift of the Holy Ghost. From the cross she had been taken to the home of the beloved disciple. After the resurrection not a word implies at appearance to the mother of our Lord. Another Mary saw Him, she of Magdala, first of all, other women shortly afterward; of any special appearance to His mother, Scripture is profoundly silent. She may have seen Him risen, as five hundred did at one time, bus Scripture intimates not a word about it. So absolutely was Christ to be known no more after the flesh. He was dead and risen, and the glory of the Messiah born of the Virgin faded away in the brighter glory of the Beginning, the First-born from the dead.

It is the last mention of Mary. Chrysostom may well suppose Joseph to have died; the truth is that he had long disappeared. Of both we heard for the last time in the beauteous scene of the Lord at twelve years of age (Luke 2:42-51). He, too, was not yet anointed by the Holy Ghost; yet was He perfect man and true God, the child of Mary, and subject not to her only, but to her husband—legally His father. But the incident brings out clearly His perfection as a child feeding on the Word of God; but no less clearly His consciousness of being the Son of God (far beyond the thoughts of Joseph or Mary), and withal His subjection to them, “His parents,” in that human place to which He had come down from divine glory in a love no less divine. When in due time, anointed by the Holy Spirit, He enters on His service and His presentation al the Messiah, Joseph is gone. This was as it should be. It was through Joseph He had direct claim as the royal Son of David; for Joseph came down from Solomon, and there lay the true line of promise to the throne Mary, too, sprang from David; but through Nathan, who could give no such title. Legally and naturally, He was descended from the King beloved of God, as He had a title in His own person above David as surely as above Joseph and Mary; He was God, Jehovah, the Lord God of Israel. Still the Word of God mast be honored and verified in every human particular which Divine grace had given and made known, for the exercise and the reward, the trial and the joy of faith.

Now Mary, according to Scripture, appears for the last time in the holy band of prayer with others, men and women, not prayed to but praying. That the upper room was in the Temple is the dream of Dr. Hammond. How strange, that grave theologians should conceive such erudities, and that they seem so destitute of kind and faithful friends to efface them, lest they might turn to shame or hurt! The last place where the disciples could have had such a chamber was the Temple. It was no doubt in a private house where they then sojourned; whether it was that large upper room furnished where the Lord and His disciples sat down to eat the last Passover, we know not, nor is it of divine moment either, else it had been told us. But such rooms were common among the Jews, and, we may be assured, in Jerusalem especially, where God had His plans for blessing through His Son and to His honor.

“And in these days Peter stood up in the midst of the brethren, and said (and there was a crowd of names [or persons] together, about a hundred and twenty), Brethren, it was needful that the Scripture should be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the month of David concerning Judas, who was guide to those that took Jesus. For he had been numbered among us, and received the allotment of this service. (This man then obtained a field from wages of his iniquity; and, falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out. And it became known to all the dwellers at Jerusalem, so that in their language that field was called Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.) For it is written in the Book of Psalms, Let his homestead be made desolate, And let there be no dweller in it, and, His overseership let another take. Of the men therefore who went with us at every time that the Lord Jesus went in and went out among us, beginning with the baptism of John until the day in which He was taken up, must one of these become a witness with us of His resurrection. And they put forward two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. And they prayed and said, Thou, Lord, knower of the hearts of all, show of these two one whom Thou hast chosen, to take the place of this service and apostleship from which Judas fell away to go to his own place. And they gave lots for them; and the lot fell on Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles” (ver. 15-26).

The hundred and twenty did not comprehend all the faithful in the land, but all in Jerusalem probably. To these Peter speaks with decision, but in the light and authority of Scripture. Power from on high had not yet come on him; but there was evidently an intelligence never experienced by him before the Lord died and rose. These two things may co-exist now; or spiritual intelligence may be found where special power may not be given, though the Holy Ghost is, and this to abide forever. But here we learn the important fact of their distinctness, and so much the more plainly, because the Holy Ghost had not yet been poured out. But Peter applies Scripture with clearness. It shone in the light of the Lord's death and resurrection. It must needs be fulfilled, not in Christ only, but in antichrist; and such was Judas, who became guide to those that took Jesus. The Holy Spirit had deigned to speak of evil as well as good; and all must be fulfilled, though spoken by human lips. The unbelief of man may ruin him, but cannot make the written word of none effect; any more than the lot Judas received in the ministry of Christ exempted him from his awful sin and punishment. And the field got from wages of iniquity bore witness in characters of blood, after Judas

passed away from his forfeited place in service and apostleship to go to his own place of torment. No wonder then that, as God so solemnly marked His resentment now before all the dwellers of Jerusalem, He should speak before by the mouth of David of such a sinner against His own Son, as well as against his own soul Psa. 109 pronounced his curse, but called for a successor to his vacated office; and Peter lays down, for such as had gone with the apostles from the baptism of John till the Ascension, the essential condition of becoming with them a witness of His resurrection.

Here once more we see what an immensely important place the resurrection was to hold in the testimony of Christ and the gospel, and how it is interwoven with this Book of the Acts in particular. Nor can there be strength or clearness in preaching and teaching without it. In presence of it vain man is annulled; by it Christ is vindicated, God is glorified, and the believer is justified. But even in this book we may learn more of its power and value in the hands of the Holy Spirit, if we return to the practical use Peter made of the Psalms he had cited.

Two then were put forward, Joseph Barsabbas Justus, and Matthias, Who, as far as man could see, possessed equal qualification. Hence appeal was made to the Lord in prayer. It was His work that was in question, and it is His to choose the workman. So, in Matt. 9, He told His disciples to supplicate the Lord of the harvest to send forth laborers into His harvest; and then, in chap. 10, He called unto Him His twelve disciples, and gave them authority, and sent them forth. It is the same principle here. Elsewhere, in what concerns the assembly of God, His God and Father may be sought most appropriately; but the Lord none the less, in what concerns His service and the instruments He may choose for it.

But there is a peculiarity to be noticed, the using of lots. It was in no way the will of man choosing whom he would, as some learned men have erroneously supposed, not without bias from their peculiar habits, nor unwilling to justify them from Scripture. Nor does the last term, translated “numbered” (ver. 26), warrant here the notion of popular election, which is in principle foreign to Scripture, for the choice of servants in the word. The lot was, as it will be in the latter day, a distinctly Jewish mode of seeking divine direction; and so, in the choice of the twelfth apostle (Matt. 19:28), it was fittingly resorted to here. For the Spirit's presence, the new power. which makes the assembly to be God's assembly, in which Jews and Gentiles are alike unknown, was not yet enjoyed. The Lord therefore was looked to thus; but lots were never cast after the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

Nor is there just ground for Stier, as cited by Alford, to question the step of choosing a twelfth apostle, which seems to be thoroughly in keeping with the waiting posture of the disciples. Besides, Acts 2:14; 6:2, would to most minds imply the contrary, and show that Luke does afterward speak of the Twelve. To Suppose that Paul was the intended twelfth is rather to lower his true position and extraordinary call.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 1:1-11

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

As Luke’s narrative of our Lord Jesus was addressed to a Christian convert, so was its sequel which recounts the gift of the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, in His presence and operation, more especially in the leading apostles, first of the circumcision, then of the uncircumcision. But we have the ways and working of the Holy Spirit, not only with many others, but also in and with the assembly also: a truth of capital moment, though lost sight of practically to the deep dishonor of God, and the irreparable injury of the church itself.

It would seem that Theophilus had either ceased to hold a governorship (or whatever other public position—of a magisterial kind the inspired historian implies by the title “most excellent": cf. Acts 23:26; 24:3; 26:25, with Luke 1:3), or had become so matured in faith and so spiritual as to value title as little as position, though one could scarce conceive a faithful man abiding in it. Further, they are not to be heard of in old or modern times, who imagine the name to be a fictitious designation of those who love God. Not only does the comparison of the Gospel with the Acts point to a real Christian to whom the writer inscribes both, but the form of the word would in this case have been φιλόθεος, as in 2 Tim. 3:4, and not θεόφιλος.

“The first account I composed, O Theophilus, concerning all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which, having by the Holy Spirit charged the apostles whom he had chosen, he was taken up; to whom he also presented himself alive, after he had suffered, by many proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking the things concerning the kingdom of God. And being assembled with [them], he commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem but to await the promise of the Father, which [said he] ye heard of me. For John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit after not many days hence.” (Vers. 1-5.)

Such is the simple opening of this book, treating of the wonderful works of God in the new creation, which He would have to be testified in the old by a witness no less competent than His own Spirit. In the cross of the Son of man sin was judged by God, not yet on sinners, but in the one perfect Sacrifice, that God might righteously send forth good tidings of saving mercy to Jew and to Greek, alike ruined that they through faith might be alike saved. And now the Savior stood in resurrection life and power, first-fruits of them that are asleep, a life-giving Spirit to all that believe. As He had walked according to the Spirit of holiness in a world of sin during the days of His flesh, so now was He marked out Son of God in power according to that Spirit by resurrection, conqueror over Satan in death as in life, as He had also exhausted God's judgment in suffering for sin, that He might be the righteous Head of a new family who live of His life as He died for their sins. Thus does the Gospel of Luke lead into what is commonly though not correctly called “the Acts of the Apostles"; for it is rather the inspired narrative of the risen Lord working in the energy of the Holy Ghost sent down from on high and witnessing to Him there both in the assembly and in His servants, some of the apostles above all.

Even the Lord risen from the dead, though not yet “received up,” is seen here enjoining the apostles through the Holy Spirit. (Ver. 2.) It was not merely before He died; in the new estate of man beyond the grave we have the evidence of the same blessed power. The Holy Spirit acts in man risen. In Jesus we see this truth, as every other. It will be so with us when we are raised from the dead; we shall not lose that divine spring of power and joy when or because we enter the final state of man according to the counsels of God. It will be that which is perfect come, but the Holy Spirit will not therefore cease to act in us; rather will He form us for all the worship and service suitable for those glorified

with Christ.

That Christ presented Himself alive after He had suffered was the great fact established “by many proofs” (ver. 3); and so it is the subject matter of testimony throughout the book, as it is the foundation truth of the gospel. The God of grace is the God of resurrection in Christ who suffered for sins once, Just for unjust. The apostles are false witnesses of God if He did not raise Him up; and He raised Him not up if no dead are raised; and if He has not been raised, our faith is vain; we are yet in our sins. But He has been raised from the dead, as surely as God is true, His word faithful; His grace and power are alike manifested not more in His chosen witnesses, than in the transforming effects of His testimony on others who believe, once children of disobedience and of wrath, His enemies. The charge was to the apostles from Him risen.

Nor was it only that He was seen by them, or appeared to them, by the space of forty days; He spoke also the things concerning the kingdom of God, as His servants preached afterward. This was no less true of the apostle to the Gentiles, as we may learn distinctly and to the end from chapters 20:25, 28, 31.

His command, when assembled with them, was not to depart from Jerusalem but to await the promise of the Father, the baptism in the Holy Spirit, not many days after that. (Vers. 4, 5.) It is of the deepest moment that this be understood: for many misapply the Spirit's baptism either to miraculous displays or to the new birth: and the more so, as without doubt He wrought largely in both these ways at Pentecost. But the reader has only to consider John 14-16 with care, to learn from God's word that it is not a question here of the great primary need of sinful man at all times to be born of the Spirit, still less of those gifts or “charisma” which were so abundantly distributed among those who confessed the Lord at that time, but of the immense and standing privilege of the church in the presence of the Holy Ghost sent down in person to abide with the saints and be in them. Him the rather gave to be with them forever; Him the Son sent to them from the Father. For this was contingent on the Son's going away: if He went not away, that other Advocate, the Spirit of truth, would not come. But, the work of reconciliation wrought, Jesus went on high and sent here below the Spirit. This would be the accomplishment of the Father's promise. The saints were then to be baptized in the Holy Spirit.

For the believer it is impossible to conceive anything of more commanding importance, whether in itself, for God's glory, for doctrinal truth or for practical value. Yet what was so soon or so generally forgotten? Without it Christ's place as Head of the church is unknown, and consequently the true relationship of the church as His body. Redemption is enfeebled, the new and heavenly place of the Christian is neither understood nor enjoyed, and the proper hope is leveled down to a Jewish expectation with its signs and dates, its troubles and fears. Still more directly does lack of faith as to the baptism of the Holy Ghost affect the walk and service of the individual, the joint worship and public action of the assembly. There is no surer sign, no more fatal means, of the ruin of the entire testimony to Christ than the blank ignorance, the utter exclusion, of this incomparable power and privilege for the Christian and the church, which now pervades Christendom, as it has done since apostolic times. Oh, what a mercy on God's part, what love on His own, what honor to Christ and His cross, that the Holy Spirit deigned to abide in all His truth to the church, if the church has been thus false to Him! The gift or baptism of the Holy Ghost was the promise of the Father, and the disciples heard it from the Son. John, the, greatest of mere men woman-born, baptized with water, the baptism of repentance; the Son of God but risen and ascended Man, the same is He that baptizeth in (or with) the Holy Spirit. None indeed could but a divine person; yet is it the One who became man to accomplish redemption and was received up in glory whence He sent the Spirit down.

“ They therefore being come together asked him, saying, Lord, dost thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not yours to know times or seasons which the Father set in his own authority. But ye shall receive power at the coming of the Holy Spirit upon you; and ye shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth. And having said these things, as they looked, he was taken up, and a cloud withdrew him from their eyes. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went on, behold, two men stood by them in white garments, who also said, Men of Galilee, why stand ye looking into heaven? This Jesus that was taken up from you into heaven shall so come in the manner in which ye beheld him going into heaven.” (Vers. 6-11)

As in the Gospel (chap. 29:11, &c.) the Lord corrects the hasty expectations of the disciples: the kingdom was not immediately to appear. The passover was to be fulfilled in it when it would assume a different shape. (Chap. 22) The Christian form of the kingdom however is not here spoken of, because the question was about restoring it at that time to Israel. Now the Lord does not at all contradict such a restoration in its season, but the salvation of Israel and the restoration of the kingdom to the chosen people clearly belonged to the ways of God of which prophecy treats; and He lets them know that times and seasons the Father placed in His own authority. Another vista He opens out to them as that immediately before them. “But ye shall receive power at the coming of the Holy Spirit upon you; and ye shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.” These words explain the situation with divine precision and unspeakable grace. It was not yet to be the displayed kingdom which belongs to the age and world to come. Now it is a question of testimony in the power of the Holy Ghost, with whose mission and presence it is bound up. They were to be witnesses of Christ, not yet reigning with Him, but His witnesses, as rejected yet risen, despised of men, especially of the Jews and Jerusalem, but on the point of being exalted of God in heaven; and witnesses of Him—for all is of grace—both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth. Compare with this beginning of the Acts the end of Luke's Gospel, where the risen Savior commands that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. “And ye are witnesses of these things. And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you; but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem until ye be endued with power from on high.” It is not baptism here, but vital blessing, repentance unto life and remission of sins sealed with the Holy Ghost. All has its place, and propriety; but the better thing it was the lot of the beloved physician to indict under the inspiring energy of God, who was in honor of His Son's person and work giving life and liberty with the Spirit's seal to all that believe the gospel: its source the grace of God; its righteous foundation the cross of Christ; its character of life His resurrection; its formative object the heavenly glory; and its power the Holy Ghost sent down from above.

But the true outlook of hope is wanted to complete the circle of blessing. And this, at least as far as it is connected with the scope of this book (for there is a divinely perfect system in all scripture and in every distinct part), now follows, the hope of our Lord's return. “And having said these things, as they looked, he was taken up, and a cloud withdrew him from their eyes. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went on, behold, two men stood by them in white garments, who also said, Men of Galilee, why stand ye looking into heaven? This Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven shall so come in the manner in which ye beheld him going into heaven.” Doubtless it is His return for the kingdom to be established over all nations and tongues, for the times of the restitution of all things, and not specially to receive His own to Himself and present them in the Father's house. It is the more general aspect of His coming, and not the heavenly side. Still it is the personal

object for the saints, the Lord coming again in person, as surely as the chosen witnesses saw Him taken up from them into heaven. This the disciples have let slip as a real living hope, not more to His dishonor and the grief of the Spirit than to their own immeasurable loss. For if faith be the more essential as men say, the true hope cannot be obscured, weakened, or destroyed, without proportionate injury, if we judge by the only true measure of God's glory in Christ. We fall into misleading hopes as soon as the truth ceases to be before the heart; and none is so false as to look for the gradual amelioration of that world or even of Christendom which must be judged in the day of the Lord, instead of waiting as pilgrims and strangers, the bride separate from the world, for Christ to come and fetch us to heaven for the marriage-supper of the Lamb. This is gracious and heavenly separateness to God, above the world's attractions and honors, outside its evils, and unmoved by its enmity. May it be more and more true of us in His grace!

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 19:32-41

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

Each was the uproar which pervaded the crowd in the theater at Ephesus.

“Different ones therefore kept crying somewhat different things; for the assembly was in confusion, and the mass knew not wherefore they were come together. And from the crowd they instructed1 (or drew together) Alexander, the Jews putting him forward; and Alexander waving his hand wished to make defense to the people. But when they came to know he was a Jew, one shout arose from all, crying for about two hours, Great [is] Artemis of [the] Ephesians. And the town-clerk after stilling the crowd, says, Ephesians, which of men is he who knoweth not that the city of [the] Ephesians is temple-keeper of the great Artemis and of what fell from the sky? Since then these things cannot be gainsaid, you must be quiet and do nothing rash. For ye have brought these men, neither temple-robbers nor blasphemers of our (or your) goddess. If then Demetrius and the artisans with him have a matter against any one, court-days are going on, and there are pro-consuls: let them accuse each other; but if you make any inquiry about other things, it will be settled in the lawful assembly. For indeed we are in danger of being accused of riot to-day, there being no cause concerning which we shall be able to render an account of this concourse. And having said thus he dismissed the assembly” (ver. 32-41).

In this book we have already had the Holy Spirit's account of religions excitement among the Jews, not only when it issued in the death of Stephen, but on other occasions where they were the chief instigators of the heathen against the gospel and its messengers. It was meet that we should have a living picture of a quasi-religions tumult among the heathen themselves, and this in the most capacious theater of which there are remains to the present day. Assuredly the Gentiles were rather more senseless than the Jews, though their convictions were in no way so deep. “Some, therefore, cried one thing and some another, for the assembly was tumultuous, and the most knew not wherefore they were come together.” Whatever the selfish motives underneath, their expression of wrath was about the great Artemis, of whom Ephesians boasted. Nevertheless, as we have seen, God wrought providentially through wiser men of high station among them; for the Asiarchs, whose chief or chiefs lived at Ephesus, had the easiest means and best position in the state, and by their very office would be expected most to resent any dishonor done to their religion. But kind feeling, if not conscience, made them tender the prudent advice to Paul, that he should not adventure himself into the theater. God need them to shelter His servant, where zeal and courage would have been unavailing, and might have exposed him to danger.

Here again we find the Jews putting forward Alexander. This, nevertheless, was a move, which, however craftily devised, did not benefit themselves, but rather inflamed the multitude so much the more. The instincts of the heathen resented such an apologist. Was it possible in common honesty that the Jews would have more respect than the Christians for their great goddess?

It was in vain, therefore, for Alexander to beckon with his hand, in the desire to make a defense to the people. It was enough that they perceived him to be a Jew, and therefore hostile to their idolatry. There was one voice from all, about the space of two hours, as they cried out, Great [is] Artemis of [the] Ephesians. What a true reflection of the world governed by prejudice and feeling in what is of all moment, not only for the life that now is, but for that which is to come! God, the true God, is not in their thoughts, which are therefore open to any and every delusion.

The town-clerk, or recorder, now appears on the scene; a much more important person in that age and country than in most others, as we learn from ancient inscriptions and otherwise. He was a heathen like the rest; but his common sense was shocked by their objectless excesses; and his speech sets forth in plain and pointed terms their own folly and wrong, not as to God but as among men, and more particularly before their Roman governors. Having stilled the crowd, he says, “Ephesians; who2 is there of men that knoweth not that the city of the Ephesians is temple-keeper of the great Artemis, and of that which fell down from Zeus (or the sky)? As these things cannot be gainsaid, ye ought to be quiet and do nothing rash. For ye have brought these men neither temple-robbers3 nor blasphemers of our goddess. If, therefore, Demetrius and the artisans that are with him have a matter against anyone, court days are going on, and there are pro-consuls: let them accuse (or prosecute) one another. But if you make any inquiry about other things4 it will be settled in the regular assembly. For indeed we are in danger of being accused for the riot of to day, there being no ground5 concerning which we shall be able to give account of this concourse. And, having said thus, he dismissed the assembly.”

Thus is man beguiled. He assumes as unquestionable what is a mere delusion of the enemy. No intelligence secures against the lie of Satan, nothing but the truth brought home by the Spirit of God! For this man; otherwise sensible, the great Artemis and the stone that fell from the sky, were things which could. not be gainsaid. On this supposition he insists on calmness as the only state of mind befitting his co-religionists. He urge that those concerned were neither temple-robbers nor revilers of their goddess. Why, therefore, should such men be brought before them? But he is more precise also, and sets before Demetrius and the artisans in company with him, that their procedure was irregular and dangerous for all. A charge must be laid at a proper time and place, and before the suited judge. There alone could there be a lawful result, Any other inquiry must be settled in the lawful assembly, which the present was not. More than that “we are in danger,” not they only, but “we,” of being accused of riot for this day's proceedings, no cause existing for which they could render an account of this concourse. The Romans, it is well known, were most jealous of such disorderly assemblages; which they often punished with bloodshed without measure. As

his speech thus closed with a most significant hint, he had no difficulty thereon in dismissing the assembly.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 19:21-31

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

Thus in Ephesus did the word of the Lord grow and prevail with might, according to the remarkable expression of Luke. Every testimony had been at full tide there; the evident power and presence of the Spirit, attested by tongues and prophesyings, bold preaching of the kingdom of God for months in the synagogue, and still less restricted discoursing daily in the school of Tyrannus, for two years, during which time the disciples took up their due separate position; so that not only they of Ephesus, but, speaking generally, all those that dwelt in the province of Asia, Jews and Greeks alike, heard the word of the Lord. The uncommon powers wrought by the hands of Paul proved even externally where and with whom God was; as the ignominious penalty of the Jewish exorcists demonstrated that even Satan despised their selfish and profane use of the name of Jesus, so as to overawe all inside, and to exercise healthfully the conscience of many within, when it was for the Lord's glory. What need was there for the prolonged stay of the apostle whose heart went out to the regions beyond?

“Now after these things were fulfilled, Paul purposed in his spirit, passing through Macedonia and Achaia, to proceed unto Jerusalem, laying, After I have been there, I must see Rome also. And having sent into Macedonia two of those that ministered to him, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in1 Asia for a while” (ver. 21, 22).

It is not correct to interpret “in the Spirit” here of the Holy Ghost. No more is meant than that the apostle purposed it “in his spirit “; a frequent phrase of his, not only in this book but elsewhere. He longed once more to go to Jerusalem, after passing through the two Roman provinces of Greece. He felt that his work was closed for the present at Ephesus, and that after visiting Jerusalem he must see Rome also. With this we may compare Rom. 1:9-13, as well as chap. 15: 22-29, though the journey to Spain appears nowhere else in the inspired writings, and we know not that it was ever realized. How immense, the energy which comes out in these few words! How much more, when we consider how fully he preached the gospel of Christ, not where He was already named, but where the good news had never penetrated before! It was also a spiritual capacity and zeal that embraced not heavenly truth only, and the whole scope of divine counsels for eternity, as well as the O.T. prophecies of the kingdom, but the most ordinary matters of need for the peace and fellowship of the saints, yea, even for their temporal good day by day. We see, too, how with apostolic authority he directed the service of others, and this at all cost to himself personally; for at thievery time he sent into Macedonia two of those that ministered to him, not Brutus only, but the fellow-laborer nearest to his heart, his beloved child, Timothy, whilst he himself stayed awhile in Asia.

“And about that time arose no small disturbance about the way. For a certain [man] by name Demetrius, a silver-beater, making silver shrines [miniature temples], of Artemis, brought no little business to the artisans, whom be gathered together with the workmen of like nature, and said, Men, ye are aware that we2 have our prosperity from this business. And ye behold and hear that this Paul hath persuaded and turned away a considerable crowd, not only of Ephesus, but of almost all Asia, saying that they are no gods that are made by hands. Now, not only is there danger for us that this trade come into disrepute, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis be counted for nothing, and that even she should be deposed from her3 magnificence, whom all Asia and the world [habitable earth] revereth. And when they heard, they were filled with wrath and kept. crying out, saying, Great is Artemis of the Ephesians. And the city was filled with confusion; and they rushed with one accord into the theater, having seized together Gains and Aristarchus, Macedonians, Paul's fellow-travelers. And when Paul was minded to enter unto the people, the disciples suffered him not. And some of the Asiarchs also, being his friends, sent unto him and urged him not to adventure himself into the theater” (ver. 23-31).

Such was the fresh effort of the enemy, not so much by means of Zeivs as Gentiles, and accordingly by an appeal to worldly lusts rather than by spiritual power in an evil shape. Nevertheless, religious motives, such as they were, even here threw a certain halo around that which was really selfish and utterly sordid. Nor is any device of the enemy more common or permanent. Satan contrives in this world to interweave debasing and destructive superstition with the present interests and honor of mankind. This being so, one cannot wonder that the mass of men are most readily inflamed by the testimony of the truth which threatens to undermine their religion and their worldly property: It is the same today, in principle, as then at Ephesus. An active leader was easily found to take the matter up and blow it into a flame. The artisans and the workmen engaged in the trade of the silver shrines of Artemis were roused by their employer, Demetrius, who appealed to their covetousness and at the same time pointed out that Paul's teaching threatened not only their trade but the discredit of the great goddess Artemis. And the appeal was not in vain; it never is, save where grace makes known the truth.

Man, ignorant of God, will fight for nothing more keenly than for his wealth and his religion. Nor could it be denied that throughout much more than Ephesus, or even Asia, Paul had persuaded and turned away much people from their gods many and lords many. There was no doubt that he did really mean that those are no gods which are made with hands, that to as there is one God, the Father, of Whom are all things, and we unto Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through Whom are all things and we through Him. We ought not to think, therefore, that the divinity is like gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and device of man. And that one God now commandeth men that they should all everywhere repent, because He hath appointed a day in the which He is going to judge the world, or habitable earth, in righteousness, by the man whom He hath ordained, giving proof of it to all in that He raised Him from the dead. So had Paul openly preached at Athens during his brief visit; assuredly his long abode in Ephesus was not less fruitful in the solemn proclamation of the truth. We need not have wondered if the silversmith had taken fire at the beginning of his stay. But grace knows how to make the wrath of man praise God, as well as to restrain the residue of wrath.

It was well ordered, however, that the outburst should come while the apostle was still there. Two of his fellow-travelers were actually seized; and Paul intended to go in to the raging populace in the theater, but the disciples would not suffer him. And very interesting it is to see the moral effect of Paul's teaching and life on certain of the chief officers of. Asia, who are distinguished from the disciples but expressly said to have been his friends. These sent unto him and besought him not to trust himself in the theater. What is more, the scripture shews that Paul, whatever his own courage or feeling, did not despise these friends, notwithstanding their position, but gave way to the remonstrance of his

brethren. He who on fit occasion knew how to wield on earth the power of heaven for the Lord's glory; he who wrote with divine authority for the saints here below till Christ comes, could graciously bend to others, as well as stand alone where this was of God. Only the Holy Spirit can give the discernment at the moment, where the eye is single to Christ.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 19:13-20

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But the Lord was pleased to manifest in another way, negatively indeed but effectively, what His grace delivers from in this present evil age.

“And certain ones of the Jewish exorcists that went about took in hand to call upon those that had wicked spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth. And there were seven sons of Sceva, a certain1 Jewish chief-priest, doing this. But the wicked spirit answering said to them, Jesus I know, and Paul I am acquainted with; but who are ye? And the man, in whom the wicked spirit was, leaping upon them and mastering them both,2 prevailed against them, so that they fled out from that house naked and wounded. And this became known to all, both Jews and Greeks that inhabited Ephesus. And fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. Many too of those that had believed came confessing and declaring their deeds. And not a few of those that practiced curious arts brought their books and burnt them before all. And they summed up the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. So with might the word of the Lord increased and prevailed” (ver. 13-20).

During His ministry the Lord answered the reproach of the scornful Pharisee by appealing to those sons of Israel who cast out demons; He did so Himself by the Spirit of God. The spirits were subject not to the twelve only (Mark 6:7), but to the seventy also through His name; nor was there any exhibition of divine energy which more affected their minds (Luke 10:17). It was the first sign which, when He rose from the dead, He promised should follow those that believe. Whether by sickness or spirits' unclean possession, there was no case which resisted the power of the Holy Ghost (Acts 5:16). We have seen a similar record of Philip in Samaria (Acts 8:7), and especially of Paul (Acts 16:18; 19:12).

It is the more important to press the word of God as to those evil possessions, because, on the one hand, the bias of man has set in so strangely in modern times to treat their existence with unbelieving contempt, where, on the other hand, people are not given up to besotted and blinding superstition. For Satan catches men by snares of the most opposite kinds. The truth is the one thing which men do not affect. And as they treat evil spirits in possession of human beings as an exploded old-wives' fable, so they no less scout the reality of the Holy Spirit's dwelling in every believer, and working in some by way of special gift, not to speak of His action in the assembly. The Book of the Acts is most explicit in bearing witness to spiritual power, good and evil: to doubt the continuance of both is mere incredulity, and unworthy of the believer particularly.

Here the Lord displayed His resentment of those who, without owning Himself, sought to avail themselves of the apostolic action in His name, as a charm to which divine energy must be attached. Seven were concerned in a general way, two (it would seem) immediately, on whom consequently the blow fell. Their position too, as sons of a Jewish chief-priest, drew the more attention to so solemn a discomfiture. In vain did they call over any the name of the Lord; indeed their daring to adjure “by Jesus whom Paul preached” brought out the more distinctly His vindication of His servant, and their own impotence, as well as the reality of the enemy's power. For the winked spirit attested at once his acquaintance with Paul and his knowledge of his Master, not only with withering contempt for the hollow profanity of those who abused His name, but with the most practical demonstration that that power could tread down and put them to shame, instead of submitting to a victory at such unholy lips.

It is interesting to note how the wicked spirit identifies himself with him whom he possesses, just as the Spirit of God is graciously pleased to work in those who are made, by His dwelling in them, vessels to magnify the name of Jesus. It is He who effects all that is blessed; yet is it all blended with their minds and affections; so that it is as a whole set to their account. Thus here the demoniac, “leaping upon them and mastering both, prevailed against them, so that they fled out from that house naked and wounded.” It was his doing, though he could not by any means have done it save by that terrible power. The moral impression was great on all outside in Ephesus. Nor was it only that fear fell on them all, but the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. It was not simply that God and the enemy were brought before men's consciences; there was a testimony to the Deliverer also.

But there was even more. What became known universally acted with especial power on many of those who had believed. They came confessing and declaring their deeds; and if any went farther still, they gave the best proof of the abhorrence with which they now regarded their tampering with the wicked one. For “not a few of those that practiced curious arts brought their books and burnt them before all.” The price was reckoned up, and it was found not inconsiderable. Living facts brought home the power of the word, and conscience responded at once. This was one of the many ways in which the Holy Spirit wrought at Ephesus; as we find the varied action of the Spirit one of the most prominent characteristics of the Epistle written to the saints long after. It was the word of the Lord that thus mightily grew and prevailed: not a company of saints merely, but the word of the Lord—that word which He has magnified above all His name. It is now the holiest answer on earth to Christ in heaven; and how precious to see, not merely the fear of His name overawing Jews and Greeks, but those who believed so zealous for His glory as to tell out their own shame and worst degradation in unconverted days, and to take vengeance on all they had, no matter how costly, which breathed of the enemy's power and wiles!

Yet it is salutary to bear in mind that, whatever be these dark arts and diabolical energies, the god of this age carries on his most widely destructive work by methods of no seemingly unusual character, but suiting his delusions to the passions and the lusts of the flesh, even to the natural affections as well as interests of men, through the meshes of that world of which he is the prince. It is in this way above all that souls are kept blind through the exclusion of the grace and truth which came by Jesus Christ. In Christendom now, as of old in Judea, the mass perish, not in the terrible displays which appear here and there, or now and then, but under the placid surface of what is respected and enjoys an unquestioned character of patriotism and even religion, where the Father is unknown, and consequently it is not the true Christ brought home to the heart by the Holy Spirit. But the word of the Lord accomplishes the gracious purpose of Him who sends it forth, and

extensively too in the conversion and blessing of souls, if no longer in the might of apostolic days.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 19:8-12

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The rather peculiar but instructive case of the twelve disciples being given, the apostle is next seen resuming his service among the Jews at their synagogue. Compare chap. 18:19-22. He was there according to his pledge.

“And entering into the synagogue he spoke boldly for three months, discoursing and persuading the1 things concerning the kingdom of God. But when some were hardened and disobedient, speaking evil of the way before the multitude, he departed from them, and separated the disciples, discoursing daily in the school of2 Tyrannize. And this was done for two years, so that all those that dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord,3 both Jews and Greeks. And God wrought uncommon powers by the hands of Paul, so that even upon the sick were brought from his body handkerchiefs and arms, and the diseases left them, and the evil spirits went out” (ver. 8-12).

The apostles patient perseverance was great. For three menthe he spoke boldly in the circumscribed sphere of the synagogue, “the things concerning the kingdom of God” (ver. 8) being the matter of his discourse and persuasion as we can readily conceive of all subjects the most suited, to inquiring Jew's, who knew the law and the prophets. The godly, as we hear of Joseph of Arimathea, were looking: for the kingdom of God. This involved his opening to them the sufferings of Christ: and the glories after these. It never occurred to his mind to disparage that kingdom, still less to deny it, because of higher possessions and richer grace in the great mystery as to Christ, and as to the assembly (Eph. v.) meanwhile revealed for the Christian. Even salvation as now opened in the gospel of God's grace has depths beyond the kingdom. But the Jews, from tradition with its darkening effects, and from unbelief which overlooks what is of the deepest import in scripture were apt to turn from Jesus as the Christ, and, thug got blinded in presence of that light which if heeded would have made everything manifest. It is only by light divine in Him that all things have their true character exposed; and His grace not only frees us from all fear of consequences from it, but emboldens us to desire it as the assured blessing of our souls to God's glory. Some there were who did go on in faith and taste that the Lord is good others stumbled at the word, being disobedient.

“But when some were hardened and disobedient, speaking evil of the way before the multitude; he departed from them, and separated the disciples, discoursing daily in the school of Tyrannize” (ver. 9).

The truth preached in the synagogue had now brought out plainly those who received the love of it that they might be saved, and with at least as much distinctness these whose hard rejection of it led them to speak evil of the way in presence of the multitude. To have continued longer could have answered no good end; it would have led to bitterness of altercation and reviling from the adversaries. To withdraw from them at this point was clearly of God. Thus were the disciples separated in the capital of the province, the religious center of an area far larger still. The synagogue being no longer a seemly place, a room commodious enough was due, not only to the disciples, but to the testimony; and the apostle carried on his work of daily discourse in the school of one who was, as far as we can judge, a rhetorician or philosopher.

What a contrast, in that school, no doubt at different hours of the day, between the Christian teacher and the heathen! The one was filled with the grace and truth which, as a revealed whole, came into being by Jesus and in His person, flowing from the love of God to man, and with not a whit less divine authority, than the law pronounced at Sinai more than fifteen centuries before, and last, not least, brought home to heart and conscience by the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven, a Spirit not of fearfulness, but of power, and love, and a sound mind; the other, not perhaps lacking in imaginative thought clothed in attractive language, gave out speculation, being wholly destitute of certainty on all that most deeply concerns God and man, ignorant of all means of his reconciliation with God on a righteous basis, or of forming near and holy relationships with Him, possessing no present assurance of His will nor affections for every day's enjoyment and obedience, and still less able to lift up the veil which hides the unseen and eternal. Yet here each of them addressed his hearers, Paul, if not Tyrannus, day by day: the one presenting a work of art which gave scope for excellency of speech, and the assumption, but not the reality, of wisdom; the other a simple yet deep witness, dependent. on the holy Spirit, to the One Who gave Himself a ransom for all, the testimony in its own times, for God delights in grace.

Hence it is, that the place of testimony was of no moment: all the value, virtue, truth, grace, and glory that we boast is in the One preached. Holy place, or most holy, was nothing now: Jesus only. Had He not been cast out by the people of God, by their scribes and doctors, by Levites, and priests, and high-priests? and when they slew Him by the hand of lawless men, had not God Himself testified by rending the veil from top to bottom? Earthly holiness was utterly desecrated. The temple therefore is nothing, nor Jerusalem, nor the mountain of blessing in Samaria. One sacrifice has swallowed up all others, and is alone efficacious. All centers in the crucified but exalted Jesus on high, where is the true tabernacle which the Lord pitched, not man; where is the Great Priest, even Jesus Himself. Hence the same building, which man misused for vanity, faith could use for magnifying the name of the Lord. The consecration of a building since the ascension of Christ is a return to Judaism and one of the beggarly elements of the world; and the grander the building is, the more flagrant its inconsistency with the cross. Popery in all this is consistently but outrageously wrong, in rebellion against God and the truth, resuscitating all that received its death-blow in the death of Christ; for it boasts of its temples, its priests, and its sacrifices for the living and the dead. But where is the consistency of the Anglican who, admitting the one sacrifice as already complete and accepted, contends for earthly priests as well as holy places? where of the Dissenter, who, discarding an earthly priesthood, clings to the delusion and pride of his temple; chapel, or miscalled “church”?

The practice of the early church coincided with and confirms the principle. For those who had boldness to enter into the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, the great priest over the house of God, what mattered the mere place of assembling themselves together? Alas! indeed, one of earthly splendor must cloud the truth and moral glory of the cross. An upper room, a private house, however obscure the quarter, or (if occasion required as here) “the school of Tyrannus,” any place, small or great, according to the exigencies of the time, sufficed for the assembly. If numbers grew in a large town, they might for convenience meet in many rooms, but never so, as to jeopard the characteristic

truth that it was “the church,” not “churches,” in that town. Where unity is abandoned, save for the foundations it is no longer God's church, but man's.

At Ephesus as yet things were in their infancy, the disciples were separated (i.e., from the Jews who adhered to the synagogue), and the apostle discourses daily. “And this was done for two years, so that all those dwelling in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks” (ver.10). A great and effectual door of testimony lay open to him, if there were many adversaries. Proconsular Asia had the gospel before it. Many may not have listened more than once; for curiosity reigned among the Greeks, which, if easily attracted, is not less easily sated. But if ever an attractive center existed for Asiatic Greeks, it was in Ephesus. It was a time too, when men, weary of pretentious philosophy, and sick of the mental and moral horrors of paganism, yearned after something sure, solid, and good, if they knew not what, which they had found very partially in the synagogue. They wanted, in the language of Job, “an interpreter, one among a, thousand, to show unto man what is right for him, and God could be gracious to him and say, Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom. And in the apostle they had one of the rarest interpreters, and, more than that, one who beyond all men could feel for Jews and Greeks; for no Jew had, in his unbelief, ever hated Jesus more bitterly than he, no Greek more proudly than he despised that name. And who so much had felt or developed the riches of God's grace in Christ. For the space of two years all that dwelt, not in the city only, but in the province where the seven Apocalyptic churches and others are afterward known to have been gathered), heard the word of the Lord from one so laboriously zealous, and so every way competent to proclaim and unfold and apply it... He was content to go about preaching the kingdom; nor was it enough for him to urge on perishing souls repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. He did indeed testify the gospel of the grace of God; but he shrunk not from declaring the whole counsel of God. Nowhere do we see a spot so favored; nowhere did this wise master-builder lay a foundation so broad, deep, and strong, though indeed it was none other than that only one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. But who laid it so well as Paul at Ephesus, according to the grace of God which was given to him?

In due time God's building in Ephesus comes before us with a wonderful luster and fullness, not only in the book now occupying, us, but in the apostolic Epistle to the saints that were there, and the faithful in Christ Jesus. To no assembly elsewhere does the Holy Spirit so freely bring out the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit, and by none was it revealed as by the. apostle Paul, and to no saints communicated as to those addressed in that Epistle. Yet in the eyes of tradition the church in Ephesus is of slight account compared with that in Antioch, or in Alexandria, to say nothing of Rome or of Constantinople afterward. But God's ways are higher than man's ways, and His thoughts than those of the sons of men. No more humiliating proof of the departure from the divine estimate than is found in ecclesiastical history, with its ever increasing homage to the spirit of the world.

But we may notice the honor which God at this time put on the apostolic testimony to the Lord Jesus and the gospel in the new sphere. “And God wrought uncommon powers by the hands of Paul, so that even upon the sick were brought handkerchiefs and aprons, and the diseases left them, and the evil spirits went oat” (ver. 11, 12). The beneficent power of God in man and for man was thus attested. By and by it will triumph in the kingdom where all things are to be put into the hands of the glorified Son of man. But He is glorified already, although we see not yet all things put under Him. Meanwhile the Spirit is here on earth to bear witness of Him and His victory achieved in righteousness over Satan. This is the principle of those early displays of divine energy in man. They were testimonies to His defeat of the devil in man's favor, powers of the world to come, though of course but samples of what will be then universal. Certainly neither the church nor any individual saint has ground for long centuries to boast on this score. But God did work marvelously not only by Paul but in the assembly, as we see even in Corinth, to the, glory of Jesus, that man might learn on all sides and in every way the delivering power in His hands, not only over human infirmity, but over all the power of the enemy. Through the apostle this was manifested here with no little splendor. The God, Who gave and sent His Son to become a man as well as a propitiation for our sins, is not indifferent to man's miseries, or to Satan's malicious pleasure in rebellion and ruin. And these early days of the victory of the ascended Christ were illuminated with brilliant manifestations that all power in heaven and on earth is in Him Who is at God's right hand, and answers to the faith that called on His name, Nor was it only in the presence or at the word of the apostle: what had touched his person did not fail upon the sick who could not approach him. The faith that brought handkerchiefs or aprons from him to them had its reward: the diseases departed from them, and evil spirits (a distinct class) went out. Truly it was delivering energy to the Lord's glory in and for man; and it could not but deeply impress those who are sensitive enough to their interests and feelings in this life. But what is it at the best compared with the still deeper glory of the Son of man when God was glorified in Him dying for sin, that there too righteousness, might be vindicated and be forever on the side of man, unequivocally and absolutely of believing man?

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 19:5-7

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It can hardly be supposed that the twelve disciples in Ephesus here brought before us had enjoyed the teaching of Apollos, still less the help of Aquila and Priscilla, who unfolded to him the way of God more exactly. They must have been in this case led on, as they were by the apostle afterward. For it was pure ignorance which hindered their advance in truth, and not either obstinacy or the absurd and winked error imputed by some to them, which appeared later in the East, and left traces to a recent epoch, as Neander states in the first volume of his Church History. John's baptism in scripture went with his call to repent, as we have just seen, and that they should believe on the coming Messiah, i.e., Jesus. In no way was it the blasphemy of accepting John as Messiah. They knew of promise, not of accomplishment: but that was to stop short of the gospel. They are now given to receive the full truth and blessing. Paul preached to them Jesus. What is there not through Him and in Him?

“And when they heard this, they were baptized unto the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them; and they spake with tongues and prophesied; and they were in all about twelve men” (ver. 5-7).

But here it is well to understand what is taught; for some have inferred from the inspired historian that the original formulary had lapsed, and that the apostles here and elsewhere in the Acts are represented as baptizing only to the name of the Lord Jesus. This is a serious position. It

professes to stand on the letter of scripture, which cannot be broken; yet is it one which demands and deserves the fullest consideration, for it really annuls scripture. It has been entertained, and even acted on, by not a few whose principle it is to abhor any view or practice winch puts a slight on the immediate authority of our Lord. Yet no one denies that He clearly laid down for that institution baptizing to the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

So it is laid down in the earliest of the Gospels, where the great commission is given to the eleven. They were told to go forth and disciple all the nations, the Jews having already been made the object of their testimony in chapter 10. But now, Messiah being not only rejected but risen, and themselves associated with Him, the circle is enlarged consequently on His death and resurrection; and it is no longer a question of the rights of Jehovah, the one true God and Governor of Israel, but of God fully revealed, not only in the person, but by the work, of the Lord Jesus; and those disciples His servants are to baptize unto the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Here in Matthew was the fitting place to make that Name known; for in this Gospel, more than any other, we have the consequences of the rejection of the Messiah, and the new witness substituted for the old, all authority being given to Him in heaven and on earth. From this point of view the rejecting and rebellious Jews are left with their house, and, we may add, their city, desolate, till grace works repentance in their hearts another day. Meanwhile, in virtue of the accomplished work of the crucified Christ now risen from the dead, grace sends out a message of sovereign mercy to all the Gentiles. It is not the Son of David filling the throne of Israel, nor is it the Son of Man with His dominion and glory and kingdom given Him, that all people, nations, and languages should serve Him—His dominion an everlasting one which shall not pass away, and His kingdom that which shall not be destroyed. These are glories of the new age when He is displayed from heaven in power and presence on His return. Here it is the Trinity revealed and testimony to be rendered before that day, when they were to teach (not the law nor the prophets, but) all things whatsoever Jesus enjoined on them; “and lo! I am with you all the days until the completion of the age,” an age not completed till even the last week of Daniel's seventy is fulfilled. This may not be and is not the revelation of the mystery reserved for the Holy Spirit through the apostle of the Gentiles; but it is in contrast not only with the law of Moses, but with the promises given to the fathers and the seal attached to them. And Paul could say, as the twelve could not, that Christ sent him not to baptize but to preach the gospel, Yet did he in his place as a confessor submit to that institution of the Lord, as he also baptized from time to time those who confessed Him, as the inspired history abundantly testifies.

But nothing would be less like scripture than to rehearse the formula every time a record of baptism was made in it. The fact was stated, and the mode of statement is as invariably formed in scripture according to the character and design of the book wherein it occurs. Now it lies on the face of the Acts that the Holy Spirit is throughout bearing testimony, to Jesus as the Lord. Baptism therefore when predicated of any in its course is so described. This exactly accords with the record, and is as it should be, if the book be really stamped with that design, as it evidently is to any intelligent eyes. Besides, it is in the highest degree probable, that those who administered baptism in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, as bound by the injunction of the Lord, would also add the Lord's name as confessed by the baptized. So it is some way habitually done at this day by those who follow in their steps. Certainly the Book of Acts has Christian baptism mentioned as “on,” “in,” and “to” the name of the Lord in strict harmony with its own character. But this in no way warrants the inference that the twelve, or Paul, or any other, dispensed with the divinely given formulary. The form of the history is due to that design equally divine which controls this book like every other in the Bible.

Another circumstance may be noticed; that these Ephesian disciples received the Holy Spirit through the imposition of Paul's hands, as the Samaritans did through the hands of Peter and John. It was a signal mark of God's honoring the apostles. As the work in Samaria was due to the free action of the Spirit in Philip, it was the more necessary to bind all together, lest there should have been with God's sanction a church in Samaria independent of that in Jerusalem. The unity of the Spirit was safeguarded by giving the new converts the seal of the Spirit only in answer to the prayers and by the hands of two chief apostles from among the twelve. What simpler proof that, as the Spirit is one, so is the church, however locally severed? So it is now. The Ephesian disciples, baptized to Jesus on hearing the gospel, had Paul's hands laid on them in order to receive the Holy Spirit. It was one body everywhere; and Paul's authority; as set of God first in the church, is attested like that of Peter and John before him.

It is in vain to argue that the Holy Spirit here conferred means only spiritual powers. These powers indeed were included in the divine gift, as the close of ver. 6 intimates. But speaking with tongues, or even prophesying, was not all that the reception of the Spirit conveyed, nor yet the best part of the blessing. It is. the Spirit Himself who is given, as well as gifts for sign or for edification, which are both particularly indicated here. Even Bp. Middleton, according to his own too narrow and defective principle, would have been compelled to own the Holy Spirit here personally given. And this it is which is never withdrawn, and indeed makes the Christian and the church to be such. There is neither the one nor the other if there be no gift, no sealing, of the Spirit any longer.

Nor is it true that this depends on an apostle, or an imaginary apostolic succession, which is wholly unknown to scripture and excluded by it. For the intervention of apostles, as in Acts 8 and 19, was exceptional, however right and wise on each occasion. The large and typical instances were when He was given, first to Jewish believers at Pentecost, and afterward to Gentile believers at Cornelius' house; at neither of which times does scripture speak of the apostles laying on hands. He was given directly on their faith of the gospel, a fact made absolutely certain and clear beyond controversy in the case of the Gentiles; which of course is especially of interest and importance to us who are not of Israel. Such a fact is decisive for one who believes in the wisdom and goodness of God, not only in so doing then, but of recording it for the comfort of souls ever afterward; lest they, ignorant of the direct gift to Jewish and Gentile believers, as a warrant for the like expectation afterward, might fall into the error, either of despair because the apostolic order existed not, or of presumption in dreaming of a fresh apostolic choir as necessary for the supply of that gift, or for any other kindred function. The Catholic systems indeed suppose a sort of perpetual apostolicity, and thus solve the difficulty by an error no less portentous; Protestantism believes not in the abiding presence of the other Paraclete so as to make good the promise of the Father forever; while Irvingism boasts of a new apostolate (well nigh gone) to effectuate an order proved to be mistaken. But the truth is as blessed in its permanence and freedom, as these errors are pernicious.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 19:1-4

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Here we have another fact of deep interest as illustrating the state of souls, not as yet favored with the apostolic or even more ordinary gospel testimony. The grace of Christ displays its elasticity in meeting them with the truth which they, needed, in order to bring them into the fall enjoyment of the Christian condition.

“And it came to pass, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having gone through the upper parts, came [? down] 1unto Ephesus, and finding2 certain disciples, said unto them, Received ye [the] Holy Spirit since ye believed? And they [said]3 unto him, Not even if [the] Holy Spirit was did we hear. And be said,4 Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. And Paul said, John baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him that was coming after him, that is, on Jesus"5 (ver. 1-4).

It is important to recognize what is here clearly made known in the inspired narrative that these imperfectly instructed souls, whom Paul found at Ephesus, after Apollos had gone to Corinth, are owned as disciples. The apostle does not question the reality of their faith. He observed probably a certain legalism in them, which raised the question, not whether they were born of the Spirit, but whether they were sealed by Him. “Received ye the Holy Spirit, since ye believed?” Their answer makes the distinction as plain as it is momentous. They had not so much as heard of the Holy Spirit as the apostle asked. They were doubtless not unacquainted with the O.T., nor of course with John's testimony, as appears from what followed. They were therefore familiar with the Holy Spirit as spoken of in the scripture, and must have heard directly or indirectly that John declared the Messiah was to baptize with the Spirit. Whether this was a fact yet, they knew not. The existence of the Holy Spirit was never in question. What they had not even heard was of any answer to the promise; still less had they been made partakers. This raised the farther question, To what then were ye baptized? with the answer, To John's baptism. They were not therefore even on the ground of Christian profession; for, as the apostle wound up, John's was “a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him that was coming after him, that is, on Jesus.” Christian baptism supposes Him to be dead and risen the work of redemption accomplished with eternal life and remission of sins proclaimed in His name. They were believers, the Holy Spirit had wrought in their souls so that the word of God had entered, but they were wholly short even of those immediately conferred privileges which faith in the gospel enjoys.

Now the case before, us is not without its bearing on souls around. How many saints there are who know nothing beyond, the new birth, imagining this the common blessing of Christianity if they be not also betrayed thereby into the delusion of what they call higher life, holiness, sanctification or perfection. These three last are scriptural terms; but treated as a goal of attainment, and especially in the sense of the amelioration of nature or the practical extinction of sin within, they veil very grave deflections from the truth.

It is therefore to be noted how careful scripture is to distinguish between, the early vital work of the Holy Spirit in awakening seals by the application of the word, and the subsequent reception of the Spirit when the gospel is believed. In the men at Ephesus before us there was as yet no such reception; yet were they born of God, which never is apart from subjection to His word. But it may be far from the gospel of His grace. Any part of the divine word, one might say generally, is applicable to quickening a soul, hardly as in this case going beyond what an Old Testament saint experienced. How many in Christendom rest on promise and have no notion of accomplishment! They of course allow that the Savior is come; but of salvation come, and of God's righteousness revealed, they are wholly ignorant. They are still in quest of what they have not got as the present gift of God; they are therefore, if earnest, anxious, tried, groaning after they know not what, if not over their own proved unworthiness and the treacherous evil of their hearts. They quite overlook the grace and truth which came by Jesus Christ; still less do they rest on His work of redemption as valid for their own Souls. Am I His, or am I not? is the question that harasses them habitually. Attracted by His love they listen to His words and are momentarily bright; then the thought of self rises in their conscience, and they are in the depths, wholly unable to reconcile the love of a Holy God with their actual state which they cannot but feel. Hence they are driven, from ignorance of the gospel, to search after as many signs of a renewed condition as they can discover within them; and thus they toil in a life of hopes balanced against fear, having as little sense of total ruin as they have of God's love toward them. And no wonder; for they are occupied not with Christ but with themselves. How then escape that sense of internal misery inevitable to the spirit, and the more so if born of God, till they know, by faith, the mighty work of Christ, where all evil is judged, all sins forgiven, perfect righteousness established without us and yet for us immutably, and ourselves brought nigh to God as His saints and children without a question unsettled?

Of all this the Ephesian disciples could know nothing. They were avowedly waiting where John's doctrine and baptism left them, believing on Him that should come after him, that is, on Jesus. But they were wholly unacquainted with the blessing as come, the glad tidings taking the place of promises, because all that God requires, as well as every need of the poorest of sinners, is already accomplished in the atoning work of our Lord Jesus. And so it is practically with many a believer now, not speaking merely of schools of doubt where on principle the right state is laid down to be the most painful shrinking from rest in the saving grace of God, but in view of the thousands who, without a doubt of Jesus as the only Savior, have no idea that God is proclaiming peace to them through the blood of His cross. They too, are under law in effect; and hence in a state of habitual bondage through fear of death, feelings as to themselves constantly clouding the simple truth (on which the gospel insists) that we are lost, and that all is grace on God's part, Who has been already glorified perfectly as to sin in the cross, so that He can righteously afford to bless the believer fully. Ignorant of this wondrous grace which excludes all thought of self save as evil and lost, what can one do but look for good as a ground of hope with God, while vaguely withal conscious that nothing but mercy will do! In truth all is comparatively vague in such a state, alas! far too common in Christendom, where not the wicked only need the gospel, but many a righteous soul, quickened by the Spirit to feel in a measure for God, but as yet never realizing that it is for the lost the Son of man came and died; that they, resting by faith on His blood, might know their sins blotted out, and their old man crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that they henceforth should not serve sin, but, freed from it and become servants of God, have their fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.

Now, in the state described, it is too much to assume that souls, wretched in the present, and drawing a precarious and oft vanishing comfort from the future, albeit prayerful and pious, have received the Holy Spirit; the incomparable privilege of the gospel; and this, because they have not really moved on from the promise to which an O. T. saint clung rightly as to his sheet anchor in a storm when the light had not yet dawned. It is sad for a disciple now to be in a similar state, instead of submitting to the righteousness of God and thus having peace with Him, as justified by faith, through our Lord Jesus Christ.

We are none of us apostles; but it is no mean part of our work and testimony to meet the true wants of such souls. In vain do you look else for an unworldly walk, for worship in Spirit and in truth; in vain, or worse than vain, do you force on these weakly plants into the high region of the church's privileges as Christ's body, or even of its responsibilities as of God's house. They really need the gospel as well as the Spirit in power for their souls. It is after hearing the word of truth, the gospel of their salvation, that saints, it may be as in the case before us born of God, are, on believing, sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. Then, and not till then, can they thrive, flourish, and bear the fruit of righteousness, which is by Jesus Christ unto the glory and praise of God. The blessing turns on “the hearing of faith,” not on works of law, which works wrath and a curse. “They which be of faith are blessed” —they only.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 18:24-28

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

Here is introduced an incident of importance in its bearing on the history of souls, passing out of the transition state which John the Baptist's teaching represents, into the full light of gospel. The episode indeed is two-fold; one part closing chap. 18, the other opening chap. 19, both tending to illustrate the same thing in substance: only the former deals with it as a question of truth; the other, of the consequent power of the Spirit which was received on the faith of the gospel. Let us look at each in due order, and first at the conclusion of the chapter before us.

“But a certain Jew, Apollos1 by name, an Alexandrian by race, an eloquent [or learned] man, arrived at Ephesus, being mighty in the scriptures. He had been instructed in the way2 of the Lord, and being fervent in his spirit he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus,3 knowing only the baptism of John, and he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. But when Priscilla4 and Aquila heard him, they took him up, and more accurately expounded to him the way of God.5 And when he was minded to go through into Achaia, the brethren wrote and urged the disciples to receive him; and he, on coming, contributed much to those that had believed through grace. For he forcibly confuted the Jews in public, showing by the scriptures that Jesus was the Christ” (ver. 24-28).

There simply comes before us a Jewish workman, who soon needed not to be ashamed, however unformed at first. He was a native of the city which was afterward to play a notorious part in the corruption of heavenly truth by earthly wisdom, himself a man of learning, or eloquence (for the word A. is used for both), and able in the scriptures. Nor was he merely a scholar and otherwise competent, but already instructed in the way of the Lord. Born of God, he was as to intelligence in advance of a God-fearing Jew, but short of the fuller truth which the gospel affords as the foundation for the mystery to be revealed, with all its wonderful light on God's counsels and ways. Further, being fervent in his spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things “concerning Jesus” (for the right reading helps to clear the true sense). He was ignorant of all truth beyond “the baptism of John.” Nor was he lacking in moral courage or zeal; “and he began to speak boldly in the synagogue.”

This raised the question, practically of great moment, how are souls thus endowed, yet little acquainted with the truth, to be dealt with? Grace answer's and settles all according to its own power. The latest advance beyond the dead level of orthodox tradition is to be hailed and cherished. How lamentable to despise those to-day who are where we wore yesterday! “Who maketh thee to differ? And what hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now if thou didst receive, why dost thou glory as if not receiving?” So at a later moment did the apostle reprove the vain Corinthians. Far different was the feeling of the godly pair with whom he had abode in that very city. “But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him up and expounded to him the way of God more accurately.”

Nor did the learned Alexandrian resent the private instruction, not only of the Christian Jew, but of his wife, who, as we may gather from the unusual order, seems to have entered into the truth with a more spiritual mind than her husband: Was it inconsistent with the apostolic exhortation in 1 Tim. 2:12? In no way. A woman might possess the highest spiritual gift, as we find that the four daughters of Philip did in fact; and assuredly there is room, not to say responsibility, for the due exercise of that and every other gift from the Lord, without collision with His word, nay only carrying it out the more. To him that hath shall be given. Apollos had enough to encourage those who knew the grace of Christ better to set out the truth according to the word; as he had enough true knowledge of the things, concerning Jesus to value and welcome for his soul all that Priscilla and Aquila could open from the scriptures. Ought He not to have suffered unto death for our sins and to enter into His glory? “Thus it is written, and thus it behooved the Christ to suffer and to rise from among the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all the nations.”

This rises far beyond the promised Messiah which was the substance of John's teaching, with repentance urged on the souls that received it. Apollos knew no more, however eloquently he might proclaim its value, and however ably he might fortify its truth by apt proofs from the O. T. scriptures. It may be argued, no doubt, that John went farther in his preaching because he testified of Jesus as the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world. But the conclusion is invalid that John knew or taught redemption by His blood. Not even the apostles did till the Lord rose from the dead. John spoke in the Spirit beyond anything which he personally apprehended. He thoroughly knew that He, Who was standing in the midst of those, who knew Him not, was the Christ, and Son of God in a sense peculiar to Himself alone. And therefore, did he preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, owning the One mightier, Whose sandals he was not fit to unloose, Who should baptize with the Holy Spirit. The efficacy of His death, the power of His resurrection, the glory of His place on high, John did not enter into as the disclosed and enjoyed objects of his faith; nor did any other till the mighty facts took place, and were set out in the Spirit from the word of God.

Thus the help of the Christian pair was as welcome to Apollos as they were needed to supply the defects of his instruction. And we may observe how distant and different were the means employed of God from the formal methods of a divinity school. Can the moderns boast of superior, efficiency? This may well be doubted by those who know what fertile hot-beds of heterodoxy theological schools have proved in all ages and lands, Protestant as well as Catholic or any other. They may be more or less learned; they may cultivate for a few terms Greek, Hebrew, Syriac, &c.; they may teach their own peculiar traditions and dogmas, with the common-places of theology; they may exercise their students in composition and elocution. But the truth of God must be known by faith, and to faith only can it be entrusted profitably; and these are commodities so rare in the schools as never to be reckoned on, though of course now and then to be found there; but even where they enter, all is unfavorable for growth: so encumbered are they with that which is extraneous and human. The means afforded by grace to

Apollos, and recorded for our guidance by the inspiring Spirit, would, I fear, find scant favor in the eyes of the professors, or even of the divinity students, that believe; and would be assuredly scorned by all who believe not, whether leaders or led.

But God has deemed it good and wise to let us know how Apollos fared under his tuition. “And when he was minded to go through into Achaia, the brethren wrote and urged the disciples to receive him; and he on coming contributed much to those that had believed through grace. For he forcibly confuted the Jews in public, showing by the scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.” His progress was thus manifest to all; and arrogant opposers were put to shame, as the faithful were built up by his means. For Apollos could work with a force beyond those who privately had led him on. Such is the scriptural way of obtaining a good degree, and much boldness in faith that is in Christ Jesus.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 18:19-23

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

Not only was Paul's head shorn in Cenchrea, and this as a vow; but we ought to gather from the subsequent history, if not from the immediate context, that it was of the Spirit to reveal the fact as important for us to observe in the account He is giving of that blessed man and of his labors. Not that we are meant to infer that Paul in thus acting was at the height of the fresh revelations of Christ given to him, but that along with these he acted thus with a good conscience. He was apostle of the Gentiles and minister of the, church; but he was also, as he said, a Pharisee, son of Pharisees, who even after this charged himself to his nation with alms and offerings, and Was found purified in, the temple. Grace was bringing out its new and hitherto unrevealed wonders in Christ, and in the church, to God's glory; but the most deeply taught and fully furnished witness of heavenly truth heartily loved the ancient people of God, and never forgot that he too was an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin; and this, not only within the precincts of Jerusalem and the land, but, as we see here, among the Greeks. This is often a great difficulty to those imbued with the spirit and habits of traditional Christianity; but it is because they are and would be logical, where the Holy Spirit is giving in those most honored of the Lord things just as they were. Prejudices and prepossession are not so quickly shaken off, even where we behold an Israelite indeed in whom is no guile. The Lord deals pitifully with a true heart, where a cold intellect can only spy out an inconsistency; but the criticizing mind could not follow that heart for a moment either in its zealous service or in the spiritual might and power which pursues the service to the Lord's glory. We shall see that more follows of a similar character, which in the inspired record beyond controversy points to no less a man than the apostle.

“And they1 arrived at Ephesus, and he left them there;2 but he himself, entering into the synagogue reasoned3 with the Jews. And when they asked him to remain4 for a longer time, he did not consent, but taking his leave and saying, [I must by all means keep the coming feast at Jerusalem;]5 I will return again unto you if God will, he sailed from Ephesus. And landing at Caesarea, he went up and saluted the church, and went down unto Antioch. And having spent some time he departed, going through the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, establishing all the disciples” (ver. 19-23).

There is no doubt considerable and good authority in support of the received text, followed by the A.V. and most others. But the best witnesses and versions sustain the plural form in the first clause, which gives additional force to the singular in the second, in which all agree. “And they arrived at Ephesus” is the reading given by the Sinaitic, Alexandrian, Vatican, and Land's Bodleian, with some cursives. The Greek of Beza's MS. is probably a mere clerical error, as it makes no grammatical coherence, and the Latin agrees with the oldest authorities and several of the best ancient versions. It is certainly true that they all reached Ephesus. It is only a matter of emphasis that the apostle entered into the synagogue and discoursed to the Jews: though he did leave them there, there was no need of giving prominence to such a circumstance. Still less is it implied that they did not accompany him to the synagogue, or that αὐτοῦ; if genuine instead of ἐκεῖ: suggests that the synagogue was outside the city; which inferences appear alike unfounded.

“And when they asked him to remain for a longer time, he did not consent, but taking his leave and saying, [I must by all means keep the coming feast at Jerusalem;] I will return again unto you if God will, he sailed from Ephesus” (ver. 20, 21). It is well known that the clause within the brackets is not in the Uncials of the highest character, though it is attested by abundant and good authority. Hence it becomes very much a question of internal evidence. Mayer lays stress on the reference of ἀναβάς in ver. 22; but “going up,” though unquestionably to Jerusalem, need not have been to keep a Jewish feast, unless it was expressly so explained. The only thing recorded as a fact is his saluting the church. This in no way disproves the purpose to keep the feast there; but it undoes the force of the argument founded on ἀναβάς. The truth is that both may be true: ver. 21, if genuine, stating what he meant to do in Jerusalem, though nothing is said of its accomplishment; and ver. 22 letting us know that his heart had other objects before him than the purpose he had mentioned to the Jews of Ephesus. And the history shortly after informs us that he did soon return to Ephesus for one of the most blessed services even of his wonderful life.

Such statements as these test the heart of the readers. If vain or proud, irreverent or self-righteous, they will probably yield to the snare of thinking and even speaking disrespectfully of the great apostle to the damage of their own souls and the injury of others. For nothing is easier than for persons superficially conscious of their own grave faults to mark with eagerness and self-satisfaction any acts of Paul, a servant of Christ. so deeply taught and devoted, which sprang from his excessive attachment to the ancient people of God, and to the habits of their religious life. It is easy also to forget that it is to his inspired writings, more than to all other sources put together, that they owe the means of sitting in judgment on him in this respect. But is this the return that divine grace would produce in hearts which have truly profited? Does it become us? Is it not a wiser and a holier conclusion to see how affections of the sweetest kind may entangle even the most faithful and spiritual, and to watch that we who have it all set before us by the unwavering and impartial hand of the Holy Spirit may learn from it, so that, far behind in self-negation and untiring labors and sufferings of Christ, we slip not through less elevated affections into far more serious delinquency?

It was after this visit to Jerusalem that the apostle went down to Antioch (ver. 22). Was it not then, as it was certainly there, that Cephas, blessed man as he was, must needs be resisted to the face? Indeed he stood condemned; for his conduct was no mere lingering respect for Jewish institutions, nor self-sacrificing love for the people of whom, as to flesh, the Messiah came, but a wavering compromise of God's gospel to the Gentiles through fears of the circumcision; and this, after not only a special revelation to him when he went to Caesarea, but his stand

with the apostles and elders at the council in Jerusalem. It was pot condescension to Jewish feeling, but what Paul did not hesitate to call dissimulation and not walking uprightly according to the truth of the gospel; and it was so much the worse and more dangerous because, of the eminence and influence of the defaulters. True, it was very far from the awful evil which began to rise up against the truth or teaching of Christ in the “last hour” of John, which this apostle of love vindicated so sternly. But hitherto men had not sunk to the unclean reasoning that heinous sin is to be excused, because it is practiced by those who claim to be dear children of God; though even they had had the warning that one who boasted of his readiness to lay down his life for Christ was precisely the one wile at that very moment was on the eve of denying Christ repeatedly with oaths.

All that we are told by Luke is that, having spent some time (ie., at Antioch), Paul “departed, going through the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, establishing all the disciples” (ver. 23). When the apostle planted the gospel in Galatia, he had entered the country from Phrygia, which lay to its south and south-west (chap. 16: 6). Now, coming from a different direction, he traversed Galatia before Phrygia. And as it was a second visit, we hear of his passing through the country “in order,” that is, where assemblies existed, and establishing “all the disciples” who had already received the gospel. This is of much interest in its bearing on the Epistle which was certainly written not long after their calling: “I wonder that ye are so quickly removing from him that called you in the grace of Christ unto a different gospel, which is net another” (Gal. 1:6), Such is man even where the foundation had been laid a little before by the greatest of apostles.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 18:12-18

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

During the apostle's stay at Corinth occurred: un event which was of interest enough for the Holy Ghost to claim a place in the inspired narrative as carrying on the design of the work given to Luke for accomplishing.

“But when Gallio was pro-consul1 of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul, and brought him before the judgment-seat, saying, This [man] persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law. But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said unto the Jews, If indeed it were some wrong, or wicked villainy, O Jews, with reason should I have borne with you; but if they are questions about a word and names and your own law, ye shall look yourselves:2 I do not intend to be judge of these things. And he drove them from the judgment-seat. And having all3 laid hold on Sosthenes the ruler of the synagogue they beat [him] before the judgment-seat. And Gallio cared for none of these thing's. And Paul, having remained yet many days, took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila, having shorn his head in Cenchrea, for he had a vow” (ver. 12-18).

The testimony went forth fearlessly; the vision answered its purpose. Paul was not afraid but spoke and held not his peace; and while much people came forth to the Lord's name, none else was allowed to do His servant harm. If not a sparrow falls on the ground without our Father, if the very hairs of our head are all numbered, if the Lord Himself will confess before His Father him that confesses the Son before men, there is ground for good courage, not for fear of man. And the impotence of the most exasperated was proved in an unexpected way and quarter, but not without the Lord.

Gallio was notoriously one of the most amiable of men. “None of mortals,” said the famous Seneca of him, “is so sweet to one man, as he to all men.” This no doubt expressed the admiring affection of a brother; but the general character of the Roman governor is indisputable. And the Jews hoped to profit for their rancorous hostility by his pliant temper and love of approbation against the uncompromising witness of the one true God the Father, And of one Lord Jesus Christ. But malice defeats itself against grace and truth whenever God is pleased so to order it; and here, as He had distinctly promised to be with Paul, and that none should injure him, so it came to pass in a way strikingly different from the apostle's experience elsewhere.

It may be well to notice again the precise position of Gallio. He was “pro-consul” of Achaia. It is the more striking, because the province under both Tiberius and Caligula had been imperial, and hence under the authority then of a pro-praetor. Claudius, the reigning emperor, had restored Achaia to the senate, which involved the change of its former government to that of a pro-consul. Accordingly at this time Luke speaks accurately, not of a pro-praetor, but of a pro-consul. We saw a similar instance in Sergius Paulus the pro-consul of Cyprus, which had been, like Achaia, under imperial authority, but was afterward transferred to the Senate, and thus became pro-consular. The inspired historian made no mistake in these details, where it was exceedingly easy if he had not been under divine guidance; and the more so, as the early Christians notoriously kept aloof from all meddling with political administration. But in scripture we are entitled to look for the truth in things small and great; and this should be recognized by giving as exactly as possible the reproduction of its meaning. In fact Luke had been supposed in one at least of these instances to have erred by applying the term erroneously according to the state of things which had existed before the transfer to the senate, till a passage was found in a historian not read generally which confirmed the change, and coins with the new title made it still more evident. Had there been no coins, no statement in Dio Cass., extraneous evidence would have failed, yet the truth would have remained all the same in scripture: only even Christians would have trembled, because history did not speak in support of scripture. It is such incredulity which is so deplorable, and this among not heathens or Jews only but the baptized. But how sad that men bearing the Christian name should be swayed in a moment by human testimonies, after sheaving their readiness to doubt when they had the inspired word for it! Can anything evince more clearly that men naturally distrust God and His word? These things ought not so to be.

The Jews then with one accord rose up against Paul, and brought him to the well-known seat of the governor whence they counted on a sentence favorable to their desires. “This [man], said they, “persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law.” Gallio saw through the case in a moment and needed no defense. “The law” in their mouth meant the law of Moses. This was enough for the Roman, whose pride was roused for his own. “And when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews,” &c. He had heard enough to be sure that neither state law, nor public morality, nor private rights, had been violated; and it was no business of his to inquire farther. The contempt in which Jews were generally held no doubt strengthened his decision, of which the accused reaped the benefit. His amiable indifference did not wish to be troubled with what the apostle had to say. Religious opinion or the worship of God, as a question between the Jews and one they blamed, did not concern him or his office; God was in none of his thoughts, and he preferred to hear no more. The time would come when

Christ's servants would be brought before governors and kings for His sake, for a testimony to them and the Gentiles, when it should be given them in that hour what was to be spoken. Here it was not the time to speak, though Paul was arraigned before the bema. The Lord guarded the interests of the gospel, and of its blessed witness, through employing providentially the careless amiability of the judge; who assuredly could not be accused of any real partiality for the apostle, and the less if he entertained views akin to those of his philosophic brother. Seneca's Stoicism was as far from appreciating the faith and humility of the Christian as from receiving the revelation of the Father and the Son, or the eternal life and redemption which the Holy Spirit now makes the known portion of the believer.

The Roman left the Jews to settle their religious questions in their own way. Gallio declined to have his hand forced: he had no mind to be a judge of these things. “Were it indeed some wrong, or wicked villainy, O Jews, with reason I should have borne with you; but if it be questions about a word and names and your own law, look to it yourselves: I am not minded to be a judge of these things.” The kindest and most courteous may be contemptuous enough when the truth is concerned, of which he knows nothing. “And he drove them from the judgment-seat” (ver. 16). Even if physical force was not used, there is implied at the least peremptoriness.

Such an issue on the part of an official so exalted would unavoidably act on an impressionable people who shared the prevalent scorn of the heathen towards Jews disappointed of their prey. It is not needful to specify that “all were Greeks,” who assailed the prominent Jew who complained in the case, though there is large and good authority for this addition, adopted in the Text. Rec. Certainly the reading of some cursives, which attributes the assault to “all the Jews,” refutes itself as intrinsically worthless and absurd. Had not Sosthenes but Crispus been said to be the object of animosity, such a reading could be understood. But Sosthenes would seem to have succeeded Crispus in that office, without a hint of his conversion as yet, though he may have been the one who is later spoken of as a brother. The best, though not the most considerably authenticated, variant is that which is found in the Sinaitic, Alexandrian, and Vatican Uncials, and some of the most ancient versions. These witnesses simply say that they “all” laid hold of Sosthenes the ruler of the synagogue, and were beating him before the judgment-seat, and that gait) gave himself no trouble about the matter. Thus did God in His providence bring to naught the malicious attack of the Jews on Paul, while manifesting the unbelieving easiness of Gallio.

It is interesting to note also that the apostle did not quit Corinth at once, as indeed the failure of the Jews before the governor left him free, “And Paul having remained yet many days took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence unto Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila, having shorn his head in Cenchrea, for he had a vow” (ver. 18). It was during his stay at Corinth that the Epistles to the Thessalonians were written, with an interval between them, short but sufficient to show what mischief could befall the saints in a brief time; so mistaken are those who think it was only after centuries that error was able to enter. So it was, as we know, among the assemblies of Galatia in a more fatal way, and on a subject yet more fundamental. And both occasions were where the saints had the inestimable benefit of an apostolic, planting, which Rome had not any more than other places, which vaunted as proudly as with scanty reason. Indeed Corinth itself was to manifest the same liability to go astray, though it was chiefly in ecclesiastical truth and order, though by no means confined to it; and yet there Paul stayed many days before the charge before Gallio, and as we are told, “yet many days” after. But at length he bade the brethren adieu, and sailed thence unto Syria, and with him his beloved companions, Priscilla and Aquila.

There is a clause at the end of ver. 18 which has afforded matter for debate. The ancients do not seem to have doubted that Paul himself is in question, the preceding words being parenthetical. Others, especially of late, as Wieseler and Meyer, have been more willing to attach the vow, and shaving of the head, to Aquila. But the great apostle went far in compliance with, and in condescension to, Jewish forms in certain circumstances which left the Face of the gospel untouched. It was the effort to impose the law on the Gentiles who believed, which roused a tempest of feeling and irresistible argument, as indeed his whole soul was engaged with burning zeal at once for the cross of his Master, and for the liberty of the souls imperiled by, that effort. Some ancients indeed, not the Aethiopic Version only, gave the sense that more than one shaved the head according to vow; but I see no sufficient reason to doubt that it was Paul; for he is the one before the mind of the inspiring Spirit, rather than to speak of Aquila.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 18:8-11

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

Remarkable blessing followed the decision of the apostle, not among Gentiles only, but among the Jews themselves.

“And Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized. And the Lord said, by night,1 through a vision to Paul, Fear not, but speak and be not silent; because I am with thee, and no one shall set on thee to harm thee; because I have much people in this city. And he settled down a year and six months, teaching among them the word of God” (ver. 8-11).

It is not a small thing that the Holy Spirit singles out the name of any man for everlasting record in scripture. Thus “Crispus” is mentioned as believing the Lord; and the rather, as he had been “the ruler of the synagogue;” nor this only, for “the whole of his household” believed also, though nothing is said of their baptism. Their faith, the great matter, was no slight cheer to the laborers and a powerful appeal to the Jews generally. The phraseology is peculiar: not here behooving “on” the Lord as object of faith, though this was true also, but believing what He says. 1 Cor. 1 states that the apostle baptized him, but not a word about his house; yet assuredly they too, accepting His testimony, were baptized, though not by the apostle, who did but little in it, as he tells the Corinthians. Under the Lord's keeping he had been preserved from any appearance of prominence personally.

“And many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized.” The work now went on vigorously under the blessing of the Lord. It was a time of rich ingathering. These were clearly not Jews but Greeks; but none the less did many of them hear and believe the gospel; and, as became them, they submitted to the outward mark which severs the confessor of Christ from the careless or hostile world. They were buried with Christ through baptism unto death. In that act, had they been dumb, they said they died with Christ to sin; not only that He had died for their sins, now remitted on their faith, but that they were to reckon themselves to be dead to sin and alive in Him to God. Sin, therefore, was

not to reign in their mortal body. What a change and deliverance for men once bond-men of sin unto death, now made free from sin, and become bondmen of righteousness, bondmen to God, having their fruit unto sanctification, and the end eternal life! For in Corinth abounded fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate, abusers of themselves with men, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, extortioners. “And such were some of you,” said the apostle, to the Corinthians who believed. In no way had they been exempt from those vile corruptions.

Grace does not find, but makes, the saints after a new and heavenly pattern, as will be manifest when they are manifested with Christ in glory. It levels all in an utter condemnation, but it freely and fully sets in Christ all who believe according to the good pleasure of God's will, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved, in Whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our offenses, according to the riches of His grace. This men hate, because it makes nothing of human distinctions in which the pride of man exalts and loses itself. It forbids all glorying in flesh, that the sole glorying may be in the Lord. For there is but one man who is of all weight in the eyes of God, not the first, but the Second, even the Man Christ Jesus, Who gave Himself a ransom for all, the testimony in its own times, which becomes the turning-point of every soul: if heard, he lives; if rejected, he perishes in his sins, whatever the appearances or pretensions.

For in believing, man best owns his guilt and God's grace, reversing the world's sentence and endorsing heaven's estimate of the Crucified One. Baptized in His name he becomes His to serve, where he was once Satan's slave, in not a few cases shamelessly.) henceforth by virtue of Christ's death and resurrection, he is, whatever the condition, to please Him in all things; if a slave, he is Christ's freedman; if free, noble, royal, none the less is he Christ's bondman. You can not have the heavenly and everlasting privileges, without the responsibility meanwhile here below. Of this, for the individual, baptism is the sign; as the Lord's supper is the sign of communion corporately. And none had the significance of the latter so fully laid open to them, as the Corinthians in 1 Cor. 10; 11. They needed the instruction and the warning peculiarly; and therefore grace gave them both.

But the Lord was pleased also to vouchsafe extraordinary encouragement to His servant. Paul had a vision, in which he heard as well as saw. At his conversion he had seen and heard the Lord by day (Acts 9); as afterward in a trance or ecstasy, when he returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, he saw Him who bade him to get out of Jerusalem for his mission to the Gentiles (Acts 22:17-21). 2 Cor. 12 records his translation (whether in the body or out of the body, he did not know) to the third heaven. Thus visions and revelations were comparatively frequent with the apostle. At this time the design was practical. The Lord said to him, “Fear not, but speak and be not silent” (ver. 9). The structure of the phrase implies that he was anxious. He needed a spring of courage beyond what His fellow-laborers could supply; and the Lord gave accordingly. Natural boldness is a force wholly unsuited to spiritual warfare, where the rule is, “When I am weak, then am I strong.” All to be safe and of God must be in dependence on the grace of Christ. Then, as He Himself said to the apostle, “My grace is sufficient for thee; for power is perfected in weakness.” Most gladly therefore, the apostle could say, will I rather glory in my weaknesses, that the strength of Christ may spread a tabernacle over me. So it was now: instead of fearing more, he was to persevere in speaking and not to hold his peace, of which he was in danger, though he had net begun to yield to it (as the form implies).

In the next ver. 10, the Lord condescends to give two reasons: the first, “because I am with thee, and no one shall set on thee to harm thee;” the second, “because I have much people in this city.” What could be more consolatory to the tried servant? The Lord bound Himself, on the one hand, to give His gracious and mighty presence against all adversaries, and, on the other, to open to him a great door and effectual in His work. Rage as Satan's emissaries might, the Lord had many to bring to Himself as His own in that depraved and godless city. It is lamentable to hear such remarks as those of Lim-borch, who will have the Lord to mean, not so much objects of, more and sovereign grace to magnify. His own mercy in redemption, as virtuous and well-disposed brethren, for this reason called His people here, and His sheep in John 10:16. To mistakes we are all liable, and not least those who flatter themselves most secure; but an error of this kind undermines the gospel, as it indicates the feeblest sense of man's utter ruin, and of our need of grace to the last degree. No one doubts God's wisdom in bringing such an one as a Cornelius under the gospel, when He first sent it out publicly to the Gentiles by Peter; but the great apostle of the Gentiles tells a very different tale of the characters (1 Cor. 6:9-11) whom grace deigned to bless at Corinth. Again, the Lord, in the parable of the marriage-feast for the King's Son, directs His bondman to go into the thoroughfares of the highways and as many as they could find, to invite to the feast. Accordingly they went out into the highways, and, gathered together all, as many as they found, both bad and good; and the wedding-feast was filled with guests. They are men met and, in believing the gospel, saved indiscriminately to the raise of the riches of God's grace; for the “good” discover through the truth of Christ that they too sinned and come wholly short of the glory of God, while the “bad” find in His plenteous redemption that His grace justifies freely, the same One being Lord of all, and rich toward all that call upon Him. There is no difference, as at bottom in the ruin, so in result in the salvation; that as sin reigned in death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

At Corinth, in the face of all difficulties, the apostle abode longer than we have yet heard of elsewhere. “And he settled down a year and six months, teaching among them the word of God” (ver. 11). The result was, not only the salvation of many souls, but the church of God there: holy, catholic, apostolic, if ever there was such an assembly anywhere. It was planted by one inferior to none; it was watered by others who were not surpassed by any; and God gave the increase beyond controversy. Yet how soon the fair scene is blighted, not merely by the presence in their midst of such sin as was Unheard of ordinarily among the Gentiles, but by the low, fleshly, and worldly-minded condition of the saints generally! So much so, that the apostle had to vindicate his own office before the self-assumed bar of his own children in the faith, and put off a visit in their dire need of his help, because he must have come then with the rod, and he wished rather to see them in love and in a spirit of meekness; and this could only be on their self-judgment which in fact his first Epistle wrought in them. It is not so that men picture the apostles going about, as if their words were received implicitly, and their presence had but to be known in order to unhesitating deference among the saints. Miracles, inspiration, and the highest place in the church, produced no more submission then and there, than fin analogous plebe had given Moses and Aaron in the congregation of Jehovah of old. But their failure in so brief an interval was turned of God to the double end; first, of refuting the folly that a true assembly may not err and become corrupt, even in a few short years, in both doctrine and practice; and, secondly, of drawing from God the suited correction at any time, for all saints who are enabled by faith to gather on the footing of God's church according to His word and by His Spirit. No doubt, recovery was the fruit of the apostles writing, as the Second Epistle bears witness; but how long this lasted, who can say? Certain it is that the second century, if not the first, &c., saw the assembly everywhere departed from the very aim our gracious God and Father had in gathering the saints—the glory of Christ therein by the Spirit. His coming was no longer an object of hope, but rather of fear; His word became more and more overlaid by human authority and tradition; and the world began to seem a prize to possess and enjoy increasingly, instead of a scene of suffering and testimony, till He come Whose right it is, when we shall reign with Him in glory.

It may be added that too much has been made of the word “persuade,” in rev. 4, as if it meant to induce by little and little.” It is on the contrary the word by which the apostle himself expresses the preaching of the gospel to win souls in view of the awful reality for the hard or heedless, of Christ's tribunal (2 Cor. 5:10, 11). Paul's word was not certainly in persuasive words of wisdom, as he told the Corinthians in his First Epistle, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, at the very time when he was with them, from his coming in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. He was not there as a philosopher or as “the power of God which is called great,” but as much of a contrast as one can conceive; and this, that the faith of such as believed might stand, not in man's wisdom, but in God's power. But as the effect of his discoursing in the synagogue, he was persuading Jews and Greeks.

When his companions arrived, this was what they found, and snore soon followed. Great is the virtue, even for an apostles of fellowship in labor; and cheering the news then brought.

“And when both Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul was engrossed with (or constrained by) the word,1 testifying to the Jews that Jesus was2 the Christ. But as they opposed themselves and blasphemed, he shook out his clothes, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own head: I [am] pure; from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles, and departing thence he went into a certain man's house, by name Titus3 Jusius, a worshipper of God, whose house adjoined to the synagogue” (ver. 5-7).

It will be noticed that the two fellow-laborers are said to have come down from “Macedonia,” as the Roman province of northern Greece was called in distinction from Achaia, of which Corinth was the metropolis. Macedonia is the natural phrase, if Silas and Timothy came down from different quarters, and the repeated article would well fall in with this. They were no doubt together at Berea; and Timothy, if not Silas; joined Paul at Athens, whence he was despatched to Thessalonica, with a view to establish thorn and encourage on behalf of their faith, that none should be disturbed in the afflictions then, and there so severe. Both Silas and Timothy now joined the apostle at Corinth, but not necessarily at the same moment, any more than from the same point of departure. 1 Thess. 3:6 omits all mention of Silas, as the, companion of Timothy on this mission to Thessalonica, who brought to Paul the glad tidings of the Thessalonian saints; whereas the apostle from Corinth joins Silas and Timothy with himself in the address of that Epistle (2 Cor. 1:19). The apostle had forewarned these young converts of the tribulation that befell them but this only the more increased his desires for them; and now he could rejoice that the tempter had failed, and that they were steadfast. The apostle was then occupied earnestly with the word when the two came down; and assuredly their joint labors with him were as cheering to his heart as the good report brought about his beloved Thessalonians. Not the least ground seems to support the notion that their arrival with supplies enabled Paul to give up tent making for the exclusive preaching of the word: certainly the verb συνείχετο does not mean anything of the sort, but rather that the state of absorption with the word, by which he was characterized, went on; for it is the imperfect, not the aorist, as it should have been if indicative of a fresh act or course consequent on their coming.

But there is another word which has to be taken into account, in order to a sound judgment. Were vv. genuine, I cannot but think Erasmus (pace Bezae) right, and that the meaning would then be straitened in spirit.” But it is not so. The received reading πνεύματι (“spirit”) is not sustained by the best authorities which give λόγω (“word”), πν. having crept in from Acts 17:16; 18:25; 19:21, etc. Hence such a rendering as Wakefield's must be summarily and on every ground discarded, “the mind of Paul was violently disturbed;” and none the less because the translation is commended by its author in his notes as perfectly agreeable to the original. Similarly erroneous is the turn given by Hammond, Mill, and Wolf, as if the apostle's spirit was vexed at the unbelief of the Jews; or the opposite notion of Beza and others, who construe it into the zealous ardor which carried him away. Others again like Casaubon, Grotius, &c., depart still farther and consider “the spirit” to mean the Holy Spirit by whose impulse he was borne away at this time: a rendering which is in every way faulty, for the verb cannot bear such a force, and the reading is certainly erroneous. If genuine, it would rather require the article absent (unless ἀγίω were expressed): its insertion simply would point to one's own spirit.

It is needless, however, though instructive in some measure, to discuss these departures from the truth; for it may be laid down as certain that the passage intimates that the apostle was occupied in the word when his fellow-workmen came from Macedonia. He was testifying thoroughly (διαμ.) to the Jews, that Jesus is the Christ or Messiah, the constant stumbling block of that blinded people. Undoubtedly Jesus is much more than” the Christ"; and none ever preached His higher glory, both personal and conferred, more than Paul. But none the less did he press on the Jews that Jesus is the Christ, as the break-up of their unbelief, and the necessary hinge of all further light and blessing.

“But as they opposed themselves and blasphemed, he shook out his clothes and said unto them, Your blood [be] upon your own head: I [am] pure; from henceforth I will proceed unto the Gentiles” (ver. 6).

With rare exceptions, Such is the spirit of the Jews, and in it they fulfill the awful warnings of their prophets from Moses downwards. They are a perverse and crooked generation, and very froward withal, children in whom is no faith, moving Jehovah to jealousy with that which is not good, and provoking Him to anger with their vanities; as He has moved them to jealousy with those which are not a people, and provoked them to anger with a foolish nation. Ignorance is bearable and claims patient service in presenting the truth; but opposition is quite another thing, especially in the face of ample and convincing testimony; and speaking injuriously, or yet more blasphemy, is worse still, seeing that it is grace and truth in Christ which is thus outrageously rejected. This is fatal. Those who despised Jesus on earth had a fresh testimony concerning Him risen and glorified, and still waiting to be gracious. There is no third, no other, witness to render those who reject Him speaking from heaven, as He is now—nothing but judgment for His adversaries when He appears in glory.

The apostle accordingly answered in significant deed as well as word. “He shook out his clothes, and said unto them,” &c. It was the spirit if not the form of Matt. 10:14, as even more rigidly carried out by himself and Barnabas at the Pisidian Antioch. It was as if the dust of the place they dwelt in defiled, and must be shaken off4 as a testimony against them: Sodom and Gomorrah were less tolerable. He said also, Your blood [be] upon your own head. So, and yet worse had those cried who actually urged on the Lord to the cross, when Pilate would have let

him go, His blood be upon us and upon our children. And so it is until this day. “I [am] pure,” added the apostle; “henceforth I will proceed unto the Gentiles.” It was in perfect harmony not only with his own course elsewhere, but, what is of deeper importance still, with the ways of God in the gospel. The Jew was to have testimony first, and so they had, and not quite in vain. Some did hear to the salvation of their souls; there is an elect remnant. But when the mass reject, the gospel with hatred and blasphemy, the stream of blessing flows, though it is not lost but blessed amid the barren sands of the Gentiles.

It may interest some to know that, even in so simple a passage as the last, men of learning have differed. Lachmann suggested, and. Alford followed, a punctuation which yields the sense, “I shall henceforth with a. pure conscience go to the Gentiles.” Wakefield follows the Peschito Syriac in breaking it up thus: “From this moment I am clean therefrom; I go to the Gentiles,” In his note he says, “This disposition gives a degree of abruptness to the periods more suitable to an angry man!” The irreverence of the translator seems to my mind as manifest as his lack of judgment, and the ordinary division most consistent, dignified, and impressive.

“And departing thence he went into a certain man's house, by name Titus Justus, a worshipper of God, whose house adjoined to the synagogue” (ver. 7).

Many from Chrysostom to Alford, &c., have understood that the apostle removed from his quarters with Aquila5; and they have sought to assign motives and reasons in justification of the change. But there is no need to take the trouble; for it was a question of leaving not his lodgings, but the synagogue, and of finding therefore, not new quarters for his abode, but a suited place wherein to continue the testimony rendered previously in the synagogue. And this appears to, me strikingly confirmed by the contiguity to the synagogue of the house; the use of which was offered at once by the devout Gentile whose heart was opening to the truth. If it were a mere lodging, why speak of its joining hard to the synagogue, on which Paul was henceforth turning, his back? But if a suited room were wanted for testimony, two conditions met in the house of Justus: one, that the owner was himself a Gentile, and hence most proper to win the attendance of Gentiles, as well as to accentuate the grave and new step of the apostle; the other, that it was close enough to the synagogue to attract both Jews who might have a conscience about the rejected truth of God, and Gentile, proselytes who had been in the habit of attending the synagogue, like Justus. The school of Tyrannus in the following chapter exactly answers to the change here. There nobody questions that a place for meeting apart from the synagogue is meant. We need not therefore infer that the apostle ceased to reside with Aquila, because the house of Justus furnished a suitable place for preaching when the synagogue no longer served. The apostle was not consulting for himself but for others, without allowing Calvin's idea, “that he might the more nettle the Jews” —a petty and evil motive, very far from his heart who had just forewarned them of their obstinacy and danger of destruction. To remind them of the baneful consequence of impenitence was of God; to “nettle!” them by abandoning the house of his godly friends, Aquila and Priscilla, for that of a Gentile proselyte, seems inconsistent with Christ, with godly wisdom, and right feeling. But with the gainsaying and blaspheming of the synagogue it was impossible to go on without constant strife; and therefore to use for testimony the house of one who valued the gospel, became the evidently proper step, particularly as it was hard by the synagogue, whence any disposed or in earnest might the more readily come.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 18:1-4

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

In marked distinction from Athens is the dealing of divine grace with Corinth, the wealthy capital of Achaia, the southern province of Greece under the Roman empire. Thither the apostle repaired after his brief visit to Athens: with what result the record stands, not in the inspired history alone, but in the two great epistles to the church of God in Corinth.

“After these things he1 departed from2 Athens and came unto Corinth. And he found a certain Jew, named Aquila, of Pontus by, race, lately come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded3 all the Jews to depart from4 Rome. And he came unto them; and because he was one of the same trade, he abode with them, and [?they]5 wrought, for by their trade they were tent-makers. And he was discoursing in the synagogues every sabbath, and persuading Jews and Greeks” (ver. 1-4).

The ways of grace are wholly above man's thoughts. None could have anticipated that God would raise a trophy to His Son, not in intellectual Athens, but in demoralized Corinth. Was there any antecedent link, or natural suitability whatever, between the Holy One of God and this proverbial seat of impurity? The grace of God gives no account of its matters but works to the glory of Christ; and most of all where man is most needy. Even so the apostle asked in the beginning of his first epistle to the Corinthians, “Where is the wise? Where the scribe? Where the disputer of this age? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God the world through wisdom knew not God, God was pleased through the foolishness of the preaching to save those that believe. Since Jews ask for signs, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, unto Jews a stumbling block, and unto Gentiles foolishness, but unto the called themselves, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God, because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.” The wisdom of this age had proved its folly in Athens; the compassion of God yearned over Corinth in the face of all its dissolute manners and corruption.

“For behold your calling, brethren, how that there are not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God chose the foolish things of the world that He might put to shame the wise; and God chose the weak things of the world, that He might put to shame the strong things, and the base things of the world, and the things despised, did God choose, and the things that are not, that He might bring to naught the things that are; that no flesh should glory before God.” Never was this more realized than in Corinth, where in due time a numerous assembly was formed from both Jews and Gentiles, for the most part of no great account in this world.

Paul was not alone long. He found in Corinth a certain Jew, called Aquila, who though of Pontes by race (like his namesake of a later date, who however was a Jewish proselyte and translated the O. T. into Greek most literally), had just come from Italy, with Priscilla his wife. This is their first mention in scripture. We hear of them afterward in Ephesus and of the assembly at their house. Later still they were found once more in Rome, and saluted as Paul's fellow-workers in Christ Jesus, “Who for my life staked their own necks, to whom not I only am thankful, but also

all the assemblies of the Gentiles.” There also we hear of the assembly at their house, In the last epistle which our apostle ever wrote, he bids Timothy salute them once more and for the last time in Ephesus.

The occasion of their coming from Italy at this time was because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. Suetonius, the Roman biographer of the Caesars, states that this emperor, because of a Jewish outbreak, “impulsore Chresto,” expelled them from Rome. The Latin words cited are probably an error on his part, but may allude to violence on the side of unbelieving Jews against those who believed, or may be a confusion (owing to Roman jealousy) with the preaching of the Messiah elsewhere. Bp. Pearson is of opinion that this expulsion happened about A.D. 52, in which year Tacitus (Ann. xii. 52) puts the Senate's decree for expelling the “mathematici” or “Chaldaei;” but whether they were identical or connected is uncertain. It is known that Claudius was deeply indebted to Herod Agrippa the First for his nomination to the empire, and did not forget him but rewarded the Herod family: so one could hardly suppose so hostile an attitude toward the Jews, while Herod A. was in Rome; and we can easily understand that, if enacted in his absence, the decree soon fell through. This consideration clears up the statement of Dio Cassius (lx. 6), which some have supposed to contradict Luke, as well as Suetonius, that the emperor did not expel them, but ordered them not to congregate in Rome. If we distinguish the times, all is clear and true.

But God made use of the edict to bring Aquila and his wife into life-long communication with the apostle. Whether they were converted or not before they first net is not quite certain. Much stress has been laid on Aquila's description as “a certain Jew,” rather than as a disciple; but this may be satisfactorily enough accounted for, both as qualifying the place of his birth, and as furnishing the ground of his quitting Rome for Corinth. Then we must bear in mind that, as the Romans and strangers in general did not in these early days distinguish Christian Jews from their brethren after the flesh, so Paul repeatedly designates himself a Jew afterward in this book (21:39; 22:3). The apostle never speaks of them as his children in the faith, however warmly he may greet or characterize them. Certain it is that they were abundantly blessed through him, as he graciously owns the large debt due to them, not by himself only, but by all the assemblies of the Gentiles. We never hear of this devoted pair in Judea: they were widely known outside the land among the Gentiles where assemblies met. Their wealth, or their trade, afforded the means to welcome the gathering of saints at their own house; a circumstance not unusual in those days (or even much later, as we know from the Acta Martyrii S. Justini, Ruinart). So we see also in the cases of Nymphas and Philemon. It abides now a happy resource where a few can only thus be gathered to Christ's name according to His word. That they should first wait for a bishop is either an Ignatian tradition or a notion at the present day flowing from the same unbelieving superstition which gave birth to the tradition in the past. Only the ever living truth of “one body and one Spirit” would call for fellowship in such an act. Independency is a denial of true church action.

Another fact in solving a principle of deep practical moment comes out in verse 3. “And because he was of the same trade, he abode with them, and wrought; for by their occupation they were tent-makers."6 God was pleased so to order things that the great apostle, in the wealthiest and most luxurious city of Greece, should carry on an honest occupation for necessary wants. What a death-blow to clericalism on the one hand, and to worldliness on the other! Yet in the circumstances of both Paul himself and Corinth, it was just the course which was worthy of the gospel of the grace which sent it out. It is unreasonable to suppose that this blessed servant of the Lord failed in ordinary foresight for his missionary journey, or that the assemblies of the saints were lacking in care for him or in zeal for the work, especially in the regions beyond those where the faithful were already gathered together unto Christ's name. The apostle had pushed forward alone without means into a quarter of abounding ease and distinguished elegance, to say nothing of the dissoluteness of morals which followed in their train; and there, laboring with his own hands for the necessities of others no less than his own, as was his wont, he truly represented the Master Who came not to be ministered unto but to minister. It was for the Son of man alone to give His life a ransom for many; it was His exclusively to suffer once for sins, Just for unjust, to bring us to God. But the apostle of the Gentiles was Christ's follower, or imitator, with energy of devotedness unparalleled not among saints or servants only, but among the apostles, whom God set foremost in the church. And grace gave his single eye to discern how best to please and glorify Christ in such circumstances. At a later day he exhorted the presbyters of the Ephesian assembly in his affecting farewell charge at Miletus; for he was not the man to urge on others what he shrank from himself. Neither did he shrink from commending such a path of gracious self-abnegation to those whose function it is to feed or tend the flock of God.

The laborer is indeed worthy of his food and of his hire, for there are other necessities beyond food, and the Lord forgot none, as is plain from this twofold statement (Matt. 10:10; Luke 10:7, as cited in 1 Tim. 5:18): so the apostle declares (1 Cor. 9:14) the Lord ordained that those who preach the gospel should live of the gospel, as the law had done before for those that ministered about holy things. But, while insisting on a title so just and true for others, we see the blessed man foregoing it for himself in the same context: “But I [emphatically] have used none of these things; and I write not these things that it may be so done in my case; for it were good for me rather to die than that any man should make my glorying vain. For if I preach the gospel I have nothing to glory of; for necessity is laid upon me; for woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel. For if I do this willingly, I have a reward; but if not of mine own will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me. What then is my reward? That in preaching the gospel, I make the gospel without charge, so as not to use for myself [or, to the full] my title as to the gospel.” Here was not letter but spirit, not self but Christ, in the full stream of that love which displayed itself to sinners in Christ sent that we who were dead might live through Him, and that He might die a propitiation for our sins. It was meet that the highest witness of grace among men should be a manifest giver in his measure as God is infinitely.

So he told the Thessalonians in his earliest Epistle, that he sought not glory of men, neither from you nor from others, when we might have been a burden as apostles of Christ. None ever so well felt the value of Christ's words, It is more blessed to give than to receive. His reason was far more, elevated than that which Calvin imputes—because the false apostles taught freely without taking anything, that they might craftily insinuate themselves. In 1 Cor. 9, where his motives are shown, there is no allusion to those evil workers; and in fact there could be no such persons in Corinth when Paul came to preach, and no assembly as yet existed. It was a heart filled with love, and burning to illustrate the gospel in deed and in truth as he proclaimed it in word, without question of adversaries yet to arise and set up cheap and vaunting pretensions to similar grace. In his second epistle no doubt he does speak of his keeping himself in everything from being a burden to the saints in Corinth, and of his determination so to keep himself, that he might cut off the occasion of those wishing for an occasion, that wherein they boasted they might be found even as we [not we even as they].

“And he was discoursing in the synagogue every sabbath and persuading Jews and Greeks” (ver. 4).

The same word means either “discoursing” in general, or in particular “reasoning,” or even “disputing,” as in Mark 9:34; Acts 17:2; 24:12; Jude 9. Here, as in ch. 20:7, 9; Heb. 12:5, the more general force seem preferable; in others “reasoning” may be right as between the

extremes. Context alone can decide. As the synagogue was the scene of the discourses, we may gather assuredly that the testimony of the O. T. was the ample groundwork on which he appealed to his hearers, who were not exclusively Jews; for we are expressly told that (not Hellenists but) Greeks were the objects of his habitual persuasion. If they were not proselytes, they must have been men whom the licentious excess of heathenism drove there; and no wonder, when, as another has said, their religion itself corrupted man; and he made of his corruption a religion. Nowhere was this more deeply and conspicuously true than in Corinth, where the worship of Aphrodite with her infamous ἱερόδουλοι prevailed (the counterpart of Venus at Rome, and of Astarte or Hebrew Ashtoreth, in Syria). Abandoning all fear or thought of the true God, they fell below even the natural decency of man, and dishonored themselves in the dishonor of God. The synagogue, cold as it was, attracted consciences which revolted from evil which philosophy indulged in, or at best was far too weak to supplant or restrain; and Greeks there listened with Jews to the holy and persuasive discourses of the apostle. We shall find a crisis that went farther ere long, but not till the apostle had the companionship of beloved fellow-laborers.

Jesus and the Resurrection, Resurrection, Jesus and the: Part 2

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

To a reflecting Christian that fact is very instructive. Never trust a mere man of intellect or learning in the things of God. There are none that make more profound mistakes; and if I were asked where at this present moment the truth of God is least acceptable, I should not point to a village or small town. Rather should I say, Go to a University, visit some great seat of learning, where classical letters and human science predominate: and there you will find God's word comparatively little known or esteemed. Nor is it so much youths in all the fervor of inexperience, but you meet with men heart and soul devoted to profane literature, and in all likelihood the truth of God proportionately slighted and least understood. Certainly it was the case at Athens.

We thus prove the value of the word of God as a living witness. Do you know what it is in conscience to stand before God? The word of God is sent for the express purpose of testing every soul. If the heart be in earnest, I believe it. If I am not in earnest, I presume to judge it, and so my soul will be lost. The word of man flatters our nature and entertains our mind. The word of God tries the reins and the heart, it awakens and searches the conscience, it proves what and where I am, and, what is yet more important, it presents the remedy for my soul's disease. That remedy is Jesus and the resurrection.

For He is not now merely the Messiah. This was what the Jews were looking for. They fondly hoped for a wondrous personage to deliver them from their enemies, to set up Jehovah's name in the world, and make His people the greatest on the face of the earth. Need I say that this is not His present object? Not that it will not be done in due season. I quite admit that the Jews will yet be restored and blessed in their land, and that they are to be the heralds of the kingdom of God to every land. I gladly acknowledge that the day is coming when the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of Jehovah as the waters cover the sea; and Scripture is quite plain that the work will be brought about, as far as human instrumentality is concerned, not by the Gentiles but by the Jews. But it is really reserved for the glory of Jesus, who will put down Satan, judge the world, and pour out the Spirit once more on all flesh. When the greatest unbelievers on earth—and the Jews are such—when they are brought in, and brought in as a nation, the moral effect will be immense on the world; and the Spirit of God will send them out on their great mission and use them to spread the truth.

Read Psa. 67: “God be merciful to us and bless us, and cause His face to shine upon us; that Thy way may be known upon earth, Thy saving health among all nations.” Who are the “us?” We are very apt, whenever we read the word “us” in the Bible, to think that it means ourselves. But it is not always so. It is well to examine the context and see who are the “us” on solid grounds. The “us” may sometimes mean the Christian. If I read “For we know that, if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens,” I say surely the “we” are not the Jews but Christians, for the reference is to heaven. If I hear the Lord say, “I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am there ye may be also,” again I say the “you” are Christians, because it is not the Jews' hope but ours of being taken to heaven. This is not the proper yearning of the Jew, which beyond controversy is that God's unfailing mercy will plant them in their own land and make them a blessing according to the promise to Abraham—and every promise must be fulfilled—that “in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.” You may tell me that the seed is Christ. Of course I grant it fully; but I maintain that there will be a real application of this very promise, in the connection of the Messiah with the Jew, and through the Jew, to all the families in this world. We knew this is not the case now, but contrariwise that the Jew is still a Christ-rejecting generation, and that the vast mass of Gentiles has gone into a variety of superstitions. This all confess, being sufficiently sensible of the faults of others. Are we equally sensible of our own? I am sure at the present time we ought to be deeply humbled. I do not say there is no encouragement, nor mean that God is not working mightily at the present moment. But whilst there is going on a gracious work of God in blessing souls, a deadly energy of Satan is also at work, leading men into the darkness of skepticism beyond example, and into superstition of every kind. It is in vain to deny either.

Here, in addressing the Athenians, the apostle took up another point. It was not, as a short time before at Thessalonica, the kingdom—that is, the power of God which is to govern the world by the Lord when He comes from heaven—for it is in that sense scripture often uses the word. Hence when the heathen rulers heard of this new kingdom, they were afraid, as Paul was said by the Jews to be a revolutionist, and that what he advocated was something dangerous to the then powers. The Roman Emperors, we know, were very susceptible on that score. They did not like to hear of a kingdom that might upset their own; and so, naturally, the magistrates were too ready at all times to take up a quarrel of that kind against Paul.

Among the Athenians the apostle preached another thing—Jesus and the resurrection. Thereon we have a remarkable enough effect produced. Although the Athenians were generally reckoned, and certainly were, the most intellectual people on the face of the earth at that time, yet they were so ignorant of divine things—even their educated men were so far from the truth of God—that, when they heard about Jesus and the resurrection, it would appear that they really thought the Resurrection might be another divinity—Jesus one god, and the Resurrection another. They were accustomed, you know, to gods and. goddesses; and so they seem to have thought that Jesus was a god, and that the Resurrection was a goddess. They therefore charged the apostle with being a setter forth of strange demons.

Here, then, we see it is not the Messiah coming to reign, but Jesus and the resurrection. For the vision of glory, of manifested glory in the world, the time has not yet come. No; it is the same person, but He was refused. He is despised and rejected, and most of all by the Jews. It was they who led the Gentiles on to put Him to death. The resurrection and the resurrection alone, is that which ushers in the blessed and wondrous development of divine truth we commonly call Christianity. It is based on the death of Christ, and it is displayed in His resurrection. And then the person! Think of Him that was God, not the man that is become God, but God who became man that He might die for men. What is the effect on us? Uncertainty? Think of WHO He is. Would God send His only-begotten Son into this world to become a man and die as a substitute for sinners, leaving the blessed effect uncertain after such a cost? Even on the ground of reason is there anything so absurd, if you believe there is a God at all? He that is the true God and eternal life came into this world and died; and the object of that death was not a mere exhibition of love, but, on the contrary, that He might for us bear the judgment of God—the judgment of God due to us as hell-deserving sinners—the judgment of God on Him as the sacrifice for sin. Is it not clear that this, and this alone, explains the death of the Lord Jesus Christ? Could anything in fact be less trustworthy, if you leave out the atonement and make it merely to be love? Why, now and then a mere man has died for a friend; and many a believer has died the most cruel death for the truth, full of joy, full of confidence. Did such an one cry, “My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?” Certainly not. Christ did, and they in no case.

Can you answer, why He and not they? Assuredly there is in Christ's death revealed an element of the deepest kind—and indeed what alone gives the key to His death—God's judgment, that made Him, even in the anticipation of it, sweat great drops of blood. Never was there such a scene as Gethsemane, except the cross. I repeat that the element was God Himself judging—in Christ atoningly judging the sins of sinners.

As a consequence of His expiation, there is for the believer a complete deliverance—an absolute bearing away of all that was against him. And now, it is not merely that I am entitled to come and rest on the Son of God, but I am sinning against Him if I do not; I am dishonoring Him if I delay. I am forgetful alike of Him and of myself; I am making light both of my sins and of the precious blood of Christ, if I do not own what that blessed One has perfectly removed as far as east is from the west—yea, so that my sins are thrown into the depths of the sea, and God Himself remembers them no more. Why does God use such strong expressions of grace, and how is it that believers can think it an uncertain thing whether or not their sins are blotted out? You know very well whether you have bowed to God as a sinner—whether, no longer ashamed of Christ, you have mourned over your sins in the presence of God; and whether, in the face of every sin, and because of it all, you are resting only on Christ. If it be so, are you to go on hanging your head as a bulrush?

Nay, look not merely at Christ's death. If I have no more than the death of Christ, uncertainty is but natural. I am, as it were, encompassed in the gloom that hung over the cross. And what a scene of desolation was that! All had left Him now. The very devil had gone away. Christ had been forsaken by every one—even by God, as He tells us Himself. And this was just because sin was there; so that, if sin had always been laid upon Jesus, He must have been forsaken of God always. Does not the life of Jesus tell me the contrary? Even of One that walked in the perfect sunshine of God's favor? It was not that God did not delight in His Son at the very moment that He forsook Him. Never was perfection so complete in Christ as when He was forsaken of God. But it was for the first time submission to His judgment of sin, no longer the enjoyment of His communion in love. He was always perfect, but then was the depth of perfection in His suffering when made sin for us.

Made sin! Yes! He was forsaken of God then; but behold the very same God that smote Him on the cross raising Him again. In this was there a make-believe that He felt so much about sin? Ah no! Never was there such a reality as the cross. The sins of men that were laid upon Him were real: it was real suffering on His part to bear them; and it was real judgment of God that fell upon Him. And as real as was our guilt, God's judgment, and Christ's suffering, so real is the resurrection. Hence all is clear now; and the same God who bruised Him for our sins took care that none should be laid in that grave save the Lord Jesus, the Savior of sinners; and what then? God has raised Him up, and set Him at His own right hand in heavenly places. So that a Man now is at the head of the universe of God, and sovereign grace flows out to sinners.

People talk, as we all know, about advance, and the progress of man. But what is it all worth? It is a false start and avails nothing. Why, they tell you that man grew out of the monkey, and that the monkey grew out of a seaweed; but how the protoplasm came into being they cannot say. Can anything surpass the absurdity of the theories and speculations of so-called men of science? I scarcely know anything more degrading than the thought that man grew out of aught else. As if man even in his fallen condition, had not the image of God in him! They know nothing at all, these scientific men, of the Christ of God; nay, what do they know about any one thing? They have no divine truth. They can give you an account of many phenomena, they can observe and register facts; but what a miserable condition is theirs, if they know nothing about the reality of their own moral condition and of Him who is above them! They know aright neither their own beginning nor their end. If so, is it not an awful picture of the state of men?

What more lamentable a fact than this, that in the 19th century of redemption, people should admire those will-o-the-wisp speculations, not merely irrational but degrading; not, merely degrading, but, denying all that is blessed in God and man! Such is their pride that they gainsay not only the faith but even the creation, though only the Bible indeed taught it. In this they deny all that is most, blessed and glorious, and, above all, the blessed Person who went down into the midst of the consequences of evil and of sin, and who, in our nature, is now risen and exalted to the right hand of God—placing man above the angels, yea, the Son of man who is the object of worship for the angels of God. I admit that, if He had not been God, He could not have been there; but still He is man. He that has the scepter of the universe is a man. He is God of course; but while He is God, and was God, and through eternity will be God, yet will He never cease to be man.

The resurrection of Christ proves two things. The apostle here uses it to show that Christ is soon going to judge the earth: this world is going to be judged; for God has given a proof of it in that He raised up that Man from the dead, whom the world of Gentiles and Jews crucified. Now, the reason why people slighted of old and still deny the Lord is because He became a man. Had He manifested Himself in His divine glory alone, do you think they would have despised Him? Certainly not. He had only to show Himself for a moment, and where was the creature that would insult Him? Look at Him even when He became a man: they asked once for Jesus, and what ensued? He had only to say it was Himself, when they all fell back upon the ground. It was a mere sample of what He could do. He was there proved a willing captive, later a willing victim. They could not have taken Him against His will. One of His followers, too fond of hasty measures, smote the ear of the High Priest's servant with his sword. Jesus checked him, and putting forth His hand healed the wound. No, beloved friends, He came to die—He came to suffer for sinners. He could have commanded twelve legions of angels, as He could have done without any aid; but He came to die. He came to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

I ask you, then, who believe in Christ, do you stand clear before God? If not, why not? If you are a believer in Jesus and the resurrection, have you a single sin left behind? What did He die for? If He left one sin, what was the good of His dying for sins? If He removed sins, did He leave any? If He has taken your sins, who can charge you with sin? I pray you then, think as believers, feel as believers, act as believers. Yield not to the thoughts of man. You will never get a true direction from your own heart. All the truth comes from the word of God. Leave to Christ all your sins, confessing them, but believing by the Holy Ghost in the efficacy of His work. What we have to do is to judge our own thoughts, and refuse the words of other men; then by grace we are kept stable in the truth of God; we are put in our true place according to Christ and the value of His death; we suspect ourselves, we distrust men, we confide in God. And so it is said that He raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, that our faith and hope might be in God. Such faith is the effect of the resurrection.

Naturally God is one to dread, because we have a bad conscience; we know that we have grieved Him habitually and deeply dishonored Him. Yes, but what did He give Jesus for, and for what has He given me His truth? It was not merely an infinite work of grace done for people in heaven. No, it was to send a message of grace to men in the world, to every creature. When law was given, it was to one nation; but when the gospel was sent, it was to “every creature.” As long as law was the rule of man—the law of condemnation and death, it was God tested in one people. But the moment He was giving eternal life and the forgiveness of sins through His own Son, it was preached to the whole creation, to every nation, kindred, and tongue.

Is not all this just like God? The law was addressed to the nation of the Jews as a test of their obedience, as our first parents were tried in the garden of Eden. There was a single tree in the midst of the garden, and this tree was made the test of their obeying God. It was not at all a matter of moral good or evil, so far as the mere fruit of the tree was concerned. It was a question of owning God's authority, of respecting His prohibition; and what Satan put into the heart of Eve was the thought, “God keeps back something good there: I would rather have that tree than anything else in the garden:” And everywhere it is so: man distrusts God thoroughly. But the gift of Christ is God giving His best to die for our sins, and to rise for our justifying. Thus the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ ushers in the gospel. If the gospel is true, God, instead of being my enemy, is my truest friend. There is no love to be compared with His. Can man have such a friend as He is who gave His own Son to die for sinners? This is mercy—infinite and forever.

Man is incapable of this Man must have a motive, and a motive of love, in order to do anything that is good; and no one loves till he knows God and is born of Him, as we learn from 1 John 4:7, 8. But look at God. He is the only One capable of giving in love His Son to die for His enemies. This is the gospel. The consequence is that the truth here announced sets aside the lie of Satan and gives God His true character. No one loves me like God, in spite of all my sins; but what dishonor of His love, if I doubt it? It is remarkable the effect its assurance produces. You have, perhaps, never weighed it well. Do you remember the lines of the hymn?—

We used to sing these lines once, but now we cannot do so; and I am rather glad to find it, because it is a proof, in its way, of making progress. For the human recollection of old hymns or of anything human acts as a sort of indicator whether you are going on in the right path or not—whether the truth of God is causing you to judge the words of men. You know, of course, that these hymns, excellent though many of them are, beyond doubt, are after all only human. I have no doubt the Spirit of God had to do with the composition of many; just as His grace helps us now with every prayer we offer, and every discourse we deliver. Still they were not inspired and should be corrected as we receive light.

Here then we have the wonderful way of God, by the redeeming work of His Son, that enables the soul, through receiving the truth that is presented, to take the place of being thoroughly clean, and forever freed from guilt before God, and this on the testimony of God Himself. Through the blessed work wrought in Christ's death the whole weight and burden of sin is removed. And this is proclaimed by the resurrection.

Herein is the proof that the world is going to be judged, because He is risen from the dead. It was because the blessed One became a man, that He was rejected and despised; and it is because He is man that many pretend He is only man. But this unbelief is the same spirit as animated those who put Jesus to death upon the cross. The feeling that takes advantage of His being man to deny His being God is the same as that which led the Jews to crucify Him—the same enmity from the same fatal unbelief. It is man opposed to God. But if the world slew, God raised Him up again from the dead; and therein gives the proof not only that the believer is justified, but that Jesus will judge the world.

Supposing, then, you have as a Christian been enabled to receive the person of Christ, I ask you what about His death? What about His resurrection? Do you believe that God has raised Him from the dead? and if you believe, where are your sins? Do not tell me that your sins are still resting on your conscience—that your sins are still bound up with you. Believer, what did Christ die for? and what has God declared in the gospel?

Forgive me if I come back upon the gospel. I am “deeply anxious that you should have the truth strongly and plainly before you. I do not expect, souls to be able to run the race that God calls them to—I do not call on them to worship God in spirit and in truth—till they are consciously and perfectly clear in His sight.

Take, for instance, that verse I have already referred to about the earnest of His love. Could one sing it now? No; because the fullness of His love is what He has shown us already. Men say “the earnest of the love” of God. But we have the Holy Ghost given to us now as “the earnest of the inheritance” that is to be. As for the inheritance, we are going to be put, along with Christ at His coming, over the universe, as heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ—the bride of the Bridegroom, the Eve of the heavenly Adam. Every member belonging to His body, and consequently all Christians, will be exalted manifestly over all things; the church will share that authority with Christ. Now the Holy Ghost is given to us as an earnest of the inheritance, but He is never said to be the earnest of God's love. The earnest of His love would imply that I only get a little of His love now, and am to have a great deal more when in heaven. The love of God fully rests on the believer already. “The love wherewith Thou. lovedst Me:” is this an “earnest?” Is it not the fullness of His love? It is what the Christian possesses; and consequently, says the Apostle Paul, “the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts.” He does not say the earnest of His love. Therefore we ought not to sing the hymn as it used to stand.

In this way you may see it is a great thing to bring everything to the test of His word, and to judge accordingly, though the poet may murmur.

Again, the law dealt with men as they were living in the world; but the truth of Christianity is that I died with Christ, already baptized to His death. Not that I am dying or that I am to die—but that I died with Christ. Do you believe this? Do you know yourself dead with Him? This is what Christ brings the saint to from the first; less than this is not the meaning of baptism. Theology says that baptism is a sign, if not means, of giving life to people who have it not. It really is the very opposite. When a man came out from the world to take his stand on the truth of a Christ who died, he in his baptism says, Christ the Lord, who was rejected by the world, is my portion. It is not a living Christ reigning here below, but a dead and risen Christ. And this is the very point of the apostle Paul in the sixth chapter of Romans, when he says— “So many of us as were baptized were baptized” —unto what? His life? Not at all— “unto His death.” And this is very important, as He insists that we are to reckon ourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. What a blessing that it is no longer a mere struggle against sin or flesh! As believers we died with Christ; even if Jews before, we are made dead by His cross, because God identifies us with Christ who died and rose again. So that a Christian starts with the death of Christ.

That is the reason why, in the two so-called Christian sacraments, the grand point of them both is the death of Christ. This is what we ought always to remember. It is not a vow or vaunt of man, though infinite things flow from it; but God's weapon is Christ's death. There I am nothing and can do nothing; let me rest by faith in the infinite worth and efficacy of Jesus who died and rose for me.

Besides being dead, we are risen with Christ. I do not enter upon this now; but I just say this little word further, that the resurrection of Christ is the witness that Christ is above the world; and that He who is ordained Judge of quick and dead, and who assuredly will judge the world, is a risen man. It is not God, as God, who will undertake judgment, but a man, who is to judge mankind. It is the Lord Jesus, and the Lord Jesus is a risen man.

But there is more. For He was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification. The same resurrection of Jesus, which is proof to the world of coming judgment, proves to the Christian that he is already justified and blessed. The Christian is already justified; the world will be judged. The resurrection of Christ proclaims both. It tells the world, You cast Jesus out, but could not hinder His resurrection. Submit you must to this blessed Son of God and of man. He is now exalted, and every knee shall bow to Him.

I remember being horrified some years ago in reading a book by one who has lately passed away from his sins, wherein he criticized one of your philosophers—the critic himself, I am sorry to say, a native of this part of the country. That man dared to say, “If the being that is called God should sentence me to that place which they call hell, there is one thing I will never do—I will never worship Him.” I think I never read anything so frantically blasphemous. Alas! beloved friends, that is exactly what he must do. Every knee shall bow and every tongue confess; and that, too, not merely of things in heaven (though it is not “things,” things having neither knees nor tongues, but beings)— “beings” in heaven and on earth and under the earth. Think of that. “Under the earth” means the lost; but whether they are lost men or lost spirits, they shall all confess Him Lord to the glory of God the Father.

But no salvation then. Now is the day of salvation—now only. Oh! lose not a moment. Now is your time, and God's time. Now is the time to make the choice, or rather bow to grace and be saved. There is nobody saved when judgment comes; and, beloved friends, there is nobody judged in the day of grace. It is now rather self-judgment; it is really God bringing one by repentance to judge himself; so that one anticipates, if I may say so, the day of judgment. One takes the place of a guilty criminal when one confesses his sins before God. There is nothing does a person more good than to feel his sins—except, after that, to know that they are all gone through the death of Christ in the grace of God.

I believe in immediate conversion; but no one can have a genuine work in his soul who has not felt his sins in the presence of God; and, therefore, do not be in too great a hurry when converted. Do not be too anxious to get the soul into peace. It would be a good thing to get people into sense of misery, it appears to me, that they may duly feel their sins. Many of those who during revivals seem to get peace suddenly have had, long before that, a deep sense of sin in their souls; perhaps half of the people who are said to be converted at revival times were converted before. They date their conversion from the time they found peace; but it ought to be dated from the time they became miserable. Christ is the way into peace, but it is through faith and repentance. Believe me, that peace is more valued where there has been the sense of previous war—where the soul has felt and judged its enmity against God.

I do not wish to accumulate words as to this, nor to enter into many inviting topics that crowd upon one now. But if it be a solemn thing, I say again, to think that every knee must bow to Jesus in the day of His coming, is it not a joy that, when people bow now to Christ and accept His gospel, they are saved? When forced to bow in the day of God by power, they will not be saved. When it is power that compels them, divine power, before the judgment-seat of Christ, there will be no salvation. There is judgment then. If you have bowed now to Jesus, may it be simply and thoroughly! Thus only can there be settled peace with God, and that, not because you deserve heaven, but, on the contrary, because Christ wrought such a peace for you that deserved hell thoroughly.

God set forth these things in the very beginning, when He said to Moses— “When I see the blood, I will pass over you.” It was not when the Israelites saw the blood, but when they rested on the blood because it was God who saw the blood. This is true faith-rest on Christ and His blood before God. If the look to your own feelings you will never have rest. God will give you plenty to draw out your feelings and put you to the proof; but all is founded on this—on your having the favor of God as a believer in Christ His Son. How would you like one of your children to come and ask you, Father, am I really your child? You would say, An enemy has done this. And so it is with those who say that people cannot know they are saved—cannot know that God is their Father. It is heathenism under the profession of Christ. They who say so know not what they do. They are certainly far from intelligence in the things of God. They do not know what His feelings are toward His children, be they ever so ignorant and lowly.

No, beloved friends, rest with unfeigned confidence in the salvation that the Spirit of God attests in the word. Certainly if hopes should be founded upon myself, I ought to have none at all. If I am founding it on the church or on men, I deserve not to have any blessing. But the question is, Did Christ work out salvation for me? does Christ deserve it? And I tell you, before God, He did accomplish redemption, and He loves to send away in peace every soul that trusts in Him and His cross. The man who has not the Son of God is not a child of God, because there is no life, no salvation, apart from Christ; and as reconciliation to God is by His death, so salvation is declared in His resurrection life. May He be your portion now and ever. Amen!

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Jesus and the Resurrection, Resurrection, Jesus and the: Part 1

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

“Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans and of the Stoics encountered him. And some said, What will this babbler say? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods, because he preached unto them Jesus and the resurrection” (Acts 17:18).

There is nothing, besides making known God's peace and truth, that proves the value of the word of God more than this—the simple and telling naturalness, the fresh power with which it applies to the greatest variety of circumstances. What Paul said to the Athenians is most true of men now. I do not mean that all the particular shades of thought found then at Athens—that those schools of philosophy which divided men—are exactly the same as those of our own day; and I am far from meaning that superstition, that addiction to divine worship of a certain low, earthly, sensuous type can be said to be the most marked characteristic of this moment. For all that the truth is a living thing, and it is the only thing that is living—the only thing expressed in words that abides as it is. Theories and ideas change, and, with their authors, pass away. The truth remains. I know that men ask what the truth is, and that they are uncertain—and no wonder.

The truth is inseparable from the word of God; and, further, the truth is never found even in the word apart from Christ. Hence it is that, as the word is called the truth, so Christ declares that He is the truth. And, further, the Holy Ghost is said to be the truth, not God. As such He is never called the truth except by rationalists, and, I am sorry to say, sometimes by legalists. Extremes meet. Again, the Father is never called the truth; nor could He be, because the truth is the full bringing out of what a person or thing is. It is the expression of objects in their reality. It is the full declaration of anything, no matter what—it may be God or man, it may be heaven or hell: but, wherever the thing is set out as it really is, there you have the truth. Christ is the only one who has ever done it objectively. As power the Holy Ghost acts by the word, and there is the link between the word and Spirit of grace. Thus, as you never have Christ really known except by the word of God, so the Holy Ghost is needed to apply that word, and to make it to be an occasion of showing grace to the soul. When you have Christ, you have the truth, and not otherwise.

Now, there may be all measures of difference outside Christ in those who have got the truth. You may have persons who really agree in very little else—they have prejudices, they have prepossessions, they have all kinds of different theories in which they have been brought up. Religious education has an important effect in modifying men's thoughts; yet for all that, if they have Christ, they have got the truth; and what gives a believer confidence, and what we ought to confide in, is that all those who have Christ are saved, and none else. Therefore it is, we see, that, where Christ is really possessed, other things are changed—not all at once, but the Spirit of God can act in living power where Christ is possessed. He may be hindered—and all wrong thoughts of Christ (the truth of God), everything that is not according to Christ, is a hindrance to the Spirit; but still, where Christ is really possessed, the Holy Ghost follows as the seal of redemption. Not only does the Holy Ghost precede, but He follows; and I shall take occasion to open this a little tonight, because it brings out a most important side of the truth, and is little seen.

Christ is never received except where the Spirit of God makes the want of Him felt. There never is, therefore, a reception of Christ simply by the mind. The mind of man always judges. The sinner believing is judged in conscience before God. Now, this is a true test whether you have got the truth. Hence where the word enters by the Holy Ghost, it invariably enters the conscience, and the effect of the word dealing with the conscience is, that the man stands at the bar of God in his spirit at once. From the time that the word of God really deals with him, he stands before God, and how? As a sinner. A solemn meeting, to be sure! God and the sinner; not yet the Judge seen of all, but the judgment-seat of God in the conscience. The word of God has this effect, it judges. That word only is judge yet in the conscience. The rationalist judges it. The natural man slights it. Even the religions man at some time or another may get into difficulties; he does not understand, he does not like to own his ignorance, and then he judges. It is in this way that souls, presuming to judge, are lost. There is no vital faith where the word of God does not judge, the Spirit using it to bring in a man as guilty before God, and to lead him to repentance.

You observe, in the verses that I have read tonight, we have God commanding men everywhere to repent. It is not merely to believe but to repent; and this is an invariable test of genuine faith that the Holy Ghost produces. An intellectual reception of the truth never brings a soul into the presence of God. It always puts man in the wrong place and

God of course also. There is many a sinner who is rather pleased with himself for accepting the truth. He sees, and other people do not see. He receives the truth, whilst others are ignorant of it. He is a little vain thereon. He is proud of his knowledge; but as to self-judgment, he has none. The man who gets in the presence of God follows that way no longer. Ah no! he has certainty now. Do not tell me there is no such thing attainable. Are you a heathen? Heathen men, of course, cannot know with certainty, because they have not even the word of God, and may not believe that such a thing exists. Alas! we find that men in Christendom are practically in this day of ours coming to the state in which the heathen were. They, too, are not sure that scripture is the word of God; they have their opinions about it. They think that Moses made mistakes in the Pentateuch. They think that Paul wrote mistakes. They think that Peter and John were only good men who did their best. They judge. They have never been in the presence of God to be self-judged; and the consequence is that all is wrong, and God is an unknown God.

Now, wherever there is a real action by the Holy Ghost, the truth comes into the soul morally. No matter how the process may be carried on, or what the occasion that began to act, the invariable criterion of a work of God is, that there is not merely a reception of the word, but, along with this, a humbling moral effect produced in the soul; there is personal sense of sin in the conscience before God, in short, repentance And repentance is not merely a change of mind. Do not allow such a definition to possess your minds. I know, of course, what those mean who say so, and perhaps why it is; but mere change of mind is far short of repentance. No doubt always, a mighty change of mind accompanies faith in Christ; there is a complete revolution in the soul; but the change is not intellectual merely, it is moral. The soul is brought to sit in judgment on itself, and to pronounce God's judgment on its ways, taking the place of a sinner, yea of a lost one, before God. Till this is done,

there is no divine root. Without it the seed wants life, and will come to nothing.

There is this danger sometimes in revivalistic preaching, if I may say a word on preaching that has been not a little blessed of God: persons are attracted and moved by the good news of pardon, without being truly convinced of their sins. Is this danger met by the common method of being brought in as guilty sinners, and left there? Most preachers were afraid to tell out the fullness of the grace of God, even where they set forth the evil of sin. We should never be afraid to trust the grace of God, provided along with that we insist on the reality of ruin, moral ruin, before God. Granted that the grace of God taken up as an intellectual thought or a feeling is a most dangerous thing, and always leads to licentiousness, for it really tends in principle to antinomianism. But it is never the case where the soul is judged by the truth—where divine revelation puts the man down and gives God His true place. And who is it that brings all this to pass? Jesus, who is the truth, and works by the Spirit.

Just look at Him with the woman of Samaria, where you may see this very thing wrought. What did He do first? He gave her the deepest impression of grace beyond a Jew and beyond man. Did He not gradually make known the truth of God? Who but a divine person could give the Spirit? or empower His servants to act so in His name? And let me tell any person who doubts this truth, that if Jesus was not God, He was not good. If God, He was assuredly good, specially in deigning to be man on earth. There is nothing that is so morally degrading to a man, and so practically a denial of God, as falsehood; and there is no falsehood worse than to say you are what you are not. Now, Jesus, though the lowliest of men, always gave the impression, when it was a question of His own person, that He was divine. It might not be always the time to say it; but whenever the occasion occurred, not only did the apostles say so—not only did John, for instance, begin his Gospel with, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” —not only did Paul bring it into the very heart of the Epistle to the Romans—but hear what Jesus says Himself: “Before Abraham was, I am.” He is the “I AM.” There was and is the truth.

There were occasions when He wrought miracles: but miracles are the lowest instead of the highest way of dealing with men. They have their own importance, no doubt; but miracles might be wrought, and the light perceived on the ground of them, and still the man remain far from God. So it was at the first Passover which is mentioned in the Gospel of John. Jesus was there at Jerusalem on the feast-day—the first of all the festivals, the foundation of all that followed in the Jewish year. But though He did many miracles, and many people believed on Him because of the miracles, Jesus did not commit Himself unto them; for, as the Spirit says so solemnly, “He knew what was in man.” What was the effect of this? He did not trust them. It was merely what was in man.

The only thing that Jesus trusts is what is in and of God. This is what appears in the next chapter; this is what He brings out to Nicodemus. Nicodemus came in the confidence of a man, in the desire of a sincere soul, to be instructed by One so capable. He had seen the miracles, but he was rather ashamed to come and be taught by Jesus. He did not wish to be seen. Conscience was at work though in a feeble way. When men have no conscience, they act boldly. When they have a conscience about things, they dread the difficulties, they have a certain fear of the opinion of others; but, if in earnest, they come, though by night. So it was with Nicodemus. And what did the Lord say? He told him on the very threshold, what He declares for every soul of man, that he must be born again. The sinner needs to be born of God. This is precisely what I am now insisting on, the necessity (not merely of a new walk, but) of a new life from God; and the truth of it I wish to put plainly before you to-night.

I presume that you are all satisfied there must be faith; but without the truth there cannot be faith. Faith cometh, by hearing and hearing by the word of God. Through faith comes eternal life; but eternal life, you must all acknowledge, is not the gift of man nor within the reach of man until the conscience is exercised by the word of God. But the moment the soul bows to Jesus in self-judgment, not merely as a worker of miracles but as the Son of God, come into this world to do these two great things—first of all, to give me a life that I have not, and, secondly, to take away the sins that I have (to remove all the evil that weighs me down, and to give me the very best that God has for me—eternal life in His own Son), then all is clear. The man is a believer. He has repentance towards God. He hates himself, judges himself, condemns himself out-and-out before God; yet none the less but the more does he look out of himself to the Son of man suffering for man's sins, the Son of God given of God's grace. He has faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, and he is a child of God by faith in Christ Jesus.

No doubt after all there may be much infirmity: and he may feel it. Here indeed, I may say, the special privilege of Christianity comes in. I do not mean only the deep characteristic of known eternal life in the Son of God; but over and above it is power imparted. And this is what saints need to know better. It is not merely the Spirit of God producing a sense of want of life, conviction of sins and of sinfulness before God; this is what precedes the soul's having confidence in God through our Lord Jesus Christ. But when the sinner believes the gospel, in his soul bowing to the Son of God, and to the incomparable work of redemption He has wrought, what is the effect? The Holy Ghost seals that soul. As He quickens the sinner, so He seals the saint. This is what is done by the Spirit following faith: He seals. No man is sealed the moment he believes in Jesus: it is always (be it a brief interval, or longer) after believing, as it is said, “Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son,” —this is not to make them sons— “into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father” (Gal. 4). “Also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him” (Acts 5). And so again in Eph. 1:13, “In whom, after ye believed,” —or if you take it literally, “having believed,” it comes to the self-same effect” ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise.” Sealing is always after the soul rests upon the work of Christ as a finished thing. Hence it was unknown under the Old Testament; and now no man is sealed by the Holy Ghost so long as he has doubts of any kind existing in his soul. It is invariably after a man has submitted himself to the righteousness of God, when he gives himself up as completely lost to find himself saved in virtue of Christ's work, it is then that the Holy Ghost seals him.

Hence we find when the apostle Paul went to Ephesus, his inquiry was— “Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?” (Acts 19) We must not suppose that this is a question of miracles, or powers, or tongues, or anything of that kind, though these very signs might follow too. There were miracles wrought by the early Christians, and they had also the gift of tongues; but these were only the external vouchers of the Holy Ghost, who had always wrought whatever was for God's glory in man, but never was communicated in person to the believers till after redemption. When Jesus was on the earth, the Holy Ghost came down and abode upon Him; we can all understand this easily. Jesus was absolutely sinless; He was the Holy One of God. But can the Holy Ghost come and dwell in us? Only by redemption, our sins and iniquities being put away righteously from before the eye of God. When God looks and sees in us, not our sins—this was our part—but the precious blood of Christ, accepted in faith as God's gracious provision for the just pardon of sinners, then the Holy Ghost says (as it were), I can come and dwell in such men as these. Thus does the Spirit of God show His estimate of the work of Christ and acknowledge the man who rests on the blood that cleanses from every sin.

It may be observed here, that the apostle Paul, when he was at Athens, only brought in one side of the word. He did not always preach in the same way the truth of God. When among the Thessalonians, the truth he brought prominently forward was that concerning the kingdom; and this gave a particular character to his work among them. There was, in fact, no company in early times so remarkable for waiting for the Son of God from heaven as the Thessalonian assembly. That was what Paul preached to them, and bright was the effect produced. There were however others at work to mar the good: and the second epistle was written not to correct the first, but to counteract the false notion that certain had foisted in, telling them (and pretending the apostle's authority for it) that the day of the Lord was already come. It was not merely that that day was “at hand,” which is a mistake in most versions. Although I have not lived very long, I have lived long enough to see that error almost exploded. I hardly know a single person of learning or ability who does not acknowledge that this is not the true meaning of the word (ἐνέστηκεν); and the power of the Spirit of God has been at work, no doubt, to bring this about. You know there are many who seem to be morbidly sensitive when told of a mistake in the common translation of the Bible; and I sympathize a little with the dislike of hasty or needless change. Nor is it well to hear men talking about “Greek” to people who do not know Greek. Far better to talk about it to those familiar with the language. There they might meet their match; but to be ever talking of Greek to persons who do not know the language is for them a bad habit, which is no less dangerous for those who are talked to. So you will understand I do not mean to say much on such matters in a general audience; but still it seemed not amiss to refer to the generally owned error in our version of 2 Thess. 2:2.

(To be continued.)

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 17:16-34

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

No! Athens was to be comparatively barren for the gospel: so different are the thoughts of God from those of men. Mere love of novelty, not value for truth, characterized that city once the most renowned seat of the arts, of letters, of philosophy. It was covered with idols: God was not really in their thoughts. Indeed He cannot be known or loved apart from Jesus. But now a herald was come to set the testimony of Jesus before them, yet alas how little heeded!

“Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked in him as he observed the city to be full of idols.1 He reasoned therefore, in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout, and in the market-place every day with those that turned up. And certain also of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers2 attacked him. And some said, What would this babbler say? and others, He seemeth to be an announcer of strange deities, because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. And having taken hold of him, they brought [him] up to the Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new teaching [is], that is spoken by thee? For thou bringest certain strange things unto our ease: we wish to know therefore, what these things mean. Now all Athenians and the strangers sojourning there spent their time in nothing else than either to tell some thing, or to hear some thing3 newer” (ver.16-21), i.e. than the last.

It was an indignant and painful feeling which stirred the apostle s spirit as he beheld idols everywhere. Companionship he loved and valued, and tidings of Thessalonica he longed for; but at once he goes to the synagogue, for the Jews and proselytes, as well as to the market-place every day for those that came by. The Epicureans and the Stoics soon encountered him; the former being really Atheists, under the plea of chance, and looking for the dissolution of soul and body; the latter, of a sterner school, which cried up necessity, or fate, and an intolerant and intolerable egotism, being really Pantheists: Some had recourse to banter. “What would this babbler say?” Others took Paul up more gravely, “He seemeth to be an announcer of strange divinities [or demons], because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection.” So Ignorant were these sages as to count the resurrection a goddess, the counterpart of Jesus, a god. The true God was unknown. But they were no longer disposed to persecute. Intellectual levity survived the loss of their national independence and political power. Mocking or curiosity alone remained. Still they were sufficiently struck by the apostle's preaching to lay hold of him and bring him up to the Areopagus, not to try him for his life, as they once did with Socrates, but that they might know what this new doctrine was. Even they could not but avow how strange the sound was to their ears. “We wish to know therefore, what these things mean.” The truth, however, enters not through the ear merely, but the conscience; and what conscience was there in spending their time for nothing else than either to tell or to hear the last news? We shall see that the apostle brought God as a personal and living reality, before themselves as morally related to Him. Till conscience is awakened, what groundwork can there be? Otherwise the gospel is degraded into another new thing, and Jesus and the resurrection become the latest additions to the Pantheon of heathen vanities.

“And Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus, and said, Men of Athens, in all things I observe that ye are very [i.e. more than others] reverent to deities [or demons]; for passing through and closely observing the objects of your worship, I found also an altar on which was the inscription, To an unknown God. What [or whom], therefore, ye without knowing worship, this4 I announce to you. The God that made the world and all things therein, He, being Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; nor is He served by human5 hands as needing something more, Himself giving to all life and breath, and all things. And He made of one [blood6] every nation of men to dwell on all7 the face of the earth, having determined appointed8 seasons, and the bounds of their habitation, that they should seek God,9 if haply they might feel after and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us. For in Him we live and move and are; as also some of your own poets have said, For His offspring also are we. Being therefore God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divinity is like gold or silver, or stone, graven by art and device of man. God, therefore, having overlooked the times of ignorance, now commandeth men that they should all everywhere repent, inasmuch as10 He appointed a day in which He is about to judge the world [inhabited earth] in righteousness, by a man whom He marked out, having given assurance to all in that He raised him from [the] dead” (ver. 22-31).

Though we have only a sketch of the apostle's discourse, we can readily see its striking difference from that which he was wont to preach to the Jews. He comes down to the lowest point and form of truth, in order, as he had done before (Acts 14) with the Lycaonian barbarians, to reach the Athenian conscience, the Jews having through the law incomparably more worthy thoughts of God and of their own relationship to Him. Nevertheless the address opens with habitual courtesy whilst there was not a particle to flatter their pride. The apostle laid hold of the only object, in that crowd, of honors paid to truly strange demons, which confessed the humbling fact about themselves and God. “An unknown God” told the true tale; all else around was but deception and the triumph of the enemy. “What, therefore, ye worship in ignorance,

this I announce to you."

"The God that made the world and all things therein" is the Judge of all the world by the same risen Man who is Savior of such as repent and believe the gospel, be they who or what they may. Creation was owned by neither Epicureans nor Stoics: the one holding the absurdity of a fortuitous concourse of atoms; the other conceiving a fixed ever recurring cycle of generation and dissolution in the universe, which was their god if they can be allowed to have had any. But the Creator of all things is also Lord of heaven and earth; He neither rests in apathy, nor is He the mere active soul of the passive world, but supreme Ruler, not of heaven only, but of the earth. He is not therefore to be limited to human sanctuaries, nor to be served by human hands as though He needed anything, seeing that He Himself gives to all life and breath and the whole of what they enjoy. Some elements of these truths might be accepted here and there, for man has a conscience.; but seen fully and simply they swept away the dark clouds of philosophic dreamers, maintaining for God His own place of sovereign goodness towards man, let him be ever so proud, dark, and miserable.

The apostle adds more. He struck next at a well-known theme of Athenian vanity, by no means, however, peculiar to that race, or land, or time: "And he made of one [bleed] every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, having determined appointed seasons and the bounds of their habitation, that they should seek God, if indeed they might feel after him, and though he is not far from each one of us." The one origin of man goes with the unity of God, as the pretension to distinct races with their respective patrons of polytheism. The Jews as they fell away helped on the falsehood in their self-exalting vanity, though to them only was committed the revelation of the two-fold truth, which Christianity alone applied thoroughly and carried out according to God. It was not only the mere passing testimony to His goodness in the gift from heaven of rains, and fruitful seasons, to which the apostle here pointed, but to appointed seasons, and the boundaries of the dwelling of the various nations, all under God's hand with peculiar favors distributed to each, and at least a whisper to seek after (not "the Lord," which is true neither in the Jewish sense of Jehovah, nor still less in the only just revealed exaltation of the rejected Messiah, but) "God," if haply they might grope after and find Him, though not far from each of us.

It is not however without interest to compare Job's treatment of the same truth generally (chap. 12:23-25): only he dwells rather on the side of the divine sovereignty of Him to whom the nations, haughtily indifferent about Him though they might be, are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance. But the glowing heat of the inspired preacher does not fail to urge the moral aim of His beneficent arrangements on the grandest scale, that they might seek after Himself, if perhaps they might feel after and find Him: teaching quite in keeping with his own Epistle to the Rom. 1:20. Even, in the darkness of heathenism more than one had owned, if not Paul's fine statement of man's absolute dependence on God for continued life, activity, and existence, yet God the source of the race: a truth already given most distinctly in Luke 3:38, supposed parabolically in Luke 15:11, and taught formally in the first clause ck; mph. iv. 6. The poets among them (the heathen Greeks) had expressed it; not the Cilician Aratus only (whom he cites verbally), but Cleanthes also in nearly similar words, as others substantially.

With this acknowledgment of their poetical seers the apostle states the confutation of the folly of idolatry. If man alone of creatures on earth is God's offspring, how maintain that the divinity is like a work of man's craft and imagination in gold, or silver, or stone? "We ought not" so to think, he says graciously, not forgetting that Israel too had to bear the sterner irony of Isaiah (chap. 44:9-20). A lifeless stock that man forms cannot be, or duly represent, the God that made him aid all things.

Yet the God, who was time shamefully misrepresented in the times of the ignorance that was past, would no longer overlook as heretofore such delinquency; He is now charging them that they everywhere repent (ver. 30.). This was a death blow, not only for the self-indulgence of the Epicurean as well as for the self-righteous Stoic, but for the careless and the proud all mankind and not least in that city. And the apostle followed it up with the solemn reason for heed and urgency, "because he had appointed a day in which he is about to judge the habitable [earth] in righteousness by a man whom he had marked out, having afforded assurance [or, ground of belief] to all, in that he raised him out of [the] dead."

Here the prevalent thought of Christendom errs greatly. The Jews used to, and perhaps in some measure do, look for a judgment of living men; the mass of Christians, notwithstanding the Creeds, only look (all but exclusively in fact) for a judgment of the dead before eternity. The apostle here and elsewhere pressed the judgment of this habitable scene at our Lord's appearing to introduce His kingdom in displayed power and glory, as He did Himself in Matt. 24, and 25; Mark 13; Luke 17, 19, 21, and other scriptures. The pledge of His thus coming to judge and to reign is His own resurrection, as ours who believe will be at His coming preparatorily to our appearing and reigning with Him.

This shows how vital and fundamental a truth is His resurrection, which so blessedly involves our own, besides being the witness to His victory over death and Satan, to the Father's glory in vindicating His Son, to the efficacy of His sacrifice for the believer, and to the displayed condition of man for heaven according to divine counsels. Granted that in the nature of the case it is a fact attested by His own, though with the most abundant and weighty evidence, above all by God's word long before the fact, as well as by fresh revelation immediately after. Could any other fact be shown possessed of grounds to be compared with these? All that on which the soul stands forever before God, rests on the self-same ground of divinely given testimony; and consequently, as being addressed to faith; purifies the heart through the operation of the Holy Ghost, as nothing else can do.

What was the effect on the Athenians? "Now when they heard of resurrection of dead [men], some mocked, but others said, We will hear thee concerning this yet again. Then Paul went out from their midst. But some men slave to him and believed; among whom also was Dionysius, the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them" (ver. 32-34).

Nor should we wonder at these heathen philosophers, and news-mongers, staggered by a call resting on a basis so irrefragable on God's part, so crushing to human will and unbelief, as resurrection. For human science never rises above sensible causes and effects, or phenomena arrayed according to natural laws. This is all true and interesting in its own sphere. The folly is in denying what is wholly different in kind, as grace necessarily is from nature; and rejecting facts attested by the fullest and surest testimony, the most unreasonable course to be conceived in things which must, and ought, as facts, to depend on testimony: a course only intelligible in this exceptional case through the desperate antagonism of fallen humanity to God, even when waiting on and speaking to man in the richest mercy. But man, and not least philosophic, man, rebels against resurrection. He might endure a whole night's Socratic discussion of the soul's immortality; for this gratifies the nobler sort, if it be offensive to the more degraded. But a dead man raised brings in God; and God intervening in the midst of a busy

world to mark out the Man Whom they crucified, Who is going to judge this habitable world one day, as also in due time the dead raised later, ere all things are made new for eternity. To science, as science, I repeat, it is repulsive, because impossible for their idol; for what can be the cause of resurrection? Certainly not death, but God in the person of the Son.

Bow, proud man, bow to Him, who in love sent His Son that we might live through Him, true God as He is, and that He might die for us—for our sins, without which the gift of eternal life had been the merest anomaly, but with it the deep blessing of a full and everlasting salvation of His grace, yet righteous, to the glory of God forever. There were mockers and triflers then as now. Oh! may you like the others of old, cleave to the apostle, and find your place with the true Dionysius of Luke, not with the Neo-Platonist impostor who borrowed his eminent name for his fables and rhapsodies of the 6th century manufacture. Doubtless that blessed place must be shared with a Damaris and others, whose names are written in heaven if unknown on earth. May Christ satisfy your soul, as well He may Who is all, and in all.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 17:1-15

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

We are now brought into somewhat new circumstances. The work of the Lord goes on, the testimony varies in its character, the zeal of the laborers is the same, the results differ more or less, and so does the opposition to the enemy.

“Now, when they had journeyed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was the synagogue of the Jews” (ver. 1).

It is remarkable the more ancient manuscripts (à A B D, etc.) omit the article before synagogue, as do the Authorized and Revised versions; but the testimony is ample and varied to its existence. On the one hand it is well-nigh impossible to conceive its insertion, unless it were originally there. On the other it is easy to understand its omission, because of its unusual connection. It would be quite justified if in fact there was but the synagogue in that district, which would give it notoriety. At Philippi we saw that there was none; only there was the place for prayer by the river, where a few used to assemble on the sabbath.

“And Paul as his custom was went in among them and on three sabbaths reasoned with them from the scriptures, opening and alleging that the Christ must suffer, and rise again from the dead, and that This Jesus, whom I announce to you, is the Christ” (ver. 2, 3). Here the apostle returns to a testimony of pointed application to the Jews. No doubt it is of the highest value to everyone, but the form of it exactly suited the place where his discourses were given. A suffering and a risen Christ was proved out of the scriptures; and this not merely as a truth in what they owned to be the word of God, but the absolute necessity because of man's sin, and the only adequate remedy in God's grace, with the further and clenching conclusion that “This is the Christ Jesus, whom I announce to you.” No miracle was needed here to arrest attention. The scriptures are a testimony beyond miracles, and the most permanent of all testimony. Jesus alone, as far as His first advent is concerned, gives full meaning to the word of God; and this it is which completely meets the conscience and the heart of the believer, for purging the one, and giving a blessed and blessing object to the other. But it is not all that the apostle had to say at Thessalonica, as we shall shortly learn; as it is all which is mentioned here, no more need be added now.

“And some of them were persuaded and added to Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few” (ver. 4). Thus, as the apostle wrote afterward, “Our gospel was not with you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance” (1 Thess. 1:5). The harvest was considerable, not only from among the Jews, but far more from the Gentiles, including not a few women of rank. In no assembly of apostolic times do we find in fact greater simplicity, freshness, and power of the truth than among the Thessalonians.

But the success of the gospel is ever apt to rouse bitter opposition and nowhere so much as among the Jews, who would keenly feel that rancorous spite which is natural to those who were overwhelmed by their own scriptures, for which they could not account, but to which they would not bow. “But the Jews, having been stirred up to jealousy, took unto them certain wicked men of the rabble (lit. market-loungers) and gathering a crowd sot the city in confusion, and besetting the house of Jason, sought to bring them out to the people. And not having found them, they dragged Jason and certain brethren before the city-rulers (or politarchs), crying out, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also, whom Jason has received; and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus. And they troubled the crowd and the city-rulers when they heard these things. And having taken security for Jason and the rest, they let them go” (ver. 5-9).

Here we see the usual lack of common honesty which marks the religious assailants of the truth. The Jews, who professed the fear of God, did not scruple, through jealousy, to form a party with wicked men of the lowest sort against the gospel. Abandoned heathens were good enough allies against the truth of their own Messiah, whom worldly lusts would not let them discern in the suffering, but risen, Jesus. God was in none of their thoughts; and self-will wrought to darken and destroy the force of His word. Their degradation could not be hidden in the company with whom they consorted to form a crowd and set the city in uproar. Yet were the Jews the exclusive representatives of divine law before all nations. They were now alas! the standing proof of utter failure, not because the law was not holy, the commandment holy, and just, and good, but because they themselves were unholy, unjust, and evil. Even now, their own Messiah being come, they failed to recognize Him through unbelief, urged the Gentiles to crucify Him, and were also forbidding His servants to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved. Thus were they filling up their sins always, “but the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost.” The host of Paul, Jason, was the special object of their animosity; his house they beset in their desire to bring forward the Lord's servants unto the people, i.e. the regular assembly of the city. Not finding them, they dragged Jason and certain brethren before the city-rulers,1 a peculiar title of the local authorities, which so much the more attests Lake's accuracy, because it occurs in no known remains of Greek antiquity. But an inscription still extant on the marble arch of the western or Vardar gate of Saloniki proves that such was the title of the Thessalonian magistrates, and that there were seven. By a remarkable coincidence three of the names of Paul's companions found here, or in the Epistles, answer to as many in that inscription given from Boeokh, No. 1967, in Conybeare and Howson I. 395. Sosipater, Secundus and Gains are common to both, a fact which

points to the prevalence of these names in that region. It was a free city anciently called Therma, which afterward received its name of Thessalonica from Cassander in compliment to his wife, Thessalonica, sister of Alexander the Great, and remains a flourishing city of the Turkish empire in our day under the derived name of Saloniki.

The outcry of the assailants in verses 6, 7 is strikingly instructive, at least in its latter part. That the preachers of divine grace turned the world upside down was natural to say, and became a standing reproach, however untrue. Yet is it intelligible because the gospel penetrates among high and low, and separates from the world by a divine bond to Christ in heaven. But for that very reason it does not meddle with the authority of the world; to which, on the contrary, it enjoins subjection on every soul as God's ordinance here below. It simply but completely attaches the heart of those who believe to the rejected One, now glorified in heaven. But we cannot look for truth in a foolish cry raised by envious Jews and idle loungers of the. Gentiles. They only sought an appearance sufficient to arouse the fears of the magistrates, and thereby drive away the chief heralds of the truth.

But they lay another charge of a more definite kind, which has the more interest because of the light on it furnished by both the Epistles to the Thessalonians, “And these all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus.”

The insinuation was unfounded and malicious undoubtedly; but it had a show of evidence in the prominence given to the kingdom of God in which Jesus was to come. For He was gone, among other objects, to receive that kingdom and to return. Now, whatever the ill-willed folly of representing that this expectation is antagonistic to the rights of Caesar, it is plain that the teaching was very far from modern doctrine, which could never be so misconstrued. Paul and his companions held before the saints the constant looking for Christ to come and reign; and this, not as a secret for the initiated, but as a most influential hope which penetrated all walk as well as doctrine, and to be urged from first to last throughout the whole Christian life. We learn from the earliest chapter of the first Epistle that it characterized the Thessalonian converts from their starting point. They turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, and to await His Son from the heavens, Whom He raised out of the dead, Jesus our deliverer from the coming wrath. Their conversion was to wait for Jesus no less than to serve God, That hope therefore was suited to the youngest believers, as truly as to the apostle. It was independent of prophetic scheme, with which neophytes, especially from the heathen, could not be acquainted. Yet was it so much the more a hope bright and unembarrassed in which they lived from day to day.

So surely was this the case, that the apostle reminds them (chap. 2) how, as a father his own children, he used to exhort “each one of you, and comfort and testify, that ye should walk worthy of God, Who calleth you to His own kingdom and glory.” What could more prove His kingdom as bearing on present walk? And in fact it is notorious that the lack of it before the eyes of the saints exposes them to seeking ease, and honor, and wealth, and all worldliness. With His kingdom and glory before as, we can heartily bear present shame and suffering, and the walk is elevated accordingly. Even the apostle looked for his crown of boasting in the saints only before our Lord Jesus at His coming. Then would holiness have its consummation and display at His coming with all His saints (chap. 3). Dead and living saints (chap. 4.) would be changed and with Him on high at His coming; and in due time the day of the Lord should fall with sudden destruction on a thoughtless, unexpecting world (chap. 5.).

If possible more precise is the intimation about the kingdom in the Second Epistle. The saints in Thessalonica, through various causes, did not then enjoy so much of the brightness of the hope; but the apostle joins his fellow-laborers with himself in boasting of their endurance and faith in all their persecutions and tribulations. This is viewed as a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God to the end that they should be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, “for the sake of which ye also suffer.” Retribution will come in its day at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven: He it is who makes good, manifests, and administers the kingdom (chap. 1). But that day cannot be (errorists pretended that it was already present) ere the apostasy come, and the man of sin be revealed.

There was already at work the mystery or secret of lawlessness, the upshot of which will be the revelation of that lawless one, who is yet himself to sit down in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. This will draw swift judgment on him and his adherents; for the Lord Jesus shall consume him with the breath of His mouth, and annul him by the appearing of His coming (chap. 2). This need not alarm the feeblest believers, seeing that God has called them by the gospel to obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, though we need the Lord meanwhile to direct our hearts into the love of God, and into the patience of the Christ (chap. 3.). It is the second advent, as men call it, the manifestation of the Lord in glory, which introduces the kingdom judicially, when in the language of Daniel, the “little stone” having executed judgment on all opposing hostile powers here below, will then expand into a great mountain and fill the whole earth. To expect universal spread and supremacy for God's kingdom before the King comes in personal and public overthrow of His foes is an error of no small magnitude. The error sought early entrance, but met with immediate exposure by the apostle who strengthened the Thessalonians in the truth. He pressed from the beginning the coming of Jesus, and God's kingdom then: a truth as solemn for the world as full of cheer for the saints.

But the world was hostile, though nothing more was done then beyond taking bail2 of Jason and the rest, and letting them go, as the preachers were not found. Persecution soon fell heavily, as the Epistle shows, on the young converts.

“But the brethren immediately sent away by night Paul and Silas unto Berea; who on their arrival went away into the synagogue of the Jews. Now these were more noble than those in Thessalonica, being such as received the word with all readiness of mind, day by day examining the scriptures whether these things were so. Many out of them therefore believed, and of the Greek3 women of good position, and of men, not a few. But when the Jews from Thessalonica knew that the word of God was announced by Paul in Berea also, they came thither also, stirring up and troubling4 the crowds. And then immediately the brethren sent away Paul to proceed toward5 the sea; but Silas and Timothy abode there. But they that were conducting Paul, brought [him] as far as Athens; and having received a charge for Silas and Timothy that they should come as quickly as possible unto him, they departed” (ver. 10-15).

It is blessed to mark the unwearied zeal of the Lord's servants. They had barely escaped the ill-will roused by the Jews at Thessalonica, when we behold them undauntedly repairing to the synagogue in Berea, on their arrival. Here they experienced such readiness of heart in searching the scriptures as evinced a greater simplicity and real nobility of soul. Bowing to the word, receiving it as God's word, which indeed it is, is the truest condition of divine blessing; yet did they daily examine scripture, whether the things preached accorded with the things written. Therefore many from among them believed. There is no way so sure or good. And it is of interest to observe that, here also not a few

Greek women of rank, no less than men, believed as well as the God-fearing Jews. It was doubtless an unspeakable deliverance from debasing immorality, as well as empty fable—from a life of selfishness to serve an only and true God, and to await His Son from heaven.

But Jewish rancor could not content itself with driving the apostles from Thessalonica: from Thessalonica came the hostile Jews to Berea in order to counteract the preached word, stirring up and troubling the crowds there also.

Knowledge of old revelation gives no security for receiving the truth God is actually sending or using most at any given time. On the contrary, as we see in these Jews here and elsewhere, if there be pride in what is already possessed, it will act powerfully to reject what is meant of God to test the heart now; especially if grace be at work to open the door of faith to those who had no religions standing from of old. Hence the gospel is of all things most repulsive to the ancient people of God, who madly refused the mercy which waited on them first of all, before it was preached to the Gentiles.

Thereon Paul is again sent off by the brethren toward the sea, whilst his companions staid there still. Athens was the apostle's destination, whither he had a loving escort, and where he charged Silas and Timothy to rejoin him. But Athens, as we shall see, was not destined to be a fruitful field for the incorruptible seed, the living and abiding word of God.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 16:31-40

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Let it be carefully weighed: the question of the jailor, the answer of the Lord's servants, was not about the sign but about the reality of salvation, soul-salvation, as Peter calls it. And this is here, as elsewhere, bound up with faith; which of all things is personal, as is the repentance it implies. Believing for others, even so close as one's household, in order that they should be not baptized merely, but thus saved, shows not only the poverty in resource of this pretentious school, but their hardihood in advancing questions, so dangerous for souls, on such slender grounds. The assumption which underlies the theory, in the minds of the more moderate, probably is that the jailor's house consisted only of children, young enough to be irresponsible: otherwise (of which extravagance some are not ashamed) it would be convicted of slighting repentance toward God, and faith in our Lord Jesus more flagrantly than any orthodox Christian sect: for which of the sects does not demand some such profession in candidates of riper years? No wonder therefore that all godly, or, even sober, interpreters of the divine word repudiate those shifts of hard-driven controversialists. But scripture enables us to carry this disproof to the uttermost; for it is added (in ver. 32) that they spoke the word of the Lord to him “with all that were in his house"; as if the Holy Spirit by express anticipation had designed to leave no possible plea for teaching so strange. Those only who could hear the word were then concerned; none else was by the call itself included within the terms of the blessing, whatever grace might effect afterward, if indeed any remained to be called and blessed.

“And they spoke to him the word of the Lord” [or God]1 with all that were in his house. And at that hour of the night he took and washed [them from] their stripes, and was baptized, he and all his immediately. And having brought them up into his house, he set meat [a table] before them, and rejoiced with all his house, having believed in God (ver. 32-34).

The jailor took them “that hour” of the night, however unseasonable it might seem; for such is the force, rather than “the same” which is not said, though of course the latter also was true. But we must correctly reproduce what was originally written and meant. After washing their stripes he and all his were baptized without delay, it would seem in the precincts of the prison proper. Then he brought them “up” into his house, apparently over the prisoners' quarters, attended to their bodily refreshment, and rejoiced with all his house, having believed in God. Undoubtedly the Greek phrase for “with all his house” is adverbial; but this makes no difference for the sense substantially, either here or anywhere else. Thus all the family of every man pertaining to Jacob (Ex. 1:1) came from Palestine into Egypt: the heads of each house did not come with Jacob in lien of the members. It was equally true of all, though the heads only were specified. So here the jailor rejoiced, yet not representatively for his family; but they too as really in their measure as he, though his joy as believing in God is duly specified. It is intended that we should understand the joy of faith in the case of all. A beautiful picture of the reality and activity of God's grace in this world, and this with the whole house of a hardened pagan; and of such it is repeatedly predicated. For is He the God of Jews only? Is He not also of Gentiles? Yes, of Gentiles also; since. God is one who shall justify circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through their faith, not annulling law thereby, but establishing it, for law never was so vindicated as in the death of the Lord Jesus; and hence the believers, once guilty, enter into peace and joy.

Such is the triumph of God's righteousness for all who submit to it; yet it is no promise in suspense, still less a sham, but a reality of blessed and effectual grace, for none but those that do submit, whatever may be one's desire and hope for others. It is sweet to see thoughtful love and hospitality at once in motion, when faith purifies the heart. The restraining and controlling hand of law is a great boon in a sinful world; yet what is it at best compared with the working of divine grace, even in one but just born of God?

“And when it was day, the praetors sent the lictors, saying, Let those men go. And the jailor reported the saying unto Paul, The praetors have sent that ye be let go: now then go out and proceed in peace. But Paul said unto them, They beat us openly, uncondemned, men being Romans, and cast us into prison; and now do they cast us out privily? No indeed; but let themselves come and bring us out. And the lictors announced these words, and they were afraid when they heard they were Romans. And on coming they besought them, and bringing out entreated [them] to go out of the city. And when they went out of the prison, they entered into [the house of] Lydia; and when they saw the brethren, they exhorted them and departed” (ver. 35-40).

Another evidence of a Roman colony appears here in the lictors employed as subordinates by the praetors, which is disguised in the vague name of “serjeants,” as the higher officials under that of “magistrates.”

The passionate or time-serving concession to unjust clamor had now passed away; and word was dispatched next morning to dismiss the abused prisoners of the day before. The jailor naturally repeated, his orders, glad doubtless to release them. But Paul was now as firm in a

dignified way for the vindication of the gospel, and even of the law, of which they were the unworthy administrators, as he and his companion before in uncomplaining meekness had borne their lawless violence. If there is a time to keep silent, there is a time to speak; and the Spirit alone can guide as to either, for which the word alone suffices, for it warrants both, each in its due season. Here we see the two injunctions carried out in the same transaction, and both turning to the glory of the Lord.

It was not invariably so even with such honored, servants. Their own spirit might, and occasionally did, act without the sure guidance of God; as when the high priest was rebuked and Caesar was appealed to, each time with consequences less or more serious, as it may be shown when the history comes before us. Here beyond controversy the silent suffering of Paul and Silas was a mighty and striking testimony to the practical grace which our Lord would have to characterize His own. “For what glory is it,” says another apostle, “if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? But if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable [lit. grace] with God.” To this, saints, as such, are called. Peculiarly does it become those to practice it, who teach it, as did the blessed pair then at Philippi. They were reproached for the name of Christ, and were partakers of His sufferings without a murmur, nay, with prayers and hymns of joy that they were counted worthy to bear wrong and shame for His Name.

But now that they had thus endured, it was fitting that it should be proved that Paul and Silas were not evil-doers punished justly with scourging and prison and the stocks, but that the guardians of the law had been guilty of flagrant, manifest, and inexcusable unrighteousness against the preachers of the gospel. The time was come when the praetors sent to let them go, and Paul saw this, not at first the jailor. Therefore said the apostle to them, “They beat us openly uncondemned, men being Romans, and cast us into prison; and do they cast us out privily? No, indeed; but let themselves come and bring us out?” Their exposure was complete, though only the officials and their victims might know it. There was not the semblance of resentment, not the least desire to injure them, and exact from men who lay absolutely in the power of those they had wantonly injured. But it was unanswerably demonstrated, that, in the conflict between the officials of Roman war at Philippi and the ministers of the gospel, the latter were no less honored by the gracious power of God, than the former had utterly failed to repress the mob, and had even become the ringleaders in cruel infraction of that law they were bound to enforce.

The lictors bring back Paul's words to the praetors, who, when they heard the sufferers were Romans, could not hide their fear but came and besought their prisoners. It was a humiliation on their part, as undeniable a triumph for those charged with God's gospel, who had suffered only as Christians with the Spirit of glory and of God resting on them.

Certainly the preachers of grace were not disposed to swerve from grace, least of all now that the truth was clear; nor had they any wish to put dishonor on any human institution, but rather to be patterns in that subjection to it for the Lord's sake, to which they were conspicuous in exhorting others. They were easily entreated, having never thought of a prosecution.

“And when they brought them out, they asked [them] to go out of the city. And they went out of the prison, and entered into [the house of] Lydia; and when they saw the brethren, they exhorted them and departed.” They exercised their indisputable title to liberty by a visit on quitting the prison to Lydia, where they saw “the brethren.” These would seem to be her household of whom we heard in verse 15. Of none others in that holy band of relationship do we read at this time in Philippi. These they exhorted, or comforted, as well there might be need, and the Lord's servants could happily do in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. As they had rejoiced in their bonds, they took their leave: a lovely picture in their own persons, of that superiority to circumstances which the apostle at a later day impressed in his Epistle on all the saints there, for their blessing and ours.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 16:19-31

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An act of such uncompromising decision as well as power roused the enemy acting on human covetousness. But it is well to note that the apostle did not act in divine energy till Satan's persistence made it a duty.

And when her masters saw that the hope of their gain was gone,1 they laid hold on, and dragged, Paul and Silas, into the market place, before the rulers, and when they had brought them unto the praetors, they said, These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city, and set forth customs which it is not lawful for us to receive or practice, being Romans. And the crowd rose up together against them; and the praetors rent their garments off them, and commanded to beat [them] with rods. And, having laid many stripes on them, they cast [them] into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely; who, having received such a charge, cast them into the inner prison and secured their feet into the stocks (ver. 19-24).

Defeated in his effort to mix himself up with God's work, the enemy flees to his ordinary and natural opposition, through human interests and passions. Covetousness is a mainspring of the world's activity, “covetousness, which is idolatry.” Those whose hope of gain vanished with the cast out spirit lawlessly apprehended Paul and Silas, and dragged them into the market place, where the local rulers then, even more than now, wore found. It may be noticed that here only the inspired historian specifies the magistrates in Philippi with the Greek term which answers to praetors: a striking evidence of minute accuracy, for the city was a colony, and a colony was but Rome on a small scale, with its two chiefs (sometimes modified by need, but in general duumviri). We shall see the city governors of Thessalonica quite differently designated in the next chapter, but there too with similarly characteristic accuracy as here. Compare also Acts 13:7, 12; 18:12; 19:31 for other instances of such exactitude.

“And when they had brought them unto the pastors, they said, These men, being (ὑπάρχοντες) Jews (or, as Mr. Humphry suggests, ‘being Jews to begin with'), exceedingly trouble our city, and set forth customs which it is not lawful for us to receive or practice, being (ὄντες) Romans.” This was calculated, and no doubt intended, to arouse the mob, the more sensitive on the score of Roman pride and privilege, because they were not unmixedly Roman; and such as might be Romans, though tolerant of Other religionists one with another, were jealous, of anything like aggression on themselves. The appeal was not in vain. “And the crowd rose up together (i.e. with the masters of the

dispossessed slave) against them, and the praetors, rending their garments off them, commanded to scourge them with rode." It may not be necessary to hold with Bengal that the dumvirs stripped Paul and Silas with their own hands; but the special expression employed (περιρ) the general scope and intrinsic sense, exclude the notion that the magistrates rent (διαρ.) their own clothes. It is certain that they gave command to beat them with rods, though uncondemned: an open violation of Roman law, which exposed themselves to severe punishment, had proceedings been instituted. "And having inflicted on them many stripes, they cast [them] into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely; who, having received such a charge, cast them into prison and secured their feet into the stocks." Such was man, civilized man, high and low, carried away into most manifest injustice, without the form even of trying the holy, harmless, and self-denying servants of the Lord, at the call of the basest who had lived by the oracles or divinations of their female slave under Satan's power. Had God nothing to do? "But about midnight Paul and Silas in praying were singing praises to God, and the prisoners were listening to them; and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened, and the bands of all were loosed" (ver. 25, 26). Could any facts more clearly indicate Whose purpose and hand had wrought on behalf of His injured ministers? An earthquake, men could readily argue, might happen, and with the most singular coincidence of circumstances; but whoever heard of an earthquake so great as to shake, not windows or walls, not chains or bolts only, but the foundations of an extensive building; and withal so nicely adjusted as to cast down nothing, nor injure a soul! Only forthwith all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed! It was the same divine power which had delivered Simon Peter, though chained to two soldiers, on the eve of his execution (Acts 12); the same power which had extricated the apostles from a prison house, shut in all safety, with the keepers standing at the doors. (Acts 5) Here a deeper purpose was in hand, and a great earthquake heralded it; and Paul and Silas, who had been praying to God in hymns, remained in the prison to declare His wonderful works; and those whose naturally strongest desire had otherwise been to make their escape and renew their lawless life, were so overawed that not one stirred from the opened prison. It was the God of all grace, Who answered the prayers and praises of His prisoners, Who knew how to control the wicked; and Who was guiding His servants for His glory. For He was now about to do more, and most worthily of the name of His Son, and this so as to win to Himself as hardened a heart as beat within the prison walls. Let us too hear. "And the jailor, being roused out of sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul cried with loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm; for we are all here. And he called for lights, and sprang in, and trembling for fear, fell down before Paul and Silas, and led them forth, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus,2 and thou shalt be saved, and thy house" (ver. 27-31).

We can understand the horror of the jailor, and his first impulse, as a heathen, to make away with himself, inferring from the open doors the flight of the prisoners, and therefore (according to the stern law De Custodia Reorum) with no other prospect for himself than a violent stroke of judicial shame. But conceive the overwhelming effect on his conscience when the apostle averted his suicidal hand by the loud assurance that the prisoners were all there! Light from God penetrated his dark heart on the instant, with a deep desire for mercy, before he got the lights he called for. He needed no more intimation where to turn for the truth he wanted, no more dealings of God to prove His hand was in all that had just occurred, and that He was really with those who had been so harshly thrust into prison, with mockings and scourgings. Had not the Pythoness notoriously designated them as servants of the Most High God, who proclaim salvation's way? The depths of his soul were broken up; and as his sins rose from every hiding place, he felt instinctively that now was the moment to find God. So he sprang in, and, all of a tremble, fell down before Paul and Silas, and brought them forth to inquire of the great salvation.

For salvation in any lesser sense is not to be thought of. The earthquake was soon all over, the prisoners were all safe; what had he to fear from Roman justice? But God had awakened his soul, and his sins troubled him. Not death from man, but divine judgment at the close of all was before his eyes; and God's servants, for whom He had just been interposing miraculously, were there to tell him the way of salvation. Whatever learned men may think, who, never having felt the burden of their sins, catch at words, and waste their time on dubious questions or words, the jailor's burning anxiety was about the salvation of his soul. The strange utterance respecting his two holy prisoners could not but rise before him in his then awe-stricken frame of mind. It was really God Who was at work in his conscience, as He had wrought otherwise in the prison. Not a moment was to be lost; so, having led forth the two prisoners he says, "Sirs, what must I do that I may be saved?" Eternal salvation was the urgent want of his soul, as he honestly owns.

Nor was the answer of the Lord's servants less prompt. Thanks be to God, it may, it ought always, to be so, when the soul is thus in earnest. For the righteous foundation on which salvation rests is already laid, and so perfectly that to add anything, to wait for aught else, is to dishonor God and to hinder the sinner. The atoning work is done and accepted of God, Who therefore sends His glad tidings to the guilty, without respect of persons. It is no question of promises on man's part or of amelioration as a ground of divine favor. Man was once let alone till his violence and corruption became insupportable, and judgment swept all away, save the few who trusted God in the ark provided for them by grace. Man was then tried fully by God's law, with every religious help possible; but, as God indicated beforehand, all was vain, save to prove that man could not be saved on any ground of moral worth, or religions ordinance. What remained? Nothing but a Savior sent from God to be a propitiation for sins. The Savior has already come, has already died, and is now risen and glorified. Yea, God has sent from heaven the Holy Spirit thereon to declare the glad tidings by His servants. Therefore Paul and Silas could say with absolute confidence, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved, thou and thy house."

Such is the grace of God in the gospel. It brings salvation for all. It is no longer laid up in shadows. It has appeared to the world. It summons all men everywhere to repent, but none receives the remission of his sins, save through faith; and the Lord Jesus is the object of that faith. No doubt He has suffered for our sins: else could there be no sovereign proclamation on God's part, nor such a righteous blessing for man. But faith goes with grace, and excludes any and every desert of man; as the righteousness revealed in the gospel is God's, founded on the accomplished work of Christ.

But it is all-important to see and hold fast the fact, that the gospel presents the person of Christ, and not His work only. The soul is called to "believe on the Lord Jesus." This could not purge the conscience without the shedding of His blood; it could not give peace or liberty, unless He were not only delivered up for our offenses, but raised for our justification. But it is on the Lord Jesus that we believe. Thus alone is the soul set in a right attitude from the first; and that object of faith abides to the last. "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved." This gave joy and assurance to the jailor's soul, as we shall see by and by. So it was intended of God, Who is the God of peace, not of uncertainty, and would bring the believer into the communion of His own mind. "Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ." Faith is the principle, and not human righteousness but God's revealed unto faith; for there is no other ground which grace or truth could accredit. Anything else would exalt man, in the way either of his own merits, or of ordinances done by others for him. God's

righteousness revealed by faith unto faith excludes everything of the sort. Christ alone is, and abides, the only efficacious ground—the Lord Jesus who has already offered His one sacrifice on the cross. All scripture on this infinite theme is but the development of that which was made known to the jailor in these pregnant words, “Believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved, thou and thy house.”

It will be seen that salvation is no less open to the jailor's house than to himself. Jew or Gentile makes no difference, old or young, bond or free, but on the same terms of faith. In scripture there is no such notion, whatever the precious privileges attached to the head of a house, that he believes for them, or that they are to be saved, because he is saved by faith. On the contrary the idea is a fleshly license, based on letter, not spirit, as dangerous for the soul as it is subversive of fundamental truth. No wonder that it shelters itself under the dark shade of ordinance with appeal to feeling and imagination without scripture, though boasting loudly of its own spiritual intelligence. Even Dean Alford forgot the Book of Common Prayer in his allegiance to God's word, and declares that καὶ ὁ οἶκός σου [and thy house] does not mean that his faith would save his household—but that the same way was open to them as to him: “Believe, and thou shalt be saved; and the same of thy household.” So too Meyer, in the face of as great or yet greater prejudices, exploded an error opposed to the gospel, and the truth generally, and says that the epanorthosis σὺ καὶ ὁ οἶκός σου extends or belongs in effect to πίστευσον and σωυήση. For, be it noted, the verse speaks not of an institution like baptism, but, of salvation, and we do well to speak seriously of what is so serious. But human levity in divine things is as incredibly common as deplorable.

But as yet, so far as I am aware, this heterodoxy is only whispered in private, or at most, taught where the ignorant and blinded votaries of party are present to hear. Its advocates do not venture to affirm it where it would be sifted to their shame, and rejected by those who still hold the truth. It will be seen in the inspired word which follows, how daringly these enthusiasts overlook the context in their haste to avail themselves of the most superficial appearance to give their favorite notion currency. This however we may leave till the rest of this scripture comes before us in due course. But it is the characteristic of error to despise what is most certain, solid, and blessed in a vain chase after shadows, and to rejoice more for one pervert, than for ninety and nine repentant sinners.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 16:13-18

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

The gospel entered Europe apostolically with genuine simplicity. Two inspired men were among those who introduced it, an apostle, the greatest of them indeed, and a prophet not the least of them, or as he is popularly styled “the evangelist,” Luke. Very likely he may have been an evangelist in the true—scriptural sense of the term. Certainly upon such as Paul and Luke were built the saints now called of God (Eph. 2:20), as to them was revealed the mystery of Christ (Eph. 3:5). The foundation was well laid, even Jesus Christ; yet what a holy absence of pretension do we see here!

“And on the sabbath day we went forth outside the gate1 by a river where2 prayer [or, place of prayer] was wont to be; and we sat down and spoke to the women that had come together. And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, that worshipped God, heard;3 whose heart the Lord opened to heed the things spoken by Paul. And when she was baptized and her house, she besought, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and abide. And she constrained us” (ver. 13-15).

There was no synagogue, it would seem, in the city, once called “The Fountains” but now Philippi from his name who had annexed the district from Thrace to his ancestral Macedonia, and drew largely the treasures of this world from gold mines in the neighborhood. By that river side Outside the city gate, among the women that assembled, one at least received richer treasure and so drank as to have within her a fountain springing up into eternal life. The good physician who writes was not a painter save graphically. Think of a philosopher, or even a rabbi, speaking to the women of what God is and gives, of the grace and truth which came by Jesus Christ! Even the disciples once on a time wondered that the Lord talked with a woman; for He first vindicated the solemnity of a lost soul, the blessed value of a saved one, be it of man or woman. And here the choicest of his servants is found, not alone but with a few of kindred mind and heart, ministering Christ and dispensing the mysteries of God to the assembled women.

Among these one attracts our attention in the narrative, Lydia, of Thyatira, a seller of that dye for which these Lydians were far famed in Homer's day (II. 8. 141), as “the dyers” may be illustrated by the inscription found in the ruins of Thyatira. She was not an idolater, but a worshipper of God, and so betook herself to the little band of Jews that met on the sabbath for prayer, separate from the heathen corruptions around, at a river side, a spot convenient for the Jews made use of for purifying. This seems to decide that it was the little and less known Gangas, rather than the Strymon which was more remote. Lydia was hearing, and the Lord opened her heart to attend to the things spoken by Paul: she received Him that came by water and blood, believing on the name of Jesus Christ.

It is well to observe the special form of the work of grace in souls: two never seem precisely alike. It is not merely that men differ, but that the Spirit of God gives a fresh character in the case, while all had been once alike lost sinners, and the same Christ is all and in all. Each however has his own individuality, and God does not withhold honor from the weaker vessel but shares His joy in love by detailing the peculiar circumstances of such an one as here before us. No doubt her conscience was exercised; she repented toward God. If this had not been before, it was now; for there is no vital operation in the soul without that self-judgment which owns our sins and ruined state, and turns to God's mercy as the sole spring of saving hope. But the glad tidings or gospel of God presents the Christ already dead and risen; that the guilty may have remission of sins not promised only but preached to them, and every believer may know himself justified from all things exactly what the law could not effect for its most zealous votary. But here we are not told of such pungent grief and anxiety as in the Jewish converts at Pentecost confronted with their guilt in rejecting their own Messiah; nor of such great fear as smote all that heard of the judicial death of Ananias and Sapphire; nor of the great grace which multiplied disciples in the face of persecutions for such as taught and preached the Lord Jesus. The Lord wrought on Lydia, opening her heart to pay heed to the discourse of Paul. It was not prayer only that day, but God's answer in the testimony of grace which supplies every want in Christ, and flows, yea, overflows, evermore to His glory.

Made a disciple, Lydia was baptized (John 4:1), as became her. Such was the Lord's command to His servants. Only the males among the Jews were circumcised; disciples, both men and women (Acts 8:12) were baptized. Not only Lydia was baptized but her household also. “And when she was baptized and her house,” &c. What is meant thereby? We do not hear of children or of husband; she may have been a widow without a family or never married. She had a household, and we hear (ver. 40) of the brethren there, believers therefore, and probably not men only but women. Of little ones we hear nothing; and the divine account, which is full and minutely exact to admiration in other respects, not even implies anything of the kind, so that the temerity of tradition, of intellect, of will, that would from this account extract a ground for supposing infants in this case at any rate, is as bold and manifest as unjustifiable. Hence Meyer, the ablest modern commentator of the Lutheran body, says honestly, in opposition to all his ecclesiastical prejudices, “When Jewish or heathen families became Christians, the children in them could have been baptized only in cases in which they were so far developed that they could profess their faith in Christ, and did actually profess it; for this was the universal requisition for the reception of baptism: see also ver. 31, 33; 18:8. On the contrary if the children were unable to believe, they did not partake of the rite, since they were wanting in what the act pre-supposed. The baptism of children is not to be supposed as an apostolic institution, but arose gradually in the post-apostolic age, after early and long-continued resistance, in connection with certain views of doctrine, and did not become general in the church till after the time of Augustine. The defense of infant-baptism transcends the domain of exegesis, and must be given up to that of dogmatics.” Others of high eminence might be added, themselves pedobaptist, who frankly own that neither here, nor later in the chapter, nor in 1 Cor. 1, is there the least proof that any were baptized except confessors of Christ, and that the baptism of infants has no scriptural warrant.

But this by the way. Lydia's heart opened of the Lord went out toward His servants. She “besought [us] saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and abide. And she constrained us.” The love of Christ was there and made her, little knowing the value of her gracious importunity in His sight, to be a fellow-helper with the truth (3 John 8).

Another lesson of far-reaching practical moment ought to be evident, the profound indifference not only to souls but to the Lord in that refusal to “judge,” which pleases the flesh and characterizes the world-church, be it Catholic or Protestant, Episcopalian, Presbyterian, or aught else that is not based on the Christ of God confessed and the Holy Spirit given of God (Matt. 16:16-18, Acts 11:17). No doubt men plead that we must not judge, or that we must exercise a judgment of charity: both pleas alike ignorant, perverse and evil. Certainly we ought never to be censorious, never to impute bad motives where evil conduct is not manifest. But it is equally unbelieving and heartless, for such as know that faith in God's testimony to Christ is the turning point of the passage from death into life—life eternal, to abandon or neglect discrimination in this respect. Our solemn judgment, if guided by the word, is that death is the condition of all; our judgment of charity and our joy are, that they only live through and of and in Christ who by grace hear His word; as thereon we exhort them in His name that they should not henceforth live unto themselves but unto Him that for them died and rose again. From such a judgment as this Lydia did not shrink but rather humbly challenged it as due to the Lord, Paul and his company acted on it, and the Holy Spirit has recorded it for our admonition. There was assuredly therefore no lack of love in Peter's judging Simon the Samaritan from his own words, and this, though a baptized man, to be in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity (Acts 8). It was rather indeed the painful side, but in the circumstances absolutely indispensable, in that judgment of love which the knowledge of God entails on His servants; and woe be to those who, to gratify the world or for selfish ease and advantage, relinquish so plain and indisputable a duty to their Master! This did not Peter any more than Paul.

“And it came to pass as we were going unto prayer [or, the place of prayer], that a certain maid having a spirit of Python met us, who brought her masters much gain by divinations. She having followed Paul and us, cried, saying, These men are bondmen of the Most High God who announce to you [or, us] salvation's way. And this she did for many days. But Paul, being distressed, turned and said to the spirit, I charge thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And it came out the same hour” (ver. 16-18).

As the better authorities (à A B C E &c.) insert the article with “prayer” in ver. 16, it is allowed that “the place of prayer” is the more likely meaning. But if so here, it would go far to commend the same sense in ver. 13, the article being there properly absent as it was a previously unknown and unmentioned place. The incident recorded was weighty in itself and in its consequences. Satan essayed a new means of mischief, not assailing the gospel but patronizing it, and this for many days. Distressed thereby the apostle at length turned and enjoined the evil spirit to leave her, which came to pass in the name of Jesus.

Alas! not so have the servants of the Most High God acted in Europe. They have accepted, instead of eschewing, the favors of the enemy, to their own shame and ruin and to their Master's dishonor. In Asia the gospel was resisted, calumniated, and persecuted. No Python followed its preachers; nor was the cry heard, These men are bondmen of the Most High who announce to you salvation's way. Open opposition, not flattery, was the devil's way. But Europe later had no Paul to cast out the unclean spirit, an unholy compact at last prevailed, and servants of God claimed honor to Jesus from the homage of the world. But it was hollow lip-service, as the event in Philippi soon proved. The world is at enmity with God essentially and always; and nothing is so far from its prince's heart than the honor of His Son. A liar and its father, he hates detection; and his rage came out when the faithful apostle, who had at first slighted his overtures, cast out in Jesus' name the power from its instrument of imposture.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 16:6-12

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

We know how universal was the field opened for the work of the gospel. Go ye into all the world, said the Master to the apostles, and preach the gospel to the whole creation. This general order which ever abides, does not however supersede the direction which the Holy Spirit knows how to supply in detail to the Lord's glory. He will have the servant subject to Christ and exercised livingly about His will: a matter of the deepest moment for all who would serve Him thoroughly, and as obligatory now as of old though we may lack some of the means of intimation. This truth remarkably appears in what follows as elsewhere.

“And they1 went through the Phrygian and Galatian country, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia, and2 having come over against Mysia, they attempted to proceed into3 Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus4 permitted them not; and passing by Mysia they

came down to Troas. And a vision, appeared to Paul by night: There was a certain man of Macedon standing and beseeching him and saying, Come over into Macedonia and help us. And when he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into5 Macedonia, concluding that God6 had called us to preach the gospel to them. Having therefore sailed away from Troas we took a straight course unto Samothracia, and on the morrow unto Neapolis, and thence unto Philippi, which is a city of Macedonia, first of the district, a colony. And we were in this city staying certain days" (ver. 6-12).

It is not only in the unconverted that man's will is treated by scripture as evil: the believer now, as living in the Spirit, is exhorted to walk in the Spirit, and the power is vouchsafed in the Spirit given, though His power will not act in positive blessing save to Christ's glory in dependence on Him and obedience to His word. So it is of high moment to remember that it is not otherwise in the work of the Lord, where the laborer is constantly exposed to the danger of being guided by fair appearances or of following what pleases his own mind, or it may be the suggestions of others whom he respects. The Lord is jealous, as valuing our subjection and fidelity and confidence in Himself, that we look to Him Who does not fail to act by the Spirit that His will be known and done. The work is His, and He only is adequate to its direction in gracious wisdom and power: we are at best only His journeymen in that work. How happy to work as well as walk by faith, guided by His eye and succored no less than sent here or there by His grace. In a world given up to self-will and all its baneful ways, how sweet to Him that His servants do not forget their absent Lord any more than their own blessedness in having Him to make His will plain, that their hearts refer to Him, that their faith expects from Him all needed to glorify Him and to preserve themselves from straying.

So was the work of Paul and his companions ordered of the Lord; as it is here set out in the written word, that we may labor in the same spirit of faith, and neither forego the like favor nor reduce scripture to a dead letter. "And they went through. the Phrygian and Galatian country, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia." The allusion to Phrygia and Galatia as the combined sphere of their visitation is full of interest. as a fact; but how striking the absence of detail where our curiosity would have demanded a great deal. In the Epistle to the assemblies of Galatia we have not only the fruit of sowing the gospel seed there but circumstances revealed of high value and solemn warning. Of Phrygia we know scarce any particulars, save that Paul and Silas did then go through that region as well as Galatia, "having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia." Was this province of Asia then wholly barren? Was it hopeless soil? From the beginning of the gospel, witnesses thence (Acts 2:9, 10) had heard the mighty works of God spoken in their tongue and that of Phrygia, among many others; yet here Phrygia is visited, Asia is not; while in the all-wise direction of the Lord the region of Galatia and Phrygia sees the apostle going through it in order, "stablishing all the disciples" and not evangelizing only (Acts 18:23), and Paul visits Ephesus after Apollos had wrought there not in vain, and, to his own learning the way of God more carefully; and there the apostle brings on the little nucleus of disciples into full Christian truth and privilege (Acts 19), and carried on the work for more than two years, first in the synagogue, then in the school of Tyrannus, so that, not the capital only but the province also, "all they that dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks," and that word, not without special powers wrought of God by the hands of Paul, "mightily grew and prevailed." He Who knew all hearts, and alone can employ any mouth to God's glory, the Holy Spirit forbade their speaking the word in Asia now. Those who believe in man may show their real unbelief in God by caviling at the present prohibition; those whose confidence is in His grace will admire His admirable care in leading to the right place of testimony then, and in working later in the place now prohibited when He deigned in His goodness to create a fruitful oasis if not more than one in that desert. He knows infallibly, as an apostle even did not; and He it is who is still here to guide the work to the praise of the Name of Jesus. As He knows the time to sow, so He ensures a harvest at the right season.

Nor was this the only prohibition about the same time. For "having come over against Mysia, they attempted to proceed into Bithynia; and the Spirit of Jesus permitted them not" (ver. 7). Here the evidence is as plain as possible to those who justly estimate scripture of the personal action of the Spirit in correction even of the apostle's proposed movements. "They attempted to proceed into where we know (1. Pet. 1.) sojourners of the dispersion, i.e. Christian Jews were, as well as in Galatia and pro-consular Asia; but this was not now the mind of the Lord for His service. And an expression is employed, more than usually, though by no means uniquely, connecting the Spirit with the Lord, which has therefore so much the more appropriate force in the passage, "and the Spirit of Jesus permitted them not." The Spirit is as we all know a divine person and may be spoken of simply as the Spirit or the Holy Spirit; He may be introduced in a general way as the Spirit or the Holy Spirit of God, or as the Spirit of the Lord, i.e. Jehovah. Again He may be specially designated where truth required it, as the Spirit of the Father, of the Son, of Christ, or as here, of "Jesus," in each case securing an appropriateness not to be reached otherwise. Scarce anything shows or produces more looseness of conception among Christians than the neglect of these fine and wonderful distinctions found in no other books with any approach to scripture, found in every book of scripture where the subject matter admits of them, and in perfection, whoever may be the inspired writer, and when ever written, so as to point to one unerring and divine Spirit, the true Author. "The Spirit of Jesus," blends the personal interest of the glorified Man Whose Name it was their heart's desire and the great object of their life to make known, subject to His will, with the power of the Spirit Who is the energy that works in the new man.

"And passing by Mysia they came down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul by night: There was a certain man of Macedon standing and beseeching him and saying, Come over into Macedonia and help us. And when he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them" (ver. 8-10).

Thus the Lord helped His servant in a positive manner. They all needed direction for their work; and Paul alone saw the vision: a favor frequently shown him; and of the highest character, which no creature has a right to expect. Grace gave him revelations also. But though set in a very different place in the assembly, the condition and wants of which are so far apart from the primitive state God never fails for present difficulties. It is we who fail in waiting and counting on Him, though the prime directory of His written word is complete as it was not then. But special honor was put on one who was behind none in position, and whose labors were most abundant and blessed. All were immediately impressed by the apostle's vision and turned their eyes and steps toward Macedonia.

But it is well to notice that the language is "we," and not "they" as heretofore. Luke thus modestly but without doubt lets us see that he at Troas joined the apostle's company. That I he inspired writer was a personal witness from this point is surely not a slight matter; but no error can be more profound in principle than the human notion that a higher character begins to attach to his account. Not so: inspiration excludes all question of degrees of assurance or authority. It is equally of God, whether the writer witnessed what he wrote, or not. The Spirit of God alone secures absolute truth, which no seeing, hearing, or research could effect. Man cannot rise to the divinely given, save as a receiver. He may be indefinitely exact but is necessarily human. God as He knows all, communicates what is due to His glory in love to His own.

In fact there is no more minuteness in what is conveyed during the writer's presence. Conversations, differences, journeys, preachings were given when he was absent no less than when with the apostle's companions. How comforting this quiet evidence that in the inspired word we have to do, not merely with, good men doing their best, but with a God Who cannot err or lie. He provides us with His account through man of these spiritually instructive facts. Later in the history we learn that they made a little stay in the Tread where then at least was an assembly (ch. 20.); but there was no indecision now, no tarrying by the way: the gospel must be preached forthwith in Macedonia. “Having therefore sailed away from Troas we took a straight course unto Samothracia, and on the morrow unto Neapolis, and thence unto Philippi, which is a city of Macedonia, first of the district, a colony. And we were in this city staying certain days” (ver. 11, 12). The description is most exact. It would not have been true to call it the chief city or capital of Macedonia; but of that part or district it was: a Roman colony too, not a Greek, which had a somewhat important bearing on the incidents that follow, of which we have so graphic a sketch. There Roman armies had engaged in deadly strife not with strangers, but one with another. There the fate of the moribund republic was decided. There the coming empire of the world began to dawn, an empire which was to last as no predecessor had done, though it had the unenviable distinction of contact with the Lord of glory,. not only in His despised birth but in His crucifixion of shame; as it alone, after succumbing long and notoriously, is destined to live again for a brief but awful space of lawlessness closing in a vain blasphemous and destructive opposition to His appearing from heaven in glory. But there were far other and happier reasons which made the entrance of the gospel and the founding of the church in Philippi full of holy interest. The work began in face of an ensnaring spirit of evil and of an adverse unrighteous world, with singular simplicity, with joy rising high and loudly above sorrow and shame, with a display of divine grace no less than divine power. There was nothing exactly like this at Antioch, Corinth, Ephesus, Rome, Thessalonica, though each no doubt had characteristics of admirably suited and special favor. Philippi too went, not without severe trials, and peculiar difficulties, but as a whole in spiritual power to ripe experience beyond known parallel without so painful a brand of declension as we know befell the once fair and bright assembly, in Ephesus. God would have us learn how the good seed took root and bore fruit at Philippi. Let others boast in the old almanac of man's tale as vain and unreliable in the ecclesiastical as in the secular sphere. Here the believer can rest in the certain truth of God and profit by that which He Who knows all gives for our refreshment, or admonition. We see alas! how fading was that which grace made so good, and true, and faithful in its measure; for where is that assembly now? how was it in the next generation after Paul's Epistle to all the saints there? If it had stood as the Latin church, it had like Rome been but a pillar of salt with every truth falsified (save perhaps those elements which the Athanasian creed owns), and every way of grace changed into Judaizing. This would have been but deeper dishonor of Christ, and the assembly at Philippi, as in almost all the apostolic plantations, has passed away, that men might learn, were they not blinded by worldly wisdom and the fleshly mind, that the power and even the truth of the church of God rests not in an ecclesiastical succession, but in the living energy of the Holy Spirit working in the bond of Christ's confessors, who are worse than nothing as a witness if untrue to Him, who are just of price in God's sight as they do His will and reflect His grace.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 16:1-5

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

The apostle has now fully and freely entered on his fresh missionary excursion, as well as visitation of the assemblies already formed. Silas is his chosen companion, no longer Barnabas. All things work together for good in the hand of divine love; whilst governmentally each shall bear his own burden: grace does not fail, but moral responsibility is untouched also.

From Syria and Cilicia Paul journeys to Lycaonia. “And he came unto Derbe and unto Lystra; and, behold, a certain disciple was there, by name Timothy, son of a Jewish believing woman, but of a Greek father; who was borne witness to by the brethren in Lystra and Iconium. Him Paul would have to go forth with him; and he took and circumcised him because of the Jews that were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek” (ver. 1-3).

Little is said of the other results from the apostle's visit to Derbe and Lystra. Our attention is concentrated on a “young disciple” there. He was therefore not converted at this time, but doubtless, during the former visit of the apostle, who speaks of him as his “true child in faith.” Timothy he had begotten in Christ Jesus through the gospel. The circumstances were peculiar. He was the son of a believing Jewess, Eunice, but of a Greek father, with an exceptionally good testimony from the brethren in those parts. This led to a remarkable step on the part of the apostle: he circumcised him “on account of the Jews” there, “for they all knew that his father was a Greek” or Gentile.

Now this was in no way the requirement of the law; which, on the contrary, in strictness placed Timothy by his birth in a painful and outside position. It was really an act of grace on the part of the same apostle who would have utterly repelled the circumcision of Titus; for Titus was a Gentile. Still less is it inconsistent with the recent council at Jerusalem; for the question there was whether the Jewish yoke was to be placed on the Gentiles that believed. It was decided, we have seen, that no such compulsion was authorized or desirable. Here, it was the child of a Jewess against whom Jews would have had a feeling because of his father. In all probability the father was now dead, of whom we never hear as alive, and who in that case, might have perpetuated the uncircumcised condition of his son. If the father no longer lived, Paul could act the more freely; and the same champion for liberty who refused compulsion in the case of Titus, himself took and circumcised Timothy.

It is of great moment that we learn to submit our souls to the largeness of divine truth. The principles which governed the cases of Titus and Timothy were quite distinct, because their nature and circumstances were wholly different. But there was a center in which the two principles found harmony. They were alike expressions of Christian liberty; in neither instance was the apostle under law but under grace. What can be more instructive for us? We are always liable to the exact reverse: flesh and law habitually work together, as on the other hand we are called to the grace and truth which came by Jesus Christ.

We may learn from this to avoid and resist the notion that there can be but one principle to govern our conduct. It is not so, if the relationships and the circumstances of the parties wholly differ. Wisdom in that case would rather seek from God's word the Spirit's instruction for our guidance in each case respectively. Nature and tradition constantly tend to a dead level, which is as far as possible from the wisdom of God, in which we are called to judge and act. A principle however true and sound, as for instance not to circumcise Titus, might entirely fail to meet. Timothy's case whom grace circumcised to stop the mouths of Jews though the letter of the law would rather have put

him away than circumcise him. Routine is sure to mislead in the things of God. An eye single to Christ and His grace will discover the true way, and grace knows where to be inflexible and when to yield. It was the wise procedure of one who, free from all made himself bondman to all that he might gain the more; who became to the Jews as a Jew in order that he might gain the Jews, to those under law as under law (not being himself under law) in order that he might gain those under law; to those without law as without law (not as without law to God but as lawfully subject to Christ) in order that he might gain those without law.

What an admirable lesson was this, practically, for Timothy, henceforth to be the companion and fellow-worker of the great apostle of the Gentiles, whatever the immense gap between them. The step, too, was taken in connection with his going forth with Paul who sought to cut of occasion from them that sought occasion. Grace where there is no demand can go far to meet such as have honest difficulties; whilst it resents and refuses every effort to impose what is unauthorized by God and inconsistent with itself.

We may here recall the important facts for which we are indebted to the two Epistles which the apostle wrote long after to Timothy; for they really had the most influential bearing on the course which was opening for his young companion. First, there were prophecies which went before as to Timothy

(1 Tim. 1:18; 4:14), and this not only as marking him out but indicating the gift of God to be imparted. The history simply gives us the apostle's wish and mind as to him; but the apostle shows that there were prophetic intimations, presumably from more than one, respecting the work to which he was divinely designated; not unlike the way in which Barnabas and Saul had been called and separated to their first missionary work and journey. Even the apostle did not act without these remarkable interventions; of which he reminds his beloved child when he first wrote to enforce the commission entrusted to him and to define his duties in that charge, “that thou mightest war by them (i.e. the prophecies) the good warfare,” though this would be vain without “having faith and a good conscience.” It would brace his spirit to remember that God had designated him to a work of such difficulty and peril. Secondly, a positive gift of God, or χάρισμα, had been communicated to Timothy by the imposition of the apostle's hands (2 Tim. 1:6), the elderhood having also joined in laying on their hands at the same time (1 Tim. 4:14) as not only witnesses but having fellowship with the apostle's act. The believer in God's word needs no argument to prove that such a power of the Spirit is wholly distinct from any qualities previously possessed by Timothy, though no doubt all he had before was the vessel in and through which the gift wrought. But such a phrase like so many common among evangelical, as well as Catholic, “sanctified intellect,” is wholly misleading; because it expresses the error of human nature rehabilitated or improved by grace, denies the judgment of the fleshly mind in the cross to which faith thoroughly bows, and leaves out the special energy of the Spirit according to the gift of Christ. This Timothy then received, and in the way Scripture describes: which none should doubt because of the powerless, not to say profane, imitation of some bodies in Christendom from early days till now. With him it was a special way for a special work. It is error and ignorance to generalize it, and to assume that others did not receive gifts, χαρίσματα, without any such laying on of hands; any more than to deny that the Holy Ghost was given to the faithful only after a similar sort. That He was so given in peculiar circumstances by imposition of apostolic hands is true; that it was always so is to neglect the still weightier instances of Acts 2 and 10. So with the gifts; they were given in sovereign grace without any such act ordinarily; and this is of all moment for the saints at all times since, when there were and could be no apostles to lay hands on any. But superstition is as blind as rationalism, though seemingly more reverent.

“And as they passed through the cities, they delivered them the decrees to observe, which had been ordained by the apostles and elders who mule in Jerusalem” (ver. 4). This is particularly recorded of the apostle and his companions; and it is the more to be noticed because, when the questions discussed at the council came up for solution in the Epistles these decrees are never referred to. Here again we have to discern the wisdom of God. The decrees were given where Jewish influence prevailed. They were of the highest value to settle the doubts of those who looked up to Jerusalem and especially to the apostles and elders there. If in Jerusalem the chiefs and the church as a whole condemned wholly the imposing of circumcision on Gentiles, who were entitled to press it elsewhere? Certainly not such as had reverence for those whom the Lord had set up in Jerusalem.

In the First Epistle to the Corinthians and in that to the Galatians, the question is argued on the broad ground of the gospel, without reference to the decrees. Here again there is no inconsistency whatever. The decrees were admirably in season and place for those to whom they were given; and Paul was conspicuously zealous in giving assemblies already formed where Jews abounded these decrees to observe. But when he wrote, his Epistles in the subsequent exercise of his apostolic power, he solves the question altogether apart from the decision at Jerusalem by the truth of Christ and His work now fully revealed.

“The assemblies then were being strengthened in the faith and increased in number daily” (ver. 5). Thus did the Lord use the action of grace for helping on His testimony. Agitation is eminently destructive not only to the confirmation of the soul but to the going forward of the work among fresh converts. Faith is nourished by grace, not by questions gendering strife, any more than “by meats” as the apostle somewhat contemptuously speaks of Jewish controversies, “wherein they that walked were not profited.” And grace is inseparable from Christ Who' s “the same yesterday, and to-day, and forever.” Questions apart from Him are met by diverse and strange teachings which only distract the senses. It is good that the heart be established by grace. This was what the apostle walked in, to the profit of those that heard him. Faith was strengthened and fresh assemblies sprung up more and more, or, at the least, their numbers increased daily. Such is the beautiful picture drawn by the Spirit of God; and such the encouragement given to the apostle with his companions in labor.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 15:30-41

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

The scene now changes to Antioch, whither the chosen envoys repair with Paul and Barnabas.

“They then having been let go went down unto Antioch, and having gathered the multitude delivered the letter. And when they had read it, they rejoiced at the consolation. And Judas and Silas, being themselves also prophets, exhorted the brethren with much discourse and strengthened [them]. And having continued a time, they were let go in peace from the brethren unto those that sent them” (ver. 30-33).

At Antioch was the assembly where the Holy Ghost had exercised His sovereign rights in making good the glory of Christ by calling and separating His servants. It was there that Satan had sought to judaize by legal influence derived from Jerusalem. And now that the assembly in Jerusalem had repudiated and cast out that leaven of Pharisaism, Antioch is the first Gentile assembly to hear that grace had triumphed in the very circle whence the evil had spread. The multitude assembled, the letter was delivered; and, when it was read, “they rejoiced at the consolation,”

Alas! it has been rare in ecclesiastical History when such is the fruit of “decrees;” for they are in general a dreary record of anathemas, and, like Ezekiel's roll, lamentation and mourning and woe is written there. Here the gracious power of the Spirit was at work, whatever the adversaries; and edification resulted, not destruction. There was no selfish design, still less a purpose to scatter. The word of God was proved to tally with the ways of His mercy, and the Holy Spirit bound all together, great or small, in giving emphasis and freedom to the gospel in its widest range. Those whose prejudice would have fettered and really corrupted its character, stood abashed and silent, however obstreperous they might have been before. Those who simply desired to hold fast grace, “rejoiced at the consolation,” which was the sweeter because the material of it came from Jerusalem. “And Judas and Silas, being themselves also prophets, exhorted the brethren with much discourse and confirmed them.” We cannot but see the blessed liberty of ministry even where apostles were present. Clerical rights, and personal jealousies, had no place yet. The brethren accordingly confirmed all, as might be looked for, through these ample witnesses, whose one desire for all was growth through the truth. It was the same principle at work here, which was developed years afterward in 1 Cor 12, 14, as indeed the New Testament knows none other according to God. After some time Judas and Silas were dismissed in peace “unto those that had sent them,” not merely “unto the apostles” as in the later copies and some early versions; the more important of which join the ancient in omitting ver. 34 of the Text. Rec. as reflected in the Authorized Version. It was probably an insertion due to. an inference from ver. 40, which is as easy to account for, as it is hard to conceive the best leaving it out if genuine. Silas may have returned, instead of abiding, which last does not well agree with ver. 33.

But Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch teaching and evangelizing, with many others also, the word of the Lord” (ver. 35). Here again we have a plain scripture fully confirming the large and active ministry of the word which characterized these early days. If it be answered that such simplicity was suited to days of testimony before Christianity became an institution established here below, the reply is that the mischief lies there exactly. Christianity ought never to be other than a pilgrimage of faith, and never to have become a thing settled in the earth like Judaism. Communion with Christ and separation from the world are the necessary conditions of fidelity. Our only right establishment will be the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God, in the day of Christ's appearing. Till then neither ease nor honor nor peace nor power in the world, but, as the apostle says, boasting in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through Whom the world is crucified to each, and each of us to the world. Hence ministry is in scripture no question of worldly rank or emolument, (though the laborer is worthy of his hire), but of devoted and loving service according to the gift of Christ.

Here we cannot do better than introduce an incident of the liveliest but withal painful interest, the collision between the great apostle of the circumcision and the younger but still greater apostle of the Gentiles (Gal. 2:11 and seqq.). There seems no real reason to doubt that it occurred at Antioch about this very time after the council of Jerusalem and before the departure of Barnabas, and so it is understood by Ussher (Works, xi. 51), as by others of the greatest weight of old as now. Yet as a fact never was a plain matter so distressingly perverted than by respectable ancients, never greater anxiety to alter its time among recent writers, some of whom prefer an earlier, others a later, date. The real moral is the reluctance of men to bow to the truth, which is all the more impressive if we give due weight to the time when it happened. Certainly man is not exalted thereby, but God Who does not fail of raising up an adequate testimony to His own glory.

No less a man than the chief of the twelve, after all that grace had done, failed to walk straightforwardly according to the truth of the gospel; and having sinned publicly, he was publicly reproved for a compromise so dangerous, and for an inconsistency in his case most glaring. “But when Cephas came unto Antioch, I resisted him face to face, because he was condemned. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he drew back and separated himself, fearing those of the circumcision; and the rest of the Jews also dissembled with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw them not walking straightforwardly according to the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before all, If thou being a Jew livest Gentile-wise and not Jew-wise, how dost thou compel the Gentiles to Judaize? We, Jews by nature and not sinners from among Gentiles, yet knowing that a man is not justified by works of law but only through faith of Jesus Christ, even we believed in Christ Jesus,” &c.

One can see on the one hand what a handle was given to enemies not only by the circumcision itself but yet more by the indelible page of inspiration; as on the other hand we may be sure the Holy Spirit would never have thus recorded it forever unless it were due to God's glory and a most needed lesson for the highest of the Lord's servants through all time. And so we learn how Porphyry chuckled over both (Hieron. vii. 371) and Marcion turned it to his Gnostic account (Tertall. adv. M. &c.) as the author of the Clementines to his malignant aspersion of the apostle Paul.

But there is incomparably more to humble a serious Christian in the way the truth was evaded save by very few. Clemens Alex. is mentioned by Eusebius H.E. i. 12 as authority for the notion that the Cephas in question was not Peter but one of the 70! a notion which spread of old and has not quite disappeared from modern times. Far more weighty are those who condescended to the still baser idea of Origen that the dispute was a mere feint promoted knowingly by both Paul and Peter in which the latter plays the errorist in order to be crushed the more effectually by the former! The greatest preacher of Constantinople, Chrysostom, more than once advocates this monstrous figment; as did Jerome with his usual keenness. With such a representation Augustine dealt worthily, arguing that to accept inspired men's acting a falsehood was to shake the entire authority of scripture. The correspondence is characteristic of each, and may be seen in the Epistolary portion of their works. Jerome was neither humble nor magnanimous enough to sing the palinode to which Augustine had at first invited him; but his authorities, real or assumed, as well as his threats of crushing his adversary under the weight of his own blows, did not deter the Bp. of. Hippo from an overwhelming overthrow of the case alleged and a faithful vindication of the plain bearing of God's word, which in fact ought never to be called into question for one moment.

Thenceforward Peter vanishes from inspired history. This is the last of his acts noticed, though both his Epistles appeared much later. It is affecting and solemn that so it should be; but so it was. People think it strange after being so used and honored, after Pentecost, Caesarea, and the council in Jerusalem quite recently. But the fear of man was ever a snare to Peter; nor was it the first time that he was rebuked for

shrinking from the practical consequences of the truth in this world.

“But after certain days Paul said to Barnabas, Let us return now and see after the brethren, in every city wherein we announced the word of the Lord, how they fare. And Barnabas was minded to take with [them] John also that was called Mark; but Paul thought good not to take with [them] him that withdrew from them from Pamphylia and went not with them unto the work. And there arose a sharp feeling, so that they parted one from another; and Barnabas taking Mark sailed away unto Cyprus; but Paul chose Silas and departed, commended by the brethren to the grace of the Lord. And he passed through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the assemblies” (ver. 36-41).

Alas! further sorrow was not far off; and the ardent desire of the apostle Paul to visit the young assemblies in Asia Minor gave occasion to it. For Barnabas, already damaged by the influence of Peter, set his heart on taking with them John Mark, his cousin. Paul had not forgotten his formerly forsaking the work, its toils and its disagreeables, its shame and the Self-abnegation it entails; hence he set his face against such a companion, till grace had wrought complete restoration in self-judgment and devotedness without stint. Good a man as was Barnabas and attached to his honored companion, this proved too much for his present state which resented Paul's. estimate as severe and beyond measure. But honey, however sweet in itself, was an element forbidden in an offering to the Lord; and Barnabas should have remembered that his natural tie was not favorable to a righteous judgment in the point of difference. Certain it is that there arose a sharp feeling between those blessed servants of the Lord, “so that they parted one from another,” never more to join in common labors. It is not that there ceased on Barnabas' side earnestness in the work or the blessing of the Lord; and the apostle Paul speaks of him with nothing but warm affection and respect in subsequent allusions. Further, it is the joy of grace to hear of Mark owned in the Lord's service, put forward by the apostle where the lack of such a recognition might have stood in his way, and this with peculiar appreciation in the latest Epistle he ever wrote. Lastly it was this very Mark who, I doubt not, purchased to himself a good degree and signal honor in being the inspired witness of our Lord's ministry. Who could enter so deeply as Mark into the wonders of a gospel service where glory shone out of the clouds of unequaled humiliation without one shade of failure, where grace reigned unwaveringly in the midst of sore trial and continual provocation with not a single comfort save from above

So “Barnabas taking Mark sailed away unto Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and departed, commended by the brethren to the grace of the Lord.” It seems plain that Barnabas, beloved as he was, failed at this moment to carry the conscience of his brethren with him. Paul on the other hand was once more accorded, and Silas with him, that mark of united recommendation to the grace of the Lord, which he and Barnabas enjoyed on their first mission to the Gentiles from Antioch (Acts 13:2, 3; 14:26). It is almost needless to remark how unfounded is the assumption that “ordination” is in question here: the renewed mention shows how little they understand the mind of the Lord who are in quest of such perverted efforts to sanction old wives fables, and overlook the grace which identified the brethren that tarried by the stuff with the mightier champions that went down to the battle.

Another feature of interest to note is that, while ministry is of individual faith, this does not hinder one of superior discernment choosing another as companion in work; as the Lord had Himself sent out His servants, both twelve and seventy, two and two before His face. Such a choice is scriptural; election of a minister in the word by an assembly is wholly unknown to the word.

We are meant to observe too that not a word more is said historically of Barnabas, who with his kinsman sailed off to his native isle. Of Paul it is written that “he passed through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the assemblies” (ver. 41). The “rite” of confirmation has no real source in God's word; but His servants were diligent in strengthening the faith of the saints. They rightly felt that the truth is best learned within, where practice illustrates and develops principle. Church action where living and true is the ready comment on scripture, and continual teaching draws attention to details as well as to the truth as a whole in the person of Christ. Thus are the assemblies confirmed according to God.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 15:22-29

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

It may be noticed by the way that no vote was taken, nor any equivalent measure. For it was no question of the will of man but of God, Who wrought by the Spirit to give holy wisdom and general concurrence.

“Then it seemed good to the apostles and elders with the whole assembly, having chosen1 from among them to send men, with Paul and Barnabas to Antioch, Judas called2 Barnabas, leading men among the brethren, having written by their hand, The apostles and the elder brethren3 to the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia greeting. Whereas we heard that some who went out from us troubled you with words, upsetting tour souls;4 to whom we gave no commandment; it seemed good to us, having been of one accord,5 to choose6 and send men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men that have given up their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have sent therefore Judas and Silas themselves also announcing by word the same things. For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these necessary things: to abstain from things sacrificed to idols, and blood, and things strangled, and fornication; from which if ye keep yourselves ye shall do well. Farewell” (ver. 22-29).

It will be observed that the most ancient authorities open with a reading which is now accepted by almost all critics. This yields a sense rather more remote from ecclesiastical tradition than the ordinary text, where “the elders” are distinguished sharply from “the brethren” immediately following. The “elder brethren,” however, is a formula which exactly agrees with the state of things which was obtaining at Jerusalem. No doubt they were “the elders” there, as we find them called in chap. 11: 30, as well as in chap. 15:2, 6. They were the local authorities; but they appear not to have been chosen formally, as the elders undoubtedly were in the Gentile assemblies by apostolic authority, direct or indirect; they seem rather to have acted simply from their experience and moral weight, as was usual among the Jews. This falls in remarkably with the peculiar expression employed here, “the elder brethren,” and harmonizes with the tone of Peter's address in chap. v. of his first Epistle.

But there is another remark to make of still more immediate and important application practically. Judas, Barnabas, and Silas were sent with Paul and Barnabas, characterized as “leading men among the brethren.” They were neither apostles on the one hand, nor were they elders or elder brethren on the other, but were chosen by the council, for their fitness, to visit Antioch. It is the same expression which we find three times in Heb. 13 The Revised version like the Authorized, translates it “chief” in Acts 15; but “those that had (or, “have") the rule” in Hebrews: “had” for the departed chiefs, “have” for such as still lived and labored. They are not spoken of as elders, but seem to have been identified with the ministration of the word (ver. 7), rather than with oversight or presiding like the elders. This fact gives us clear insight, when duly recognized, into the far greater liberty as well as variety of gift, exercised in the apostolic church, as compared with the straitness of modern Christendom. I do not speak of sign-gifts, such as miracles and tongues, but of spiritual endowments given of Christ for the perfecting of the saints. Denominational arrangements on the worldly system of a salary, with the claims of an exclusive position, directly interferes with the Lord's will in this respect and destroys the beautiful liberty of the Spirit, to the famishing (not the edification) of the body of Christ.

Yet it will be found by the attentive reader not only of the Acts of the Apostles but of their Epistles, that the principle and the practice of this free ministration in the assemblies is easily vouched for apart from local authority or official rank throughout the New Testament. Rom. 12 is plain. “Teaching” and “exhorting,” and “ruling,” or “leading,” are spoken of as “gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us” distinct from “prophecy,” as well as one from another. In the church or assembly according to God's word there was and ought to be room for them all. It were the sheerest unbelief to assume that they are now extinct. Woe be to the adversaries of the Holy Ghost who affirm such a falsehood to justify their system!

The reader can Compare also 1 Cor. 12 and 14 throughout, as well as chap. 15:1-16, Gal. 6:6, Eph. 4:7-16, Phil. 1:14, Col. 2:19, 1 Thess. 5:12, 13, 2 Tim. 2:2, 1 Peter 4:10, 11, 3 John 7, 8, which prove in the clearest manner the full opening in the assembly as well as towards the world for those suitably gifted which scripture maintains, and only persons like Diotrephes; as far as God's word speaks, dare to oppose and neutralize.

It is in vain to plead, as unbelief blindly does, that such largeness and liberty were only suited to the apostolic day. For this really gives the highest sanction to such free action of the Holy Ghost. If inspired men, if the highest gifts that God ever set in the church, did not hinder but help on every form of gracious ministry, how can men in avowedly inferior position now-a-days justify their opposition? None but the most prejudiced will contend that the ordinary gifts of edification fail. None but enthusiasts will deny that the sign-gifts, which ushered in the present economy, are extinct. Not so those, thank God, that are given by the ascended Christ unto the work of ministering, save such as were for laying the foundation (Eph. 2:20) which once laid was laid forever.

We may remark in the letter of the council that the order is “Barnabas and Paul” (ver. 25) as in ver. 12, whereas earlier in the chap. as in ver. 2, and later as in ver. 35, etc., it is “Paul and Barnabas.” The feeling of the saints in Jerusalem expressed itself in the former way, as was the feeling elsewhere in the early days of the great apostle's testimony. Compare Acts 11:30; 12:25; 13:2, 7. But chap. 13: 13, marks a great change, as we see in verses 43, 46, 50 (but not 14:14). The reader of the Old Testament may find a similar principle in Ex. 6:13, 20, 26, and 27. In the order of nature it is “Aaron and Moses;” in sovereign grace it becomes “Moses and Aaron.” The author of the Old and the New is, the same and can only be God Himself, working in man through His unerring Spirit.

This was the only council which was entitled to say, “It seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us.” If others have imitated the language, it is but profanity. Yet it was not an ecumenical assembly at all, but simply the assembly at Jerusalem where the apostles and local elders met together to consider the matter. The decision was most rightly taken there, whence the evil had sprung; and where the apostles were, Paul and Barnabas going up for the purpose. It was they with the whole assembly at Jerusalem who decided for the liberty of the Gentile converts. How different and disastrous it must have been had it been a council at Antioch, even though the decision had been the same! It is of all consequence that the way as well as the end be of the Holy Spirit and in accordance with the word of God. So it was with this council, and we hear no more of the much discussion or questioning which had agitated the brethren before the council. Judas and Silas were sent as the most unequivocal witnesses of the decision at Jerusalem, that Barnabas and Paul might thence have a support above all question. The power of divine grace had thus wrought in truth and righteousness for the name of Jesus; and there was a great calm.

There was no such portentous error as a portion of the assembly (though in Jerusalem exceedingly numerous) deciding for itself alone; then the other portions following suit; and lastly all who objected to the fraud and force of the transaction justled and declared outside in the city, with the like course pursued throughout the country. No wonder that breaches must be created by so gross a departure from the word, even if the object had not been partiality to a favorite preceded by unrighteous oppression. At the council at Jerusalem, as love wrought for Christ's glory, so righteousness was the result, and unity throughout was maintained. Nobody thought of another judgment of the question, either in other parts of Jerusalem or anywhere else. God honored His own principles in His word, grace triumphed, and the saints at large, however previously alienated, owned and rejoiced in the blessing, where appearances had threatened a storm of evil omen to all who valued the gospel.

But the ecumenical councils anathematized individuals and forced divisions far and wide. In this they succeeded; for nothing is so easy as to scatter the saints. To allay fleshly violence, to conciliate the alienated, to repress party, needs grace and truth wielded by the Lord: what was so rare at these councils? Will and passion reigned more humblingly and bitterly than in the political sphere.

Even the first and most important of these “general councils” was convened by the Emperor Constantine, though an unbaptized man! to be held at Nicea. The number of western delegates was ridiculously small, as indeed it ever was at all the councils in the East. Later when the popes exercised the power of the emperors, the eastern bishops were wholly absent. Thus the claim to be “ecumenical” was a nullity, and most evidently after the west quarreled with the east, for thenceforward only the Latin party attended. Thus God took care that; as the departure became complete and evil was enforced by man's will, unity should be manifestly at an end, though none were so loud and arrogant in their claim of it as those who in their blind zeal had done most to destroy the testimony to it.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 15:12-21

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

Peter had made an admirable introduction and his argument was the reflection of the grace of the Lord Jesus. It was well and worthy that the apostle of the circumcision should so speak not merely from personal experience but from the sovereign choice of. God. We can understand the effect: “And all the multitude kept silence.” None could doubt the strong Jewish prejudice of Peter, no more could they question now his assertion of liberty from the law for the Gentiles. But there was another reason for keeping silence. “And they hearkened unto Barnabas and. Paul rehearsing what signs and wonders God wrought among the Gentiles by them” (ver. 12). Here there ought not to be a hesitation that “all the multitude” must take in not merely the apostles and the elders but the assembly. This seems certain from ver. 22, whatever may be our judgment of the true reading in ver. 23. It is interesting to note that the signs and wonders are said to have been wrought of God by Barnabas and Paul, whereas in ver. 4 the more general work of the Lord is said to have been all that God wrought with them. The signs and wonders were more external and they are viewed as mere instruments. “With them,” implies more of fellowship and divine association than exercise of mere power. Such a statement must have had the most powerful effect on Jewish minds. God graciously gave in abundance what they would expect peculiarly in so novel a work among the Gentiles. His grace had fully provided for all emergencies beforehand. “And after they had held their peace, James answered saying, Brethren (men-brethren) hearken to me; Simeon has rehearsed how God first visited the Gentiles to take out of (them) a people for His name” (ver. 13, 14). This is a most important proposition in its way, it gives a separate character to the present work of God. It in no way denies that God had a line of saints in Israel, and before Israel, and what is more, outside Israel; but it asserts a special gathering out at this present time, and it leaves no room for the vain thought, that even one nation, as a whole, shall be brought by the gospel to confess the Lord, still less that all nations shall be so changed. The truth is that God only proposes while Jesus is at His right hand, to take out of all a people for His name. This is the church of God and as distinct from the ways of God before the cross as from those which are to follow the Lord's appearing and reign by-and-by. “And to this agree the words of the prophets, as it is written; After these things I will return and will build again the tabernacle of David which is fallen, and will build again its ruins and will set it up; so that the residue of men may seek out the

Lord and all the nations upon whom My name is called, saith the Lord, Who maketh [all] these things known from the beginning of the world” (ver. 15-18).

It is an error to suppose that these last words allude to the mystery of forming the believing Gentiles with the faithful Jews into one body the church. Rom. 16:25, 26 and Eph. 3:5, 6 do refer to that mystery, but not our text which simply speaks of God's gracious recognition of those of the nations that believe as His own, though Gentiles still, whether under the gospel now or in the future kingdom. Union with Christ and the head as His body goes much farther, though said of Gentiles now as of believing Jews;. but no Old Testament prophet reveals it. The prophetic writings of Rom. 16 and the prophets of Eph. 3 are New Testament exclusively.

It will be observed that the prophets are referred to generally, though none but Amos is quoted, and the object is general. James draws from their testimony, proved expressly by the one cited the principle, of Gentiles as such having the Lord's name called upon them. So far were they of the nations from having to accept circumcision that the prophet speaks of all the Gentiles. This will be in the days of the kingdom as no Jew could deny. They will not become Jews any more than the Jews will become Gentiles; both will be blessed of the Lord in their respective positions when the Messiah reigns. It was absurd therefore to object to God's grace toward the Gentiles now, under the gospel, and in the church where is neither Jew nor Gentile, but Christ is all and in all.

The reading in ver. 18 is somewhat doubtful, and even the version, which may mean “who doeth these things known from the beginning of the world.” The general sense is plain enough. Accordingly James gives his judgment. “Wherefore my judgment is that we trouble not those who from the Gentiles turn to God, but write to them that they may abstain from pollutions of idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood. For Moses from generations of old hath in every city those who preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath” (verses 19-21).

“The pollution of idols” were meats offered to idols, as in ver. 29. Cf. Dan. 1 Mal. 1, not to speak of Eccles. 11 Bentley's conjecture of χοιρείας (“pork”) for πορνείας is an instance of the great scholar's audacity and erudite ignorance (perhaps suggested by Bellonius' Observat. iii. 10 whom he cites on ver. 29). We may think it strange to see unclean sin classed with idolatrous sanction &c.; but the Jew felt differently, and to the Gentile they were equally indifferent.

Thus it was going up rather to God's ways with Noah, than enforcing the law of Moses. Noah being a sort of head of mankind generally, after the flood, Gentile liberty was thus secured, idolatry was intolerable, and so was fornication, however universal both among the nations. Abstinence from things strangled and blood brought in the recognition of God's taking account of man as fallen. God forbade both: the use of the creature was not forbidden to man, but God prohibited meddling with the special signs of death; life belongs to God, and it was forfeited through sin. As for the law, there was no reason why the church should busy itself in that direction: from generations of old Moses had in every city those that preach him. The synagogues at any rate had the law read there every sabbath. The Gentiles henceforth might well rejoice in the gospel.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 15:6-11

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It seems evident that much was done before the council. The opposition of the judaizing party had come out fully and distinctly from the time the apostles of the Gentiles had been received by the assembly, as it had wrought since the baptism of Cornelius and his household. Naturally the public recital of what God had done in Asia Minor provoked their prejudices yet more. What occurred privately is not stated here; but we know from the early verses of Gal. 2 that it was of high moment.

What is reported in Acts 15 had for its prime object the repression of Jewish feeling and the distinct recognition of the Gentiles who believed on common ground with the Jewish disciples. The decrees, that were ordained by the apostles and the elders in Jerusalem had the greatest weight in that point of view. But, in writing to the Gentile assemblies, the apostle takes the high ground of grace, and proves the incompatibility of a fleshly ordinance, however venerable or instructive, with the truth of a dead and risen Savior as a ground of justification before God. In that grand scheme, wherein God Himself has wrought for guilty and lost man in the cross and blood of His Son, circumcision made with hands wholly vanishes away. And the Gentile believers, dead in their offenses and the uncircumcision of their flesh, Christ quickened together with Him, no less than the Jewish faithful, having forgiven us all the offenses. The handwriting written in ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, He blotted out and took out of the way, nailing it to the cross. We can understand how truly it was of God, thus to confront and set aside all Gentile inclination for ordinances by the teaching of the truth of Christ; which had buried the question in His grave and given the Christian a new place in Him, to which the flesh never had, nor can have, a claim. The decrees had their place and season most suitably while the early Jews who believed were objects of the patience of God; but the apostolic Epistles treat the question on a deeper foundation, and with higher associations, which abide forever. But it is highly instructive to notice that the apostle was not behind others in honoring and using the decrees, which are not even mentioned in the final discussion of the case for the edification of the church in general.

“And the apostles and the elders were gathered together to see about the matter. And when there had been much questioning, Peter stood up and said to them, Brethren, (lit. Men-brethren) ye know how that from early days God chose among you1 that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel and believe. And the heart-knowing God bore them witness, giving [them]2 the Holy Spirit, even as to us also; and He put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore, why tempt ye God, that ye should put a yoke on the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe3 that through the grace of the Lord Jesus4 we shall be saved in like manner as they” (ver. 6-11). Here we have the opening of the council. None but the apostles and elders are mentioned as gathered together. It was emphatically for their decision; but assuredly not without the presence and concurrence of the assembly, as we know from verse 22, not to speak of verse 12; and this of course as a reality, not a mere form which Christianity forbids. But God would have the positive seal of the highest authority in the eyes even of the remonstrants. Hence the prominent mention throughout of the apostles and elders, while it cannot be doubted that the assembly was present and free to take, part, It was a matter in which every soul had a real interest but in which the judgment of the wisest was particularly needed. And One wiser than any took His guiding part here (ver. 28), Whose personal presence we have seen to be sedulously acknowledged throughout this entire book; as indeed it is characteristic of the church of God according to the scriptures. The Holy Ghost was there and was counted on for guidance to the glory of Christ.

This, however, did not preclude discussion. Verse 7 lets us know that there was much debate or questioning. No doubt it was sorrowful and humiliating that there should be such disputation; even in the presence of the apostles; but the fact is plain and is calmly recorded by the Holy Spirit, which should convince not a few how far their notion of ecclesiastical order differs from primitive history. Even in apostolic days we see how liberty prevailed though flesh undoubtedly took advantage of it. To destroy the liberty because of its abuse were a remedy worse than the disease; and thus it is with Christendom bound in fetters of brass for ages, and denouncing true liberty as license. Human rules have rendered the scriptural state of things just as impossible against good as against evil. But faith, when directed to God's revelation in this, can never rest satisfied short of subjection to scripture, and the rather as the Holy Spirit was promised to abide with us forever.

The apostles, it is evident, bore patiently with the difficulties and even disputes of their less discerning and more prejudiced brethren. They were strong in the grace that is in Christ. They had His glory livingly before their souls. They tonight net lordship over the faith of their brethren, but that others should stand by faith even as they stood. As the grace and truth of Christ faded in men's hearts, ecclesiastical authority became an idol or self-importance a snare. Such was, such is, no small part of the present ruined state of the church: no one contends that there was perfection even in apostolic days, still less can one look for perfection now, even within the most circumscribed sphere. But every faithful soul is bound to stand for the Lord's honor according to the written word, and to eschew whatever is opposed to God's order as well as to doctrinal truth and personal holiness. The denial of such a responsibility is in substance not only a sin but antinomian in principle, no matter whose be the names or what the fair-spoken pleas to excuse the unfaithfulness. It is easy to point out grievous short-coming even where a truthful stand is made. But those who point it out with complacency fail in this very matter to exhibit the Spirit of Christ, and will never be able to justify human methods in God's church, even if they succeeded in carrying them out ever so successfully. How much more worthy to do better according to the word what they blame for being done so feebly! Is it uncharitable to say that to act themselves according to the word is far from their purpose, which is simply to discredit those who do seek it?

Peter then reminds all of his mission to Joppa, where the Gentiles received the gospel through him as God's first and apostolic instrument. Most powerfully does he urge God's dealings with them, “the heart-knowing God” being witness to them, in the gift of the Holy Spirit, uncircumcised as they were; nay, further, that He put no distinction between the Jewish and the Gentile believers, seeing that His purification is of the heart by faith. For this a rite avails nothing. “Now, therefore, why tempt ye God”? Their prejudice, in itself, and specially if maintained, was a real disbelief of God's word and acts. It was putting a yoke of law upon the neck of the disciples, which none in the past or present could bear: a circumcised man was debtor to do the whole law. For introduced in glory as it was, it is a ministry of death and condemnation. The gospel believed is salvation through the grace of the Lord Jesus, Who bore our penalty and blotted out our sins in His blood. This is grace indeed, where all the guilt was ours and all that availed for our forgiveness and deliverance was His, to the vindication of that God, His God and Father, Whom we had rebelled against or lived without. In reality we knew Him not as He is, believing the lie of Satan rather than the truth of God. We did our own will and gave Him no credit for love, though He so loved the world as to give His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth should not perish but have everlasting life. But now we have seen the Son and believed in Him. His grace in suffering for our sins, the Just for the unjust, has made us both ashamed of ourselves and acquainted with God; and He is love. “Hereby know we love, because He laid down His life for us.”

Formed by that grace, it is remarkable that Peter says here, “we believe (we Jews) that we shall be saved in like manner as they (Gentiles).” The natural phrase for a Jew would have been, “They in like manner as we;” but grace reigns and Peter says, “We, in like manner as they.” How worthy of the gospel! This was not Simon Bar-Jonah left to himself, but it was Peter—a true rockman. Flesh and blood had not prompted the thought or word, but the Father Who is in heaven.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 15:1-5

The Spirit of God next brings before us the first signal working of that judaizing which was destined to play a deep, wide, and permanent portion in the history of the church of God. “And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, Except ye be circumcised1 after the custom of Moses, ye cannot be saved” (ver. 1).

In every point of view this was serious. It was an error, and yet it claimed to be founded on the word of God. It proceeded from men bearing the name of Christ, and withal it struck at the foundation. Satan's habitual effort is to insinuate evil, not only under fair appearance and if possible by one part of the word made to neutralize another, but through disciples. No principle more false than to urge the reputation of advocates in defense of their doctrine, which must stand or fall according to scripture interpreted in the light of Christ and His work; for these ever call for the energies of the Holy Spirit, as they command the hearts of the faithful.

It is clear also that the truth of God is imperiled by an unwarranted addition even more than by the manifest opposition of unbelief. These men did not avowedly deny the gospel, nor teach that one could be saved by an ordinance only; but they did insist on the necessity of circumcision in order to salvation. This is to undermine Christianity, which is not merely promise but accomplishment; but mere promises leave the door open, as inspired history shows, for thereby insinuating the law, instead of sovereign grace reigning through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord. It was really ignorance of Christ risen from the dead and glorified in heaven, the proper object of the Christian. He never can thus be by faith before the soul, without maintaining the efficacy of His atoning death. What has law or circumcision to do with Him who is at the right hand of God? On this side of the cross law has its place.

But these men were occupied with their prejudices and were looking back at things and persons on earth, not through the rent veil upon Christ above. Hence their pride was wounded. They could not bear to hear that the distinctive mark, the ancient glory of a Jew, was now eclipsed and gone. They had feebly learned the teaching of the cross. They had not discerned there the sentence of death on the flesh at its best. They would no doubt have acknowledged their need of Him who suffered once for all for their sins; but they saw not their religion (and circumcision was its initiatory and characteristic badge) treated as naught, yea utterly condemned therein. Error flows from a wholly false measure. Had Christ, the truth, been before their souls, had they estimated aright His death on the cross, they had never fallen into a mistake so profound and unworthy.

But they were wrong otherwise also. The Lord had promised the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of truth, to guide into it all and to teach what they could not bear daring His earthly ministry. The truth was there in His person; but yet the best taught of His disciples did not understand at all fully even fundamentals till He was risen and glorified. But now the Holy Spirit had been sent down from heaven, and Gentiles without circumcision had received Him, no less than did the circumcised believers. Was this nothing in their eyes? Is it not a solemn lesson that disciples could be so blinded by their religious habits as to overlook a fact so plain, certain, and conclusive? For God had taken care that not the apostles of the uncircumcision but Peter himself should be His chosen instrument for the call of Cornelius, in the presence of the six brethren of the circumcision that accompanied him from Joppa.

It is instructive also to observe, if faith is ever humble, bold though it may be, how presumptuous error is. For these men who were clamorous for the necessity of circumcision, ventured not to plead that apostolic authority had laid down any such dogma as they sought to impose. Their judgment and their dignity, we may say, proceeded from themselves, in this behaving like the Gentiles who know not God.

Insurrection against the truth was thus permitted to display itself in the face of the apostles, that the Lord might give us His own distinct and ever-abiding correction. What a mercy to us, as well as to the church of God ever since, that this question was not suppressed till the apostles disappeared from the earth! We should then have had only an uninspired answer however sound. Now we have what all Christians own to possess divine authority. That which an apostle writes is really the Lord's commandment (1 Cor. 14:37).

The troublers came from Judaea, which with the weak and ignorant would be apt to lend weight to their words. Of this Satan is ever active to take advantage. Human tradition readily creeps in, and as naturally flatters the flesh. The Holy Ghost falls back upon the word; only we must take care that we do not require the letter which kills when we can only have the spirit which gives life. Subjection to Christ alone keeps us right; life in Him is always obedient and holy, and is the way of true intelligence. Human tradition is never to be trusted even among disciples. God is jealous for His word, which bears constant testimony to Christ and therefore against human pride. The men who came down from Judea were imperious nominally for God; it was really for the flesh and self. They would have cut off, if they could, not only the Gentile saints but the apostles of the uncircumcision.

“And2 when Paul and Barnabas had not small dissension and questioning with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up unto Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question” (ver. 2). Here again let us admire the wisdom of God's ways. Paul and Barnabas themselves were unable to settle the dispute. Self-will is invincible, even for apostles. God had it in His mind to interpose in a much more impressive and efficacious manner. It might have been dangerous, however desirable in itself, to have terminated the present matter of debate at Antioch. For the evil, being inveterate as to principle in the nature of things, would surely have broken out afresh subsequently, and elsewhere, probably worst of all in Jerusalem itself. It was true wisdom, therefore, to transfer the further discussion of the question to the source from whence the mischief had come; more particularly as Paul and Barnabas would go there, in order that it might not only be heard but there and then settled by all the authority given of God for the governing of His assembly on the earth. All was thus directed under the good hand of God; for the evil was judged in the quarter from whence it emanated, where presumably, not to say notoriously, was its hotbed, where lived those who knew best its promoters, and where all was rather favorable than hostile to them; with on the other hand the immense moral weight that would follow the judgment from such as God had set first in the church to govern in the Lord's name.

In Gal. 2 the apostle Paul says he went up “according to revelations” Here the inspired historian says that they (i.e. the brethren or the laborers generally without defining more) arranged or decided that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up to the apostles

and elders at Jerusalem about this question. There is no more contradiction than in Acts 13 where the Spirit called unmistakably and exclusively the same servants of the Lord to a definite missionary work, while they also enjoyed the cordial and holy fellowship of their fellow-laborers in commending them to the grace of God for that tour. They may have had the revelation direct as in Acts 16 or through the prophetic intimation of others as before; what is certain is that “according to revelation” Paul went up, and not merely as a step appointed by others. Each statement is in perfect keeping with the document where it is given, and the Holy Spirit's design in each, though men as usual have not been wanting to set them in antagonism. Titus was one of these others, and his case at least of immediate bearing on the question, as an uncircumcised Gentile endowed and honored of God beyond most; but this again is specified only to the Galatians for its importance there, though room be amply and evidently left for it in the Acts. The rationalistic misuse of God's word is an instance of that ignorance or dishonesty, if not both, which characterizes the system. The believer ought to have no hesitation or difficulty, inasmuch as faith adheres to all scripture as divine.

“They therefore, having been set forward by the assembly, passed through both3 Phenicia and Samaria, recounting the conversion of the Gentiles; and they caused great joy to all the brethren” (ver. 3). Is there any good reason why προπ should not be rendered here as in Rom. 15:24, 1 Cor. 16:6, 3 John 6? No doubt the heart of the saints was with them, not with the legalists; but there was considerate and affectionate care for their wants by the way, whether or not there was any escort, as in ch. 21: 5, which some conceive here. The picture is a lovely one, the joy in all created by the accounts heard of God's grace outside Israel. What a contrast, with Jewish jealousy! Yet are unlettered men and women peculiarly open to superstition, prejudice, and human feeling. But divine love prevailed, in accordance with the truth. Others alas! who for the time ought to have been teachers had again need to be taught the elements of the beginning of the oracles of God and had come to need milk, not solid food. It is harder to unlearn than to learn.

“And on arriving at Jerusalem they were welcomed4 by the assembly and the apostle's and the elders, and reported all things that God did with them. But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees, believers, saying, It is necessary to circumcise them and charge [them] to keep the law of Moses” (ver. 4: 5).

The heart of the church beat truly; but there were adversaries now within as well as without. It was not yet the conference, but meetings preliminary to it, where the wonderful works of God by the gospel drew out sympathy or opposition among those at Jerusalem who bore the Lord's name. Those who at this time resented the liberty of grace are expressly said to have believed. The crisis therefore was grave. Unity—unity not merely by-and-by in heaven, but now on earth—is the blessed privilege and the unalienable responsibility of the body of Christ, the assembly. There was no such unhappy wish as to forestall the due place, by dealing with the question where Paul and Barnabas had especial and commanding influence, and then arguing on the church's unity to compel the communion of the assembly in Jerusalem and of course everywhere else. Yet Antioch might have been plausibly set forward as the only proper place to discuss and determine a question which so intimately concerned the Lord's glory among the Gentile believers. For not from Jerusalem but from Antioch were those ambassadors of Christ sent forth who had been the great pioneers in the missionary work of the Holy Spirit. Self or party could have furnished abundant reasons; but Christ held His place, which first sought His will and then made all saints dear, even those who were creating trouble by their lack of grace, lowliness, and intelligence. Thus the snare was avoided by which Satan sought even then to scatter and make a Jewish church apart from the Gentile; or, at the least, by leaving out the assembly in Jerusalem the apostles, and the elders, to begin a separate course at Antioch, which would ere long end in division if not immediately. But grace and truth prevailed, the respect clue to all those whom the Lord had honored, and, as we have seen, the particular principle of dealing with evil in its root, and not merely its fruits.

It was, I presume, at this juncture that the apostle, as he tells us in Gal. 2, set the gospel he preached to the Gentiles before those of reputation in private. It was then they saw that he had been entrusted with the gospel of the uncircumcision, even as Peter with that of the circumcision; and that James, Cephas, and John gave to Paul and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship according to that partition of the work which the Lord had already marked out for all that had eyes to discern. This was of the utmost moment to state in, the Epistle; but it was outside the public history and independent of the council which is the Spirit's. object in the chapter before us. The independence of Paul's mission and work does not enter into view here; whereas in the letter to the Galatians it was of capital moment, and the decrees of the council not named, where they could have no just place, and their mention might have wrought only mischief. How truly, in the New Testament as in the Old, to everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven. Above it is uncalled for, where all is light, peace, and love to God's glory.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 14:20-28

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The apostle had now nearly reached the extreme point of this the first missionary journey.

“And on the morrow he went forth with Barnabas to Derbe.” This, or the country round about, was the farthest limit westward for the present. It might have seemed an inviting opportunity to have visited Cilicia or even Tarsus; but he who blamed John Mark, who left them and the work to return to Jerusalem, was not the man to allow such a claim; as even Barnabas seems to have done when he took Mark with him and subsequently went to Cyprus.

“And,1 after preaching the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned onto Lystra and unto Iconium, and unto Antioch, establishing the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God” (ver. 21, 22). It was in this neighborhood and during this visit apparently that Timothy was brought to the Lord through the apostle Paul (1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2); for in Acts 16:1 he is spoken of as already a disciple in Derbe and Lystra, well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium. Here no reference is made, though grace had great things in store for him. It was enough to add about Derbe that the preaching was blessed to many there as elsewhere.

We next hear of their return, visiting in reversed order Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch. The circumstances gave a new character to the work. First they were “establishing the souls of the disciples.” For this is a necessary part of the labor of love, and a real need for new-born souls; and many who are blessed in awakening have little power to confirm the young disciples. Here were servants of the Lord. fitted beyond all to help on the unestablished; and we are told of their exhorting them to abide in the faith. How much there is to alarm in it if not to seduce from it. But they are also warned of the difficulties in the way, especially of the numerous severe trials which intervene, or, as it is expressed, “that through many tribulations we2 must enter into the kingdom of God.” So the Lord had told the early disciples who as Jews might and did expect things smooth and bright, now that the Messiah was come. But He was come to suffer and to go on high, rejected of men and of His earthly people; which gives room to a yet deeper aggravation of the suffering path before glory dawn. And if Paul was a great preacher, not less was he a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth. Christ was ever his theme; “Whom we announce,” as he says himself, “admonishing every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom, to the end we may present every man perfect in Christ: whereunto also I labor, combating according to His working that worketh in me in power.” He never took any Christian duty lightly, least of all that which lies so near to God's purpose and Christ's affection, even for those who had not seen his face in the flesh; that their hearts might be encouraged, being united together in love and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the recognition of the mystery of God, in which are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. For those are not wanting anywhere, who, deceived themselves, seek to deceive the saints by persuasive speech. The word dwelling in us, and praise and prayer flowing out to God, with diligent testimony in love within as well as without, are grand safeguards; but withal the mind made up with joy for all endurance and long-suffering, as we wait for Christ and the kingdom.

Secondly, another task which the first visit could not effect, yet remained— “And when they chose (or appointed) for them elders in each assembly and prayed with fastings, they commended them to the Lord on Whom they had believed” (ver. 23). Naturally the differences in Christendom warp the minds of too many in their impressions of this instructive verse. Jerome, though by no means so extreme as some of the early fathers, interprets the word χ. (which all the early English as well as the Authorized Version had rendered “ordained,” Tyndale, Cranmer, and Geneva adding “by election,") of ordination by laying on of hands, as if χειροτονία=χειροθεσία. This Mr. Humphry rightly treats as untenable, or at least unsupported by any clear example of such a sense. But we may go farther than Dean Alford and must affirm that scripture nowhere points to the churches selecting elders by show of hands or in any other way. Indeed the phraseology before us excludes any such thought; for, first, if χ. necessarily implied any such etymological import here, the meaning must be that Paul and Barnabas chose elders by that method of suffrage, which nobody holds or wishes, but the contrary. And, secondly, this is confirmed yet more abundantly by the pronoun “for them,” which excludes the disciples from their desired part in the election, and distinctly makes the apostles choose the elders for the saints concerned. Of all interpretations therefore none is so bad as the amiable compromise that the apostles ordained those whom each church elected. The words simply teach that Paul and Barnabas chose elders for the disciples in each assembly. No doubt the word may mean to stretch out the hand, and this especially in voting; but it had long been used, where no such form could be, to express choice or appointment. And this is certain in the New Testament without going outside it, and in Luke's usus loqueudi, as the most prejudiced must allow in Acts 10:41, and here too, unless he contends for Paul and Barnabas holding up their hands in each of these cases. This however is not what Congregationalism wants, but that the disciples should thus decide their choice of each elder and of one only in each church; whereas the text declares that the apostles chose elders for them in each assembly3: the most distinct and conclusive disproof of popular election which language can convey. And if laying on of hands followed, it is in no way taught here, for the word refers only to the choice of the presbyters. Nor does 2 Cor. 8:19 support the idea of an election of the elders popularly; for the question there was solely of brethren acceptable to the assemblies for conveying funds to the saints in distress elsewhere. And it is certain that scripture does warrant the saints at large in choosing those they confide in for such work, as we seek in Acts 6 Still less is there the slightest analogy with the two put. forward (not elected) in Acts 1:23, as to whom they prayed the Lord to choose for the vacant apostolate. The lot is a wholly different principle, on which turned the numbering or enrollment of Matthias with the eleven. In short, the procedure here was, just what Calvin denies, the apostles choosing solely in virtue of their peculiar office; as afterward Titus was commissioned by Paul to appoint the elders in every city of Crete, without a hint of sitting as moderator of a free election by the consent of all. Not only is the book thus in harmony, but the New Testament as a whole. Where man gave, man was allowed to choose; where the Lord gave, He chooses and sends apart from man; where it is a question of order, the authorized envoys of the Lord appointed in His name, not only directly as here, but indirectly through a distinctly recognized channel.

After the choice of elders for the saints, the apostles prayed with fasting and commended them to the Lord on whom they had believed. The saints in general were the object in view, not the elders only And whatever the supplication which assuredly preceded and accompanied the delicate work of appointing the elders, it would appear from the language and connection that, the prayers and fasting here specified followed that appointment and concerned the saints cast on the sustaining grace of the Lord.

“And having passed through Pisidia they came unto Pamphylia; and having spoken the word [of the Lord)4 in5 Perga they went down unto Attalia; and thence they sailed unto Antioch, whence they had been commended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled. And when they arrived and brought the assembly together, they repeated all things God had wrought with them and how He had opened to the Gentiles a door of faith. And they tarried6 no little time with the disciples” (ver. 24 -28).

Thus the first great evangelistic journey to the heathen by the apostles was brought to a close, Perga having heard the word on their return, if not on the earlier occasion saddened by the departure thence of John. And now Attalia (the modern Satalia, or Adalias) was touched, instead of Paphos, of any other part of Cyprus and from that port to the Syrian Antioch, their point of departure, the voyage was readily made.

Two remarks it is of moment to add. The latter part of ver. 26 defines yet more, if it were needed, the import of that which had preceded this missionary visit. It was in no true sense an “ordination of Barnabas and Paul; but, as here described, their recommendation to the grace of God for the work which they hart fulfilled. Indeed from chap. 15:40 it would seem to have been repeated on the apostle's second journey with Silas. The notion of holy orders founded on the beginning of Acts 13 is therefore not only without value but strips what was done of all its gracious meaning. It is part of that Judaizing which for most has darkened New Testament scripture.

Next, we may observe that, though sent out authoritatively by the Holy Spirit (chap. 13:4), and so placed directly under responsibility to the Lord, whose bondmen they were, they are quick to share all His doings with them: they call together the assembly whence they had gone out that all might rejoice in His grace, and especially His grace to the Gentiles. The church is not the source of mission, but the scene of

communion with divine grace using the truth for the blessing of the Genesis tiles by Paul, not Peter, and from Antioch as a starting-point on earth, not Jerusalem nor yet Rome. Patriarchal jurisdiction there was none, till men forgot that the true spring of the authority, power, and blessing, was Christ in heaven, and ere long began to dream of rival sees and their hierarchs. How had the little seed become a tree, so that the birds of heaven, which snatch away what was sown in the heart, came and lodged in its branches! (Matt. 13)

We should bear in mind that the stay of Paul and Barnabas on their return to Antioch was not short.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 14:1-19

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

If the Pisidian Antioch has only of late been identified, there is no doubt that Koniyeh, a considerable town of some forty thousand souls, represents in our day the changed scene of apostolic labors which now opens to us. It was then an important city, having rapidly grown up from Strabo's estimate in the reign of Augustus, as we may gather from Pliny's account, a few years later than the inspired one, though far below what it became as the capital of the Seljukian Sultans.

Here, as in the city just left, the Jews had a synagogue, to which Paul and Barnabas repaired as usual. Persecution had in no wise daunted their courage or cooled their love and zeal in the gospel.

“And it came to pass in Iconium that they entered together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake that a great multitude of both Jews and Greeks believed. But the Jews that disobeyed1 stirred up the souls of the Gentiles and aggravated [them] against the brethren.2 A considerable time therefore they stayed, speaking boldly in reliance on the Lord that gave witness unto the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands. But the multitude of the city was divided; and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles. And when an effort was made of both the Gentiles and Jews with their rulers to outrage and stone them, becoming aware of it they fled unto the cities of Lycaonia, Lystra and Derbe, and the [country] round about, and there they were preaching the gospel” (ver. 1-7).

There was without doubt marked blessing at Iconium where the Lord honored and used largely the bold preaching of His grace: “a great multitude of both Jews and Greeks believed.” This roused the enemy; and the Jews that disobeyed the glad tidings (cf. 2 Thess. 1:8) stirred up the souls of the Gentiles and made them evil-affected against the brethren. It was not a visit from without but the alienation of the Jews that refused God's message on the spot; as is confirmed by the correct form of the word (ἀπ.) in the more ancient witnesses as against the received text. But this only drew out a pretty long stay and plain speaking in dependence on the Lord, Who on His part displayed His gracious power not only in the more ordinary testimony to His word but in confirmatory signs and wonders, of which we heard nothing at Antioch in Pisidia. It is a solemn fact however that such deeds of divine energy, as the rule, do not turn the stubborn heart. Men judge mainly in accordance with their feelings, whatever be the qualms of conscience; and where the will is set on its own way, none so hardened as those that breathe a constant atmosphere of miracle, as we see in the wilderness history. So here in the face of all, the multitude of the city was rent in twain; and if some held with the apostles, others as decidedly with the Jews, the hereditary enemies of the gospel, ever ingenious in perverting and undermining what might have told on upright minds. But the intent of violence, which had oozed out, brought the testimony to a close: for a plan or start of this kind seems to be the force of what is meant here, rather than an “assault,” as may be inferred safely from the context. Had there been an actual “rush,” there seems little propriety in the words “becoming aware of” what could not be doubted and made escape hard. Nor does the form of the verb admit of the rendering “was making;” for the aorist must signify a definite fact instead of anything merely in course, which would be rather the imperfect. If they got cognizance of purpose to outrage and stone them, so, generally formed as to carry along Gentiles and Jews with their rulers, they judged it wise to leave with all haste. And so they fled to the cities of Lycaonia, Lystra and Derbe, and the country around; and there they pursue their gospel work.

“And there sat a certain man at Lystra powerless in his feet,3 lame from his mother's womb, who never had walked. This [man] heard Paul speaking, who fastening his eyes on him and seeing that he had faith to be made whole, said with a loud voice,4 Rise upright on thy feet: and he leaped up and walked. And the crowds seeing what Paul did, lifted up their voices in Lycaonian, saying, The gods are come down unto us in the likeness of men. And they called Barnabas Zeus,. and Paul Hermes, because he took the lead in speaking. And the priest of the Zeus that was before the city, having brought balls and garlands unto the gates would have sacrificed with the crowds. But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard [of it], they rent their garments and sprang out5 unto the crowd, crying out and saying. Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like affections with you, preaching and evangelizing to you that ye should turn from these vain things unto a6 living God who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all things in them; who in the bygone generations suffered all the Gentiles to walk in their own ways. And yet he left not himself without witness in that he did good and gave you7 from heaven rains and fruitful seasons, filling your8 hearts with food and gladness. And saying these things they wick difficulty restrained the crowds from sacrificing to them. But there arrived Jews from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the crowds and stoned Paul, they dragged [him] without the city, supposing that he was dead. But as the disciples encircled him, he rose up and entered into the city” (ver. 8-20).

The healing of the hopelessly lame man was eminently suited to arrest a rude heathen crowd, besides its being a practical as well as extraordinary witness to the gracious character of God so foreign to the thoughts of man left to himself. All was in contrast with the mysterious mumblings with which their wizards practiced their charms. The addition to ver. 10 was made early to save the appearance of pretension on the part of him who wrought the miracle. The absence of the clause is the instructive lesson that as such words would be unavailing in another mouth (definitely proved long after at Ephesus), so they are by no means called for where all the life and testimony were set on magnifying Christ. There was no legally required formula. Of all men Paul was most conspicuously, as he loved to call himself, the “bondman of Jesus Christ;” so that in his case it was the less necessary by a formal declaration to disclaim any virtue to heal by his own power or holiness.

That heathen should conclude as the Lycaonians did in consequence was the more natural, as they had the fabulous tradition made current a little while before by a Latin poet of the Augustan age that these very deities had been entertained in a part of Asia Minor. Physical

differences would lead to the respective identification of their superstitious minds, besides the specific reason assigned as to Paul; and the proposal to do them sacrifice followed as matter of course. The scene is as usual set graphically before us; the crowd, the priest of Zeus (whose temple, or statue, was before the city), with the oxen and garlands all ready brought to the gates (of the house or court probably, where the apostles lodged). On the other hand we see the indignant and most earnest rejection of the God-dishonoring honor by Barnabas and Paul (for so they are presented in accordance with their assigned place), springing forth with garments rent and loud remonstrance. Their words were no less uncompromising though courteous. And what a difference from Catholic missionaries doing evil that good might come, or rather accepting a gross sin in order to propitiate their way, and to make a new and not less grievous and more guilty idolatry perpetual!

But the witnesses of the Lord Jesus are jealous for a living and true God and refuse to allow a sinful personal influence at His expense. “Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are of like affections with you, preaching to you that ye should turn from these vain things unto a living God” &c. Substantiality it was an appeal akin to what Paul afterward uttered to the Athenians on the Areiopagus. How debasing is heathenism! The ignorant Lycaonian and the refined Athenian needed the same sort of discourse. They are set to spell the alphabet of creation. Here however it is not so much the unity of God and man's true and near relationship to Him, in contrast with his absurd reverence of idols or God-making; it is God's active beneficence attested to the Lycaonians in rains and fruitful seasons, with their results in plenteous food and gladness. That the gods are envious at human gladness was the lie and curse of paganism. Not such is He who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that is in them. Who could deny that He in the generations bygone suffered the nations to proceed in their own ways? If He sent the gospel now concerning His Son, was it not in full accordance with the active goodness He had testified to all lands and times in those bountiful gifts from heaven which overspread the otherwise barren earth with every good thing for man's life and heart? We need not dwell on each phrase; but it would not he hard to prove how telling was every word, and how all the undeniable truth thus conveyed indirectly dissipated the mischievous and destructive and demoralizing falsehoods of heathenism, to which their minds and habits had been inured, not only in their religion, but in the whole of their outward relations saturated with that poison, as their own literary remains show and Rom. 1 briefly declares in the burning reproofs of its latter verses.

So inveterate is the idolatry of the heart that it was with difficulty the crowds were kept from sacrificing to the Lord's servants (ver. 18). How awful to think that Christendom over its largest half pays divine honors to men of like affections as themselves! It is admitted that apotheosis goes beyond canonization; but the dishonor to God and the injury to man can scarcely be said to be less. For the distinctive truth now is the unity, not of the Godhead only, but of the One Mediator; and consequently the peculiar assault of the enemy is not by honoring more gods than the living God, but by setting up other mediators or intercessors, as the Virgin, angels and saints, as well as nullifying the full and intimate knowledge of God as the Father and the Son by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. Here Romanism is the chief offender, though others are not free from the taint, as indeed the tendency is common to the natural man.

But idolatry was not the only danger at Lystra, though others entered the scene characteristically to oppose, calumniate, and persecute. This is mostly the work of men who know some truth, but are jealous of more and better. These are the men who stifle conscience and are athirst for blood—blood of God's saints and Christ's servants, whom their ill-will blinds them to regard as the most wicked of men. So it was, and so it is. “But Jews arrived from Antioch add Iconium; and having persuaded the crowds and stoned Paul, they dragged him without the city, supposing that he was dead.” These adversaries were not wholly ignorant of God's testimony in the gospel. They knew enough to feel how immeasurably it rose above the law; and that it exceeded in glory was enough for their hard and proud hearts, which disdained to own their ruin, any more than God's righteousness which can justify the ungodly through the faith of Christ. To the law they adhered, because it was theirs rather than because it is God's; to the law, even though it can as such show no mercy to the guilty, and itself bears witness to the Messiah, the only Savior of the lost. But to this witness they were wholly blind, being only alive to the pride of possessing it from God to the exclusion of all others. Yet when the gospel went out to others, they were eager to persuade these poor despised heathens that the word of God's grace which Paul preached was nothing but imposture. Alas! they found them there, as ever since, ready victims. And why? That very refusal of homage, which the Lystrians were ready to pay, is most offensive to man, and disposes him to believe the most odious misrepresentations of those he was about to worship. Men exalt themselves by human adoration; and to be baulked of it soon turns to the hatred and perhaps death of those who seek the honor of the only God. So it was here. Instead of changing their minds like the Maltese (who from a murderer regarded Paul as a god), they listen to Jewish calumny though ordinarily despised, and stone him as a false prophet, to whom they had been so lately wishing to sacrifice, leaving him dragged without the city as a dead man.

But his life was in him, as he himself said later of Eutychus; and as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up and entered into the city (ver. 20). Paul's work was only beginning, not done. To abide in the flesh was needful for many sinners as for all saints. It could not be that he was to expire thus, though Jews had incited Gentiles to do their worst, and imagined all was over. Grace had called him to its own great work of salvation, as well as of edifying the body of Christ. Nor was it enough that he rose up; he entered into the city, from which he had just been dragged outside as a corpse. Such was the faith and love of this more than martyr soul: Of him, if of any, we may surely say, the world was not worthy. Christ alone was and is the worthy One. He could say, as he did, “to me to live is Christ” —not the work, but Himself, which is of all things the most elevating, purifying, and strengthening of motives in that work. It is the spring of lowliness as of love, of courage as of faith. So rising up he entered into Lystra. Fear would have said, Go anywhere else just now. Self would have whispered, Stay there and see what a future triumph for the gospel! But the thoughts of man are in neither suggestion the mind of Christ; and this the apostle had and acted on. May it be ours in His grace.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 13:42-52

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

Such was the discourse with which the great apostle of the Gentiles opened his missionary labors in the Pisidian Antioch (only about fifty years ago identified as Yalobatch by an intelligent British traveler). The result was cheering. And as they were going out (for the service was over, not interrupted as some have singularly imagined), the hearers besought that they might have these words spoken to them the next sabbath, the great occasion for such a discourse. Later, when the gathering was broken up, many of the Jews and the proselytes, attracted

and impressed beyond the rest, followed Paul and Barnabas (for henceforth, at least away from Palestine, Paul has the precedence); as they on their part spoke more freely to them than the synagogue could permit, and urged them to abide in the grace of God. Gentiles there were none as yet to hear, beyond the proselytes; but the ensuing sabbath beheld them drawn by the report in crowds; and the effect was as marked on them for good, as on many Jews for evil, as we shall see.

Ver. 42 has suffered not a little both from copyists and from commentators. The ordinarily received text instead of “they” (αὐτῶν) has with some cursives, the interpolation ἐκ τῆς συναγωγῆς τῶν Ἰουδαίων, which may have been due to the public lessons of early days, though more common in the passages taken from the historical books than in selections from the epistles. But this addition, though unauthorized, does not contradict (though it may alter) the sense, like τὰ ἔθνη, “the Gentiles,” which is made the subject of the sentence, to the confusion of the passage as a whole, and without the least to commend it in itself. The verse is quite general. “And as they were going out, they kept beseeching that these words might be spoken to them on the following sabbath. Now when the synagogue broke up, many of the Jews and of the worshipping proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who (οἵτινες) speaking unto them persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. And on the next sabbath almost all the city was gathered together to hear the word of God “1 (ver. 42-4.4).

Dr. J. Bennett conceives that the critical reading points to the sense that they, i.e. Paul and Barnabas, entreated that the same things should be spoken to them (again). But this is quite a mistake. The true reading leaves us open to the people's thus entreating the apostles; which appears to me much more simple and becoming as well as “delightful.” Even Calvin, who understands the sense to be that Paul and Barnabas went out while the Jews were yet assembled, holds that they (the apostles) were then requested &c., though he was misled by the misreading to think it was the Gentiles who made request. But what could have brought “the Gentiles” to the synagogue on that first sabbath? It is easy to understand that they flocked there on the second; and this it was doubtless, and yet more their heed, as well as the free grace proclaimed, which roused the envy of the unhappy Jews. But even this premature introduction of the Gentiles though unfounded does not yield so strange and repulsive a meaning as that Paul and Barnabas! entreated that their discourse should be spoken on the next sabbath. That souls struck by the truth might beseech that “'these things,” blessed yet so startling, so momentous yet solemn, should be spoken to them again, is very intelligible, as it is the unforced sense of the true text.

Tyndale completely missed the point of time intended, for he took εἰς τὸ μεταξὺ σάββατον of the intervening week— “betwene the Saboth dayes.” But this was from oversight of the later usage of μ. which signifies “after,” not “between” only, as Kypke, Ott, &c. have noticed with illustrations. Calvin was quite wrong therefore in censuring here the Vulgate and Erasmus who were right; and still more is Beza to be blamed, because he was a better scholar than the great theologian he followed, and ought to have known how thoroughly Josephus, Plutarch, and Clem. Rom. 44 (twice), justify the text of the Authorized Version against the marginal alternative, as Dr. 3. Lightfoot plainly confirmed it from his vast Rabbinical learning.

As ver. 42 lets us know the general interest in what had been announced, which prompted the desire to hear all again, ver. 43 adds that, on the break up of the congregation, many of the Jews and of the worshipping or devout proselytes followed the preachers thereon, who not only spoke to them but urged them to abide in the grace of God, which the gospel declares and they professed to receive. What can one think of a man like Calvin doubting whether it was not these young converts who exhorted Paul and Barnabas that they should not faint but stand firmly in the grace of God? He does not however (as Dean Alford thought) incline so strongly to this interpretation as to decide for it against the common and only correct view, that the gracious speech and confirmatory exhortation came from the apostles to those on whose hearts God's grace had just dawned.

Again, in the beginning of ver. 44 stands the expression on the “coming” sabbath, vouched by both the most ancient uncials of highest character and the mass of cursives, and so not only adopted by Erasmus, the Complutensian, Colinaeus, R. Stephens, the Elzevirs, but also by Tischendorf (eighth edition), Tregelles, and by Westcott and Hort. On the other hand at least two of the great uncials with several good cursives testify to the exactly technical word which differs by a letter less, for “next following,” “ensuing.” Acts 18:21 used to be cited for the former, till the critics omitted the clause; but there is no doubt that the rival reading is a standing usage of the inspired writer (Luke 13:33, Acts 20:15; 21:26), as it is in the language generally. No wonder therefore that Alford, Bengel, Green, Griesbach, Lachmann, Scholz, and Wordsworth accept it as right: an instructive instance, by no means uncommon, where a few copies are more accurate than the weight of both antiquity and number combined.

“But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy, and contradicted the things spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming. And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, For you it was necessary that the word of God should first be spoken; but since ye thrust it from you and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, lo, we turn unto the Gentiles. For thus hath the Lord enjoined us, I have set thee for a light of Gentiles, that thou shouldst be for salvation unto the uttermost of the earth” (ver. 45-47).

How base as well as evil and malignant is jealousy, above all religious jealousy as here! In general they had hailed the joyful sound when it first reached their ears, even though closed with a most serious warning; and “many” had gone farther than the entreaty to have the truth spoken again. For many of the Jews, as well as of the devout proselytes, followed the apostles who exhorted them to abide as they had begun. But “the crowds” were too much for religious prejudice which hitherto dormant, and awakened the most malignant feelings in antipathy and abuse. Such is flesh in presence of grace and truth, and at the sight of hearts attracted and consciences touched. Had the gospel been powerless, the Jews had retained their equanimity; where the long preaching of Moses had never so wrought, its immediate effect in winning such large attention was intolerable. But the hatred of grace, ruinous to those guilty of it, only enlarges the field of work, as it also liberates the messengers from an over-careful waiting on the men of tradition and its narrow channels. Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, instead of being shocked into silence by Jewish blasphemies, pointed out how faith denies not but defers to law in its own place, and, now that the ancient people of God were ignorantly spurning the best blessings of grace, announced this matchless road open to the needy and long despised Gentiles (ver. 46).

The application of Isa. 49:6 in the following verse is as striking as richly instructive. It is the Messiah rejected by Israel, Who has this consolation vouchsafed by God: His humiliation opens the door to wider glory. This the slighted servants of Christ appropriate to themselves. Infinite grace, under like circumstances, warrants the men of faith: what was said of Christ is no less true of the Christian. “Thus hath the Lord enjoined us.” It is a principle of far-reaching explanation, which faith knows how to guard from irreverence, however much of direction,

comfort, and strength may be reaped from it. The reader may see another instance no less bold in the use made of Isa. 1:7-9 in Rom. 8:33-34. The spirit of obedience, we may add, finds an injunction where no other eye could discern one.

Here first Gentiles as such come into prominence: others in this country who had heeded the apostles were proselytes from among them. Scripture was express as to the principle.

“And the Gentiles, on hearing, rejoiced and glorified the word of the Lord; and as many as were ordained unto life eternal believed. And the word of the Lord was carried abroad through the whole country. But the Jews excited the women of rank that worshipped, and the chiefs of the city, and stirred up a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and sent them out of their borders. But they shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came to Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy of [the] Holy Spirit” (ver. 48-52).

The tide of blessing in God's grace was now turned to the Gentiles. Christ is a light for revealing them now, as He is the glory of God's people Israel. The nations had been long hidden as well as outside; they are now disclosed to view, the direct object not of law as Israel once, but of divine mercy in the gospel. The righteousness of God is unto all, though it takes effect only upon all that believe. So here they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord; and as many as were ordained unto life eternal believed.

The evil and the ruin are man's: all the good is of God's grace exclusively, and the believer enjoys it of His sovereign mercy. Thus the word of the Lord was carried abroad through all the country. And this roused a more systematic effort of opposition, as usual on the part of the Jews, who urged on the devout women of position and the chief men of the city against the apostles with such a flood of persecution as to cast them out of their borders. As these ladies had been drawn into Judaism to their immense relief from the uncleanness as well as debasing follies of heathenism, one can understand how the sex would be peculiarly open to exciting influence against the testimony which left the law in the shade; and they would know how to reach the first men of the city, as being of their own rank and in all probability nearly connected with themselves, so as to get the preachers expelled. But the apostles, bowing to the persecution, acted on the Lord's word not only in fleeing to another city, but in shaking off the dust of their feet against their persecutors; while joy in the Holy Spirit filled the disciples, left behind as sheep in the midst of wolves.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 13:32-41

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

From ver. 32 comes the application of the facts as to the Messiah, already given in ver. 23-31, especially His death on man's part, His resurrection on God's not without ample witness of His appearing subsequently among those who knew Him best.

“And we (we, emphatic) declare to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers, that God hath fulfilled to us their children,1 having raised up Jesus; as also in the second2 psalm it is written, Thou art My Son: this day have I begotten Thee. But that He raised Him from [the] dead, no more to return unto corruption, He hath spoken thus, I will give you the faithful mercies of David; wherefore3 also in another [psalm] he saith, Thou wilt not suffer Thy holy (Merciful) One to see corruption. For David, after having in his own generation served the counsel of God, fell asleep, and was added to his fathers, and saw corruption. But He whom God raised up saw no corruption. Be it known to you therefore, [men] brethren, that through this Man remission of sins is preached to you; and4 from all things from which ye could not in Moses' law be justified, in Him every one that believeth is justified” (ver. 32,39).

Here the apostle goes over the all-important points doctrinally. The coming of Christ was the accomplishment of the promise to the fathers; their children now had the glad tidings of it in His person here below. The raising up of Jesus in ver. 33 does not therefore go beyond the Child thus born, the Son thus given. And with this agrees Psa. 2:7, which refers not to His resurrection from the dead, as many have supposed, but to His birth, as the words simply express it; so that a further or mystic meaning here is not only uncalled for but improper. He, the Messiah, born of woman, born under law, was the object, accomplisher, and heir of the promises. Yea, how many soever be the promises of God, in Him is the yea. So to the Romans (1:2-3) the apostle describes himself as separated unto God's gospel (which, he adds parenthetically, He had before promised through His prophets in holy scripture) concerning His Son come of David's seed according to flesh, just as it is treated here in the first place. But then he goes on, “marked out Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by resurrection of the dead,” just as here too he proceeds to cite Isa. 55:3 and Psa. 16:10 as prophecies of Christ's proper resurrection. Indeed it is surprising that any intelligent and careful reader ever understood the passage otherwise: For it is as certain as it is plain that, to God's raising up the Messiah according to promise and the prophecy of the second psalm, verse 34 appends as another and still more momentous truth that God raised Him up “from the dead.” It is no mere reasoning on the verse before, no epexegetic explanation, but a further teaching of the highest value. Hence it is thus introduced, “And,” or “But, that He raised Him from the dead, no more to return unto corruption, He hath spoken thus,” &c. Calvin accordingly is justified in his statement5 (Opera vi. Comm. in loco) that the word “raised up” has a wider significance than where repeated just after. For it is meant that Christ was divinely ordained and as it were by God's hand brought forth into light that He might fulfill the office of Messiah; as scripture here and there shows us kings and prophets raised up by the Lord. Acts 3:22- 26; 7:37, are clear cases of this usage in the same book; so that the Authorized Version in the wake of Tyndale is not safely to be defended in going out of the way to insinuate resurrection into ver. 33. “Raised up” is correct; “raised again” might have been said, if the text had certainly pointed, as it does not really at all, to the resurrection. But “raised up again” is unjustifiable. In any case the compound can only yield either “up” or “again,” not both; and here we have seen on good and cogent grounds that “up” is right, “again” inadmissible, because rising from the dead is not intended in ver. 33.

It would not have been necessary or advisable to spend argument on the question, if Dean Alford and Canon Cook, following Hammond, Meyer, &c., had not unwittingly played into the hands of enemies who ridicule this very misapprehension of Psa. 2:7, for which not Paul but his expounders are responsible. It has also been noticed that the addition of “now” in the English Version of verse 34 is not only needless but misleading, as it might imply a previous turn to corruption. Here too Tyndale misled all the public Protestant versions since his day, even to the Revised one.

Psa. 2 is quoted then for Christ as Son of God in this world. It is neither His eternal sonship, as some of the earlier Christian writers conceived, nor His resurrection, as the misapprehension of Acts 13:33 was used to teach. His birth in time as Messiah is the point, “Thou art My Son: this day have I begotten Thee.”

Psa. 16 is cited (ver. 35) in proof not of His Son-ship as man and Messiah here below, but of His resurrection, and therefore stands in close and logical connection with ver. 34. Peter had already used this psalm similarly in Acts 2:24-32; and it is strange that any who believe the Christian revelation can allow a doubt that Christ's resurrection is the just and only meaning of the tenth verse of the psalm. I do not speak of their modesty in preferring their opinion to the Apostle Paul's, if they count it becoming to slight the apostle Peter. The question is, Is there such a thing as inspiration in any true sense?

The application of Isa. 55:3 in 34 is no less certain if we bow to apostolic authority, but not so easy, though where seen most instructive. But only the death and resurrection of the Messiah could make the covenant everlasting; only so could the promised holy or merciful blessings of David be made inviolable. Thus they are, as the LXX translates, ὅσια Δ. τὰ πιστά. Thus only could the soul even of the Jew live, or the door of grace open widely enough to take in a Gentile. Hence it will be seen that the chapter begins with the call of God to “every one that thirsteth.” He who was lifted up on the cross will draw all, not Jews only; and a risen Messiah, though He thereby gives the utmost sureness to Israel's promises, cannot be bounded in grace any more than in His glory, but will certainly have all peoples, nations, and languages to serve Him with an everlasting dominion.

It is difficult in any rendering short of a paraphrase to mark for the English reader the close link between the “Holy One” in Psa. 16:10 and the “mercies” in Isa. 55:3. Psa. 89:1 compared with ver. 19 as in the Authorized Version may help: very far different is the Revised Version of the Psalm here which can only darken. But the reader should know that the true force is, “Then spakest Thou in vision of Thy merciful (or Holy) One,” the personal concentration of the sere mercies of which the Psalmist sings in ver. 1. They are “the mercies” of David no doubt, but, what is of all consequence, of Jehovah also; and so this psalm also everywhere speaks of David, and therefore confirms the truth in question. Christ beyond controversy is here in the mind and word of the Spirit of prophecy. Jehovah, the Holy One of Israel (in this case quite a distinct word and thought), speaks of Christ as His Holy or Gracious One. It is not the same truth which the same apostle asserts in Rom. 1:4: Christ declared or determined Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by resurrection. The same power of the Spirit in which He ever walked superior to all evil was proved by resurrection. In Acts 13 it is the holiness of grace and mercy manifested and operative in Him risen from the dead. After His baptism of suffering, known by Him as by none else, straitening was over, Jewish barriers righteously gone, the floods of grace could flow forever and overflow.

The apostle of the uncircumcision, in ver. 36, 37, reasons pretty much as he of the circumcision in Acts 2:29-31; and both with unanswerable power. But one man, the Messiah, was, while tasting death, to see no corruption. David in his own generation served the counsel of God, but saw corruption: as did all his descendents, save that One of Whom he in the Spirit prophesied. Scripture cannot be broken. One man alone does and must fulfill the condition: who was He but Jesus, the Christ? As a fact the witnesses attested His resurrection on the fullest evidence, apart from the predictions. All proofs center in Him. God's glory and love are His infinitely; so are man's salvation, blessing, holiness, service in any true way and to the highest degree of which the creature is capable.

And thereon the apostle, though of course limited by the state of his audience, brings out the message characteristically beyond what Peter had done to hearers more informed than those of Pisidia. “Be it known unto you therefore, brethren, that through this Man remission of sins is preached to you; and from all things from which ye could not in Moses' law be justified, in Him every one that believeth is justified.” Was it not, is it not, grandly, yea divinely simple? What does a sinner supremely need? Forgiveness of sins. This the gospel proclaims: it is no question of a promise only. Remission of sins is through Christ dead and risen preached. It is a free gift of grace, as is eternal life in Christ: the two wants of a sinner there alone found, and by Him freely given. To all it is preached, there is no limit to the grace of Christ, any more than to the efficacy of His blood. It takes effect only, among those that hear the gospel, upon all that believe. For faith glorifies the savior God, as it abases the sinner man; and repentance accompanies it, real if faith is, shallow or deep in like manner, or alas! as unreal as may be the faith. But it owns God's grace in Christ, and so His righteousness revealed in the gospel. Of faith therefore is the blessing that it might be according to grace; and thus alone man can either be assured of it or God is glorified thereby.

But there is more than remission of sins, that most deeply needed, in itself inestimable but initiatory, boon of the gospel. “And from all things, from which ye could not in Moses' law be justified, in Him every one that believeth is justified.” How boldly the apostle can speak! and this, not because his preaching or the style of it was any peculiarity of his position in the church, but in honor of the Savior's victory over every hindrance and all evil. To speak timidly might be well, if it were a question of man addressing or of men addressed. But the preacher of the gospel is not only free but bound to forget himself by grace in his magnifying of Him Who died and rose, in order that divine mercy might triumph for the worst, and this without money and without price from the sinner: Christ has paid the penalty—paid it long, long ago. Here Moses' law is wholly unavailing, whatever the pride the unbelief, Or the ignorance of the Jew might think. There is no possibility of justification by that law, holy as it is, and the commandment holy and just and good. Law is all in vain to save. It can give neither life nor pardon, neither holiness nor power. It puts a restraint on, and so alike discovers and provokes, lust; it is the power of sin, and works out wrath; it is thus a ministration of condemnation and death. What possible deliverance can it bring the needy and lost sinner? Negatively indeed it is used by grace to break him down, to deepen his distrust of self even when converted, and to cast him wholly on Christ outside and on high, Who gives him to know that he died with Himself, that he might walk and serve under grace, as alive to God in Him.

But the grace of God in the gospel justifies the believer “from all things.” Indeed, if it were not so, how could the sinner's condition be met in a way worthy of God? If justification were partial, it might no less satisfy man, yea far more readily, than that free and full display of divine goodness in Christ which alone is the truth. Nothing is so excellent, so holy, so strengthening, so God-glorifying as the revelation of His grace in Christ, and this undiluted as well as unadulterated. But it seems extreme to some minds, lax to others, and dangerous to more. So it is in Him in and by Whom the gospel came. He was wholly misunderstood and unintelligible to the “wise and prudent “; as the mass believed not on Him, so many from among the rulers did not confess Him through fear; for they loved the glory of men rather than the glory of God. Even John the Baptist was more reasonably right in their eyes than his Master and Lord; as those that refused Him who came in His Father's name will by-and-by receive him that comes in his own. Nothing is so condemnatory of fallen man, and especially when he glories in his character or in his religion, as grace; nothing so foreign and even repulsive to his mind and his self-righteousness. For it levels all mankind, high and

low, learned and ignorant, loose or moral, superstitious or profane, in one indiscriminate grave of sin and ruin Godward—of spiritual death; while it proclaims to faith, and only to faith, a present, full, and everlasting redemption. This is offensive to man's thought and title who can soon find reasons to argue himself into unbelief and rejection of God's word, as if it were but the opinion of fallible and mistaken man, and thus makes manifest his unremoved heart-enmity to God.

The work of grace however goes on, as a dew from the Lord, as the showers upon the grass, that tarrieth not for men, nor waiteth for the sons of men. Conscience-stricken souls, hearts pining after God long slighted and sinned against, are won by the name of Jesus, and gladly receive that remission of sins which is preached to them, and adore as they take in the wonder of mercy in Jesus, in Whom every one that believes is justified from all things, from none of which could he be justified in Moses' law or in any other way. Justification for a sinner is essentially a Pauline expression; being of faith, not of law, it was open to a Gentile as well as to a Jew. It was a word eminently suited to that great messenger of the gospel of God's grace. And here we have it tersely in the first discourse of his which Luke reports or at least summarizes. So deals God's righteousness which is now manifested apart from law: God just and justifying the believer as he is, the ungodly as he was (Rom. 3-4). How truly divine! No wonder man as such misses the truth: Christ is the only key that opens all.

But the apostle does not conclude without a warning appropriately drawn, for the Jews that listened with reluctant ears, from their own volume of inspiration. “See therefore that what is spoken of in the prophets come not on you,6 Behold, ye despisers, and wonder and perish; for I work a work in your days, a work which ye will in no wise believe if I declare it to you” (ver. 40, 41). It is especially Hab. 1:5 which is in substance cited, with perhaps Isa. 29:14 and Prov. 1:24-31 in view. Unbelief is the same evil scorn of God's word, whether of old or by-and-by, and never worse than now when grace beseeches men as they are to be reconciled to God. And whatever the work to be done in the future, none can ever match what God has wrought already, the basis on which the gospel is proclaimed to every creature. The coming execution of judgment by the Chaldeans was sufficient to arrest any soul that heeded the warning voice of the prophet; and a destruction was about to fall on Jerusalem and the temple, as the Lord had predicted, by the Romans (Luke 19:43, 44; 21:20-24). But what is either providential work of God or any other that can be gleaned from the harvest of judgment in the future, compared with that which in His rejection and atoning work befell our Lord Jesus? And as is the immeasurable grace to sinners in that work which cost God and His Son all things of unsparing vengeance on sin—our sins, so is the wrath of God not yet executed, but revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and the unrighteousness of men that hold the truth in unrighteousness. If the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation? says the same apostle writing to the Hebrew confessors of Christ. Is there less sin, less danger, for those who in Christendom have grown up in the constant iteration of the same gospel, and are now exposed as none ever were to the apostate infidelity of our day, which finds its life in nature and sets up natural law as the idol of its worship, if along with Jesus soon to supersede Him, as none can serve two masters. It must be God, or the creature, not both, even if God were not as He ought to be a jealous God, as He is the True, and therefore necessarily intolerant of all spurious rivalry.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 13:13-31

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

Henceforward, save perhaps under the shadow of Jerusalem (Acts 15:12, 25), Paul has the chief place, as is indeed conveyed by the well-known phrase, not so used elsewhere in the New Testament (Mark 4:10, Luke 22:49), but familiar in the best writings of Greece (Plat. Crat. 440 C., Ken. Anab. vii. 4, 16, Thuc. v. 21, viii. 63), οἱ περὶ Παῦλον (lit. “those around Paul”), Paul and his company.

“Now Paul and his company, having sailed from Paphos, came unto Perga of Pamphylia; and John departing from them returned unto Jerusalem. But they passing through from Perga came unto Antioch of Pisidia, and having gone into the synagogue on the sabbath-day sat down. And after the reading of the law and the prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, Brethren (lit. men-brethren), if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, speak” (ver. 13-15).

The separation of John is remarked by the Holy Spirit. It was not a trifle in God's mind, and the difference it occasioned afterward, when Barnabas would have joined him again with Paul, proved serious for servants so ardently and justly attached. John had not faith and courage for the work opening before them and returned to Jerusalem where were his mother and the associations so dear to the natural heart. But on the other hand we must not exaggerate with those that affirm that a stumble is fatal. It may be so in a horse; but one might suppose that Christian men knew better both their own probable experience and the teaching of Scripture expressly in this very case. Grace turned past failure to future profit; and at a later day the great apostle was as earnest to commend his ministry as he could not but blame it when in progress.

We next see Paul and Barnabas at Antioch of Pisidia in the synagogue on the sabbath. It is remarkable what measure of liberty was enjoyed. After the reading of the law and the prophets, a message came to them from the synagogue-rulers to speak if they had any word of exhortation for the people. Can there be a more painful contrast with the habits of Christendom? Assuredly one might from Scripture expect more liberty where grace rules than among those born and bred in the trammels of the law. Yet who ever hears of such an invitation now-a-days? So completely has the church departed from the enjoyment of that holy liberty, which is characteristic of the Spirit of the Lord. In this case too the visitors were but strangers, unknown to any, it would seem, save as grave godly-looking Jews. Routine governs in modern times on solemn public occasions, were the strangers ever so well known by report for their gifts and labors.

It was Paul who rose to address the congregation. “And Paul stood up and beckoning with the hand said, Men of Israel, and ye that fear God,1 hear. The God of this people chose out our fathers and exalted the people in their sojourn in [the] land of Egypt and with a high arm brought them out of it; and for a time of about forty years bore them nurse-like in the desert; and when He had destroyed seven nations in [the] land of Canaan, He gave them their land for an inheritance, in about four hundred and fifty years. And after these things He gave judges until Samuel the prophet; and then they asked for a king; and God gave them Saul, the son of Kish, a man of [the] tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. And having removed him, He raised up for them David as king, to whom also bearing witness, He said, I found David, son of Jesse, a man according to My heart, who shall do all My will. From his seed, according to promise, did God bring to Israel, a. Savior, Jesus, when John

had preached before His entrance a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. And as John was fulfilling his course, he said, Whom suppose ye that I am? I am not [he], but behold, there cometh One after me the sandal of Whose feet I am not worthy to loose" (ver. 16-25).

It is all-important to observe the basis of fact on which the gospel hinges, no less than the hopes of Israel. It is not so in the religious systems of men. In India, for instance, all is but speculation and reasoning, as in ancient heathenism mere fable. So it is with the Buddhist and the Confucian. Nor is it different with Mohammedanism, as far as it puts forth any distinctive claim. Nowhere do men even pretend to a sub-stratum of fact such as that on which respectively repose both the Old and the New Testaments. Shake the facts and their foundations are alike gone. If the facts abide irrefragable, the most momentous consequences ensue both to faith and to unbelief. And although there are weighty differences in the history of the Old Testament as compared with the one commanding figure of Christ in the New, there is nothing more marked and unstinting than the seal of truth which the New everywhere puts upon the certainty of the Old in all the wonders it records. This is the more striking, because the New Testament has no enemies more determined and deadly than the Jews, to whose custody the ancient oracles were committed. The witnesses of the New Testament, on the contrary, maintain a uniform and unhesitating testimony to the absolute truth of the Old Testament; which they prove to have no adequate result, apart from the appearing and work of the Lord Jesus. And we may add that there is no sufficient key to the present abnormal state of the Jews, without taking into account the rejected and suffering but risen Messiah; on which rock they have made shipwreck through unbelief, however else they themselves essay to explain their actual ruin as a people.

Accordingly there come to view these solemn yet plain facts, which only prejudice can overlook or deny. On the one hand the real, living, priceless value not only of the New but of the Old Testament is found by sovereign goodness in the church of God. On the other hand, alas! the ancient people of God have ears but they hear not, eyes but they see not, and hearts which do not understand at all for the present; else conversion, healing, and glory would doubtless be theirs. For the light and the love of God, inseparable from Him who sits at His right hand on high, are only enjoyed among those who were once dogs of the Gentiles, but are now, in pure mercy yet according to the righteousness of God in Christ, made free in the riches of His grace and the counsels of His glory in Christ the Lord.

First the dealings of God from His choice of the fathers are at once connected with the exodus of the people from Egypt, and His nurture of them in the wilderness till He gave them to inherit the land. It is the Pentateuch and Book of Joshua in miniature, centering in Israel beloved for the fathers' sake. The gospel confirms, instead of annulling, God's love to Israel, though it announces "some better thing for us" as in Heb. 11.

The reader will notice the beautiful expression of ver. 18 weakened in the more favorite ancient MSS. à B Ccorr D H L P &c. but happily preserved in A Cpm E, as well as in most of the ancient versions, as it seems truest to the Hebrew in Deut. 1:31 which the apostle, beyond just doubt, had in view. Here Tregelles and Westcott and Hort2 part from most moderns as well as others of weight.

In verses 19, 20 there is a notable difference from the common words. It is not giving by lot which is the point, though in itself true, as (by the least and lowest possible testimony) in the received text, but causing them to inherit their land. But here there is a more united front among the Editors of late; for, excepting Dean Alford, almost all accept à A B C, &c. and the ancient versions save the Syrr. and Aeth. This connects the date of about 450 years with the accomplishment of the promised inheritance (under law, which made nothing perfect). The common text makes it the duration of the judges. But it appears to me that the dative of epoch suits the sense of the critical text as distinctly as it disagrees with the common one. Both before and after this phrase the accusative is given to express a term of continuance, here only the dative. Now if the idea intended were the supply of judges for 450 years, the accusative would here also be the natural construction. At any rate, it is a date within which a certain action occurred, and not duration as in the other cases. If the oldest vouchers be accepted, it was in about 450 years that Israel was made to inherit this land, after the promise to "our fathers" i.e. from the birth of Isaac as the starting-point. Indeed so Junius and others take the common reading, not as the space for which judges were given, but in which God had fulfilled His promise at least provisionally, till judges were given in the low estate of His people. It cannot therefore be assumed that Paul assigns a duration of 450 years to the judges, and so invalidates the date in 1 Kings 6:1 of 480 years from the Exodus to the founding of Solomon's temple. More than one period of considerable duration has been added to the space of the Judges which really fell within other assigned dates. But it suffices here to note that the extended space for judges drawn from the verses before us is illegitimate. Ussher (xii. 70, xiv. 340) firmly holds to the integrity of both the Hebrew and the Greek texts in both these scriptures, rejecting the bold conjectures of Luther and others as wholly needless and of course improper.

The apostle then rapidly sketches God's deep and constant interest in His people till a king was given, but stops with David, the known type of the Messiah, as his own psalms abundantly testify. From him easy transition is made to his promised seed, whom, he declares, God "brought"3 to Israel, a Savior, Jesus. Was not this like Him? Was it not assured in the law and the prophets as well as the psalms? Were they not looking for Him? Did they not miserably need Him?

Nor could it be said that God had failed to alter His long promised intervention by renewed testimony, the more impressive because the living voice of a prophet was unheard for more than four centuries. And as all took John for a prophet, so did our Lord bear witness to him as more than a prophet, Jehovah's messenger before Messiah's face to prepare the way before Him, as Isaiah and Malachi previously intimated. So, before the face of His entering in, John preached a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel; nor was it moral only, in self-judgment before God, but saying unto them that they should believe on Him that should come after him, that is, on Jesus. It was avowedly a token of His manifestation to Israel (John 1:31). Of his meaning which they quite mistook, ready as human nature is to exaggerate man and to depreciate God, no ground for doubt was left by the fore-runner. "And as John was fulfilling his course, he said, Whom suppose ye that I am? I am not [he]; but behold, he cometh after me, the sandal of whose feet I am not worthy to loose." Here again were new facts which could not be disputed. John is spoken of as a known witness, though none knew better than Paul that grace alone gives the truth efficaciously by delivering from the self-will which enables Satan to forge his chains of dark unbelief. But who better than he to press the value of a testimony which he too had once ignored like the rest, and would now commend as having proved its worth?

Next comes his appeal, but an appeal grounded on fresh facts of the gravest and most affecting significance.

"Brethren (men-brethren), sons of Abraham's race, and those among you that fear God, to us4 was the word of this salvation sent forth. For the dwellers in Jerusalem and their rulers, having ignored Him and the voices of the prophets that are read on every sabbath, fulfilled [them]

by judging [Him] And though they found no cause of death, they besought Pilate that He might be slain. And when they fulfilled all things written about Him, they took [Him] down from the tree and put [Him] into a tomb; but God raised Him from [the] dead, and He appeared for many days to those that came up with Him from Galilee unto Jerusalem, the which are now His witnesses unto the people" (ver. 2631).

The sending forth to Israel of "the word of this salvation" (for no less does the gospel carry) stands solemnly confronted by the stubborn ignorance of those who most boasted, the dwellers in Jerusalem and their rulers; who had the voices of the prophets read sabbath by sabbath, yet fulfilled them in unbelief, knowing neither themselves nor Him whom they presumed to judge, the Judge of Israel smitten on the cheek, the Judge of quick and dead hung on the tree, the meek and most holy bearer of all curse from God and man on the cross. Yes, they blindly fulfilled all things written by God concerning Him, law, psalms, and prophets centering in Him whom most of all they ought to have known, whom least they knew; for their eye was not single and their body full of darkness, consummated in the death of their own Messiah extorted from the reluctant Pilate (blind indeed and not without warning and moral witness, the contrary of the false witnesses that destroyed each other), but not so blind as they who said they saw, and so their sin remained, and remains, alas! to this day.

"But God raised Him from the dead." Paul differs not from Peter in putting forward this foundation truth of the gospel. What a fact proved by all conceivable evidence, that grace could, would, and did supply, of which such a thing admits suitably to God's character and glory as well as man's sin and folly! Nor is it only "the great exception" to rebuke the vanity, pride, and will of unbelieving man; but what a spring and supply of peace, light, joy and blessing to all who believe!

Here however it is not the victory of righteousness which God's grace secures and gives freely to faith that is set forth, and the apostle loved to enlarge as to the saints, but the demonstration of the world's and especially of Israel's blindness, when they had unconsciously fulfilled all that was written concerning Him till they took Him down from the tree and laid Him in a tomb. "But God raised Him from the dead." It was not only the object of promise come, but when all seemed lost, through unbelief, in His rejection and death, God's intervention in raising Him up from among the dead. To this answers nearly the beginning of the Epistle to the Romans, where the Lord Jesus is presented, first, as Son of David according to the flesh; then, as Son of God in power by resurrection of [the] dead according to the Spirit of holiness. Glad tidings in good sooth! glad tidings victorious over all that sin could do up to death itself. The victory is won over evil in Satan's last stronghold, by God's grace in Christ, that man may believe and be saved before He executes judgment on His persistently unbelieving adversaries. It is therefore no question of man's desert, for righteousness he has none before God, unrighteousness much in every way. God's righteousness alone avails—God righteous in His estimate of the efficacy of Christ, and above all of His death, on behalf of those who in themselves are wholly lost.

But here the apostle points out the gracious care and wisdom of God in giving the risen Christ to be "seen," and this not once or twice only, but "many days." Now who could be valid witnesses of this stupendous fact? Comparative or absolute strangers to His person, or those most familiar with Him when alive? Unquestionably the latter; and to such accordingly He appeared when risen, the slowest of all to believe Him alive again for evermore, in proportion to their deep grief and disappointment over His cross and grave. His enemies remembered His words that He was to rise in three days, and vainly sought to Make all sure by sealing the stone that closed the sepulcher and by the watch, which only turned to their own confusion, when the guards trembled and became as dead men through fear of the angel after the Lord arose. But the very slowness of His friends to believe, inexcusable as it was, turned to account when He was seen "of those that came up with Him from Galilee unto Jerusalem, the which are now5 His witnesses to the people." The common text with more than one excellent MS. of antiquity omits the adverb, though it is really emphatic and important. They are at this moment, says the apostle, His witnesses to the Jews; and none the less does he insist on it because he was not one of them. Indeed with this class he contrasts himself and Barnabas; for grace provided another character of testimony if by any means the mouth of gainsayers might be stopped. Witnesses were raised up, who were wholly unacquainted with Him when here in the days of His flesh. Nay, Paul himself was bitterly hostile till He revealed Himself to and in His enemy, henceforward His devoted bondman, outside Damascus. What possible testimony other or more could be wisely given or desired? Alas! unbelief of God is as deadly in its nature and working, as in its source, its aims, and its results.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 13:1-12

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

Peter, with the exception of his part in the council held in Jerusalem (chap. 15), disappears from the inspired history before us. Another figure comes not merely into prominence, but into centrality even from this, the first chapter of what may be justly regarded as the second volume of the book of Acts. Not from Jerusalem but from Antioch, already so remarkable for Christian zeal impressing itself strikingly on those without, as well as for the first corporate stand made or mentioned among the Gentiles, we hear of a mission by the Holy Ghost.

"Now there were at Antioch in the assembly that was [there]1 prophets and teachers: Barnabas and Simeon that was called Niger and Lucius the Cyrenean, and Manaen foster-brother of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. And as they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, Separate me 2Barnabas and 3Saul for the work to which I have called them. Then when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they let them go. They then, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, went down unto Selencia and thence sailed away unto Cyprus, and, when they were at Salamis, they announced the word in the synagogues of the Jews; and they had also John as attendant. And having gone through the whole4 island unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a Jewish false prophet, whose name [was] Bar-Jesus, who was with the pro-consul Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man. He, having called to [him] Barnabas and Saul, desired to hear the word of God. But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name interpreted) opposed them, seeking to turn away the pro-consul from the faith. But Saul who also [is] Paul, filled with [the] Holy Spirit5, with fixed look at him said, O full of all guile and trickery, devil's son, enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease perverting the Lord's right ways? And now behold [the] Lord's hand [is] upon thee; and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell upon him a mist and darkness, and he went about seeking persons to lead him by hand. Then the pro-consul seeing what was done believed, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord" (ver. 1-12).

None can deny a plurality of gifted men, five of high rank in full service of Christ, and this expressly in “the church that was at Antioch.” “Churches” in the same place, each with its own minister, we see here as everywhere ignored. It is not meant that the faithful may not have met to break bread regularly in many houses here or there, as we know they did in Jerusalem; but none the less did they in that city as in every other constitute “the assembly” there. Unity prevailed, which only the Holy Spirit could form or maintain; not unity invisible or for heaven merely, and admitting of actual diversity or even antagonism, but rather living and manifest unity on earth: which as yet the gifts, and the elders where they existed, subserved, instead of being the instruments of expressing their independency.

It is also to be observed that these five prophets and teachers are named neither in worldly style nor in ecclesiastical rank: otherwise Barnabas had not been first, still less had Saul been last. They seem rather arranged in the order of spiritual birth—at any rate so far as they were known to the saints in Antioch. He who was Herod the tetrarch's foster-brother is neither first nor last. But the gracious power of the Lord according to His word in Matt. 20:16 was soon to make him first in the testimony of His truth who here occupies the last place.

“Whilst they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, Separate me now Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” The ministering to the Lord here must not be confounded with His service in preaching or teaching; it was no doubt mainly prayer and intercession. That the Lord's supper was concerned is a crude and unfounded idea; for this supposes the fellowship of saints in the remembrance of Christ, and in its principle contemplates all saints; whereas the “ministering” here was simply on the part of the fellow-laborers, it may be presumed, that the Lord might be pleased to direct and bless the work, and that each of them might be a vessel unto honor, sanctified and meet for the Master's use, prepared unto every good work. This is confirmed by the fasting which accompanied their spiritual action toward the Lord, expressive as it is rather of the outward nature abased that the inner might be the more undividedly before Him, rather than of the chief public occasion of the church's thanksgiving and united praise.

It is probable that the Holy Spirit may have used one or more of the prophets to convey the mind of God as to the work to which He had summoned Barnabas and Saul. So it appears to have been in Timothy's case (1 Tim. 1:18; 4:1.4), though we see direct action in that of Philip (Acts 8:29). Here, whatever the channel, the word was not to the church, as Alford assumes, but to the fellow-laborers as a whole to separate those two for the special work before them. The language is very expressive of the Spirit's personal interest and authority as One here below immediately concerned in the highest and most intimate degree. It is the Spirit who says, “I have called them.” Neither Barnabas nor Saul was now called for the first time authoritatively to the service of Christ; for, even the younger of the two had labored notoriously and efficiently for years, both in the gospel and in the church. Ordination by brethren of a rank inferior to themselves would be the result gained by men who are precipitately anxious to extract that rite from the passage. If there was any such thing in the case, the proceedings would be irreconcilable with all its acknowledged principles, and for episcopacy in particular. But the “separation” here described is of a wholly distinct nature and with a different purpose, as the intelligent reader cannot but see if unbiased. Certain it is that Gal. 1:1 repudiates, with marked precision, what many ancients and moderns have erroneously founded on the interesting and instructive circumstance before us. Paul declares that he was apostle (not of men as source, nor of man as channel, but) by Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead. It would have admirably suited his Judaizing detractors to have argued that he owed his ministerial title to the three teachers at Antioch who laid their hands on him and Barnabas; but bold as his old adversaries were at Corinth or in Galatia or elsewhere, we are not told that they dared to go so far in their insinuations. Clearly his own statement precludes summarily and forever all effort thus to lower his apostleship or, what comes to much the same result, to exalt ordination at the expense of the apostle Paul in this place or any other.

The third verse confirms the remarks made on the early words of ver. 2, for here we have again fasting with prayer. But though an initiatory ceremony assuming to convey holy orders is not here intended, yet do we see a holy and solemn tone sustained in striking contrast with that which prevails in some modern forms mistakenly built on it. The “charge” and the “dinner” suit well those for whom fasting and prayer offer no attractions. “Ember days” may be formal enough, but at least resemble more and are morally better. The Lord was the one object then, and the Holy Spirit wrought in power, and a service of self-abnegation to God's glory was the blessed fruit. The outward acts flowed from the life within. So with the laying on of hands. It was a general sign of identification, or of blessing given. In the case before us their fellow-laborers solemnly commended the honored pair to the grace of God with this seal of their own fellowship in the work. “They sent them forth” is here objectionable, because it might be, as it has been, interpreted to mean the mission to which they had authorized Barnabas and Saul. But the word chosen excludes such a thought and simply means “let them go” without a shadow of commission in it. The idea of mission is conveyed forcibly in the beginning of ver. 5: “They then, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, went down unto Seleucia and then sailed away unto Cyprus, and, when they were at Salamis they announced the word in the synagogues of the Jews; and they had also John as attendant. And having gone through the whole island unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a Jewish false prophet, whose name [was] Bar-Jesus, who was with the pro-consul Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man” (ver. 4-7).

Thus we see Saul, not only called by the glorified Christ from heaven, but now sent out with his elder companion by the Spirit from the city remarkable for the first directly named assembly among the nations. Here took place the apostle's “separation” (comp. Rom. 1:1) unto gospel work, though not his only. All was outside Jerusalem and the twelve. His call was heavenly, his mission toward the Gentiles and from the bosom of the first Gentile assembly, but the energy and direction was of the Holy Spirit, though his fellow-servants testified their communion with the two in their work. John Mark waited on them in person, and no doubt helped on the work in his measure. To call him chaplain or deacon would be ridiculous, if such perversion could admit of such a feeling. It is humbling that godly men should descend so low. Let modern practice rest on its true basis: Scripture is no warrant for it.

We may notice the practice of the apostle which answered to the principle so familiar in his inspired words, “to the Few first, and also to the Greek.” When at Salamis they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. It was indeed the only place of a religious sort, where any such liberty existed. And such also was God's order till Jerusalem was destroyed or at least the Epistle to the Hebrews was written, when the “no difference” which the gospel declares found a yet more manifest and final application. But till then the door was open, and those who possessed a Jewish title were free to read or expound the scriptures.

But it was at its capital Nea Paphos (not exactly the spot so celebrated as the dissolute seat of Aphrodite's worship), that the gospel came into collision, not with Jewish prejudice only, but with this intensified and embittered by religions imposture and sorcery. “And when they had gone through the whole island unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer (or, magician), a Jewish false prophet, whose name [was] Bar-Jesus; who was with the proconsul Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man. He having called to [him] Barnabas and Saul sought to hear the word of God.

But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is interpreted his name) withstood them, seeking to turn aside the pro-consul from the faith.” Salamis being on the east, as Paphos on the west, they had to cross the island as a whole; as the best copies say, though this is omitted in the common text. The interest of the Roman governor aroused the jealous opposition of the corrupt Jew who had had influence over a mind shocked with demoralizing idolatry but open to displays of power not without some show of revelation. What could be more overwhelming to the Jewish impostor's influence than the grace and truth which came by Jesus Christ? But the proconsul6 (not “deputy” or legate, as in the Authorized Version) had a conscience in exercise and by grace an ear for the truth, which soon turned toward that which was of God, when the testimony reached his soul. Bar-Jesus (=son of Jesus, or Joshua) called himself “Elymas,” the wise man, or magician, which was a title apparently akin to the Turkish “Ulemah.” This wickedness drew out the solemn rebuke of Saul (henceforward called Paul)7, accompanied by a sentence from God which the Holy Ghost gave him not only to utter but to execute. The rareness of such judicial inflictions under the gospel makes their occurrence all the more impressive.

The apostle then, “filled with the Holy Spirit, fixed his eyes on him, and said, O full of all guile and all trickery (villainy or craft), devil's son, enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease perverting the Lord's right ways? And now, behold, [the] Lord's hand [is] upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell upon him a mist and darkness; and he went about seeking leaders-by-hand” (ver. 9-11).

Sergius Paulus was precisely in the state for such an intervention to affect him profoundly. And we too can mark the difference of God's dealing here, as compared with the Samaritan who offered a deeper affront if possible by the proposal to buy the power of conferring the Spirit on others. For he had been baptized, and is warned of his awful state, but exhorted to pray and repent. Bar-Jesus becomes the striking figure of the Jews, blinded themselves in their effort to turn aside the blind Gentiles from the light of life. Yet is it not forever, but “for a season;” as God will give them in due time to look on Him whom they once rejected unto death to their own loss and ruin meanwhile.

“Then the pro-consul when he saw what was done believed, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord” (ver. 12).

This is worthy of all consideration. It was not the wonder which struck him most, but the truth he was taught. The miracle arrested him, no doubt, as well it might; but how many like Simon Magus may have been amazed, beholding signs and great powers wrought! Faith grounded on such evidence is only natural, and has no divine root. The senses are struck, the reason is convinced, the mind receives the testimony, and the mouth confesses it. But there is no life, apart from conscience exercised about one's own evil before God, and Christ the object of the soul as the gift of God's love to a guilty sinner in pure grace. This was true of Sergius, not of Simon. The one was amazed at the miracle, the other at least as much or more at the teaching which brought God before his soul and himself into His presence. This only is effectual. It is eternal life.

And this is just the difference between a true divine work and a mind convinced by evidence or carried along by tradition. The latter may be all well in itself, and a reasonable homage to facts, which cannot be got rid of fairly but compel honest acknowledgment from all who bow to adequate proofs. Yet this may be and is where the soul has never met God in the conscience, where sin and even our own sins are not an unbearable burden, where the love is not trusted that gave His only-begotten Son and laid the burden on Him to suffer atoningly that the believer might have life, pardon, and peace. No displays of power, however wonderful, are so amazing in the eyes of faith as the grace of God in saving the lost through His own Son. This the governor was enabled to receive from God; and not a word more do we hear of the great man. The gospel gives to the greatest on earth; it receives no glory from man. One Man only it beholds exalted in the highest. In Him we may and ought to boast, for He is the Lord; and His grace in saving us, yea making us one with Himself on high, to God's glory, is the wonder of wonders.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 11:19-30

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

But God works variously to accomplish His purpose; and so we see at this point of the inspired history. The action of Peter was of the utmost moment, and its acceptance in Jerusalem by those whom God had set in the highest place in the assembly. A fresh apostle had been expressly called outside the twelve, called by the glorified Christ in heaven where all for man is and must be of sovereign grace, called as apostle of Gentiles in formal and acknowledged contradistinction from those of the circumcision. Nor was this all. The free action of the Holy Spirit receives a full and rich expression in the labors of brethren, who, when driven by persecution from Jerusalem, began to preach, but were bold enough to preach without trance or vision or personal direction outside the ancient people of God and even proselytes.

“They therefore that were scattered abroad through the tribulation that took place on the occasion of Stephen passed through as far as Phenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to none but Jews only. But there were some of them men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming1 unto Antioch spoke unto the Greeks2 also,3 preaching the Lord Jesus. And [the] Lord's hand was with them, and a great number believed and turned4 unto the Lord. And the report concerning them came unto the ears of the assembly that was in Jerusalem; and they dispatched Barnabas5 as far as Antioch: who, on arriving and seeing the grace of God, rejoiced and exhorted all with purpose of heart to abide by the Lord. For he was a good man and full of [the] Holy Spirit and faith; and a large crowd was added to the Lord. And he6 went forth unto Tarsus to seek for Saul, and, on finding brought him7 unto Antioch. And it came to pass that even8 for a whole year they were gathered together in the assembly and taught a large crowd, and that the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch” (ver. 19-26).

It will be observed that the account of this early and free evangelizing, first to Jews, but after a little while to Greeks, is reserved for the introduction of Saul's first connection with Antioch, the earthly starting-point of the great apostle's labors. This is quite in Luke's manner. His order (and none more orderly) is not one of simple sequence, as we may see in the Gospel of Mark; still less does it linger on giving evidences of the change of dispensation, as in that of Matthew. He was led to deal with moral associations, which, if less patent, present a deeper arrangement, and fuller of instruction in God's ways, than a mere chronological series.

Whatever the value, and it was immense, of the episode we have lately had before us in Acts 9:32-xi. 18 (ix. 31 being a sort of transitional link that closes what goes before and introduces it), God took care that the gospel should reach the Gentiles first in a way altogether informal, even while the highest ecclesiastical authorities were there to commence and sanction its inauguration with the seal of the whole apostolic college in Jerusalem. It pleased the Lord that all should be ordered otherwise; and the work among the Gentiles began with not even distinct purpose nor definite intelligence on the part of its promoters, with nothing apparent save the loving zeal that knew the desperate need of the Gentiles as well as the immeasurable efficacy of the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. It was therefore according to the deepest wisdom as well as divine goodness that the real beginning of the gospel outside Israel should be simply of love flowing out from God only, as far as understanding went, in the circumstances that ensued on Stephen's martyrdom. Then, as we know, the saints generally were scattered through the persecution that set in. In the course of their passage here and there, Phenicia and Cyprus and Antioch profited by their testimony At first, however, the word was spoken to none but to Jews only. Some of them, however, and these foreign Jews, Cyprians and Cyrenians, ventured farther, and in the last of the places named, at Antioch, addressed the Greeks also with the glad tidings of the Lord Jesus.

Was not this very bold? Certainly it was of God who made use of the providential circumstances for His glory. It was love, it was spiritual instinct, in the heart of those who evangelized, whose very names are unknown. God has taken particular care not to name them, perhaps lest we should attribute to them a deeper perception of His mind than was really due. The momentous fact was there; and simple-hearted laborers were those to whom God gave this mighty and profound impulse by His Spirit. Let us admire these ways of God, which are higher than those even of His people, as the heavens are higher than the earth.

Man, even the wisest of His servants, would have expected otherwise. But the same God was now at work, who, if He brought Moses by providence into the house of Pharaoh's daughter, brought him out by faith: who even then did not use him, learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, to the deliverance of His people, till he had unlearned man as well as himself, and realized alone what God is in the wilderness, for forty long years: then and then only was he fitted of God to be a ruler and a deliverer. So now did it to God seem meet to begin Gentile Christianity through men of comparatively small account in either the world or the church, before there was the smallest intercourse between Peter and Cornelius. The highest order that ever was established in the assembly on earth could not therefore boast. The Lord is above that or any other order; to Him none can dictate. Nor has He abdicated His rights over the earth into the hands of a vicegerent any more than of the twelve. This having been vindicated by His sovereign employment of the Cyprians and Cyrenians, who first planted the gospel among the nations, He does take care to send Peter to Caesarea and to have Peter's action according to His direct command formally sanctioned by the twelve in Jerusalem. His own call of Saul to be apostle of the Gentiles was independent of both the free action at Antioch and the formal in view of Caesarea at Jerusalem; as it was evidently also prior in time, and in many respects superior in claim and power, one may add, to both, though this was not yet fully disclosed.

Of such weight it was in God's eyes to found, confirm, and authenticate this work among the Gentiles, so supremely interesting and indispensable to us, who without it were mere sinners, “without Christ, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.” But if to us of such moment, what was it to the glory of His own grace? what to the praise of His Son, the Lord Jesus?

And if these brethren of Cyprus and Cyrene kept speaking to the Greeks also announcing the glad tidings of the Lord Jesus, the Lord's hand was with them; and a great number believed and turned to the Lord. If ever men dared to draw indefinitely on grace—without waiting for outward sign or open commission, if any servants of the Lord ever exposed themselves to a seemingly just taunt of going beyond all bounds, more especially as “the twelve” were not only alive but together not so far off, surely it was these pioneers of grace to the Greeks.

Antioch in Syria was no doubt a suitable place in God's mind. The city was founded B.C. 300 by Seleucus Nicator; and there, as the Jews possessed equal privileges with the Greeks politically, great numbers lived under the government of an ethnarch of their own. God never forgets kindness shown to His poor people even in their fallen estate, and knows how to repay with an interest unmistakably divine. Here first the Greeks heard, believed, and turned to the Lord.

It is well known that large and good MS. authority supports the reading of the common text, Hellenists, Grecians, or Greek-speaking Jews. But the sense afforded by אcorr A Dpm, and if not all the ancient versions, the Armenian, is made decisive by the requirements of the truth stated. For in Jerusalem itself before the scattering not only were “Grecians” objects of testimony as well as other Jews, but notoriously the murmuring was of that portion against the Hebrews, or native Jews who spoke Aramaic. Nay more, all “the seven” chosen to allay the unworthy outbreak, and to relieve the apostles from a work that hindered for an incomparably better, bore Hellenistic names; and one of them was expressly from Antioch. Again, it is recorded in Acts 9:29 how Saul of Tarsus spoke and disputed against these Hellenists in Jerusalem. Thus there would be nothing new or peculiar in similar speech at Antioch; whereas it is declared here that at first none but Jews were addressed, and afterward “the Greeks also,” and this effectively under the good hand of the Lord. Now “Hebrew” stands over against “Hellenist,” but not “Jew,” which includes both. So that “Jew” can only be confronted by “Greek,” not by “Hellenists” which falls under that category. The point therefore is so far from immaterial, that “Greeks"9 can alone bear rigid or intelligent investigation, and at once conveys a new and important fact. Further, we must on no account suppose their conversion to the Lord by the gospel to have taken place after the disciples had heard of the call of Cornelius. It has been already stated that it occurred before Peter's visit to Caesarea. Evidently all that our chapter implies is, that the report about their conversion only then came to the ears of the assembly that was in Jerusalem. The fact of the conversion itself had of course taken place considerably before; and we have seen how beautifully its priority contributes its quota to the full scheme of God's grace, which called apostolic authority into action no less appropriately.

Barnabas then, who was of Cyprus, though a Levite, comes to Antioch on his mission of inquiry. Nor can we conceive one more admirably chosen, if a genial heart devoted to Christ were wanted to judge fairly of the work in Antioch and to re-assure those in Jerusalem adequately. For he, when he came and saw the grace of God, “rejoiced and exhorted all with purpose to abide by the Lord” (ver. 23). And striking is the comment of the inspired historian, who in no way grudges his due meed, any more than Paul would, because Barnabas subsequently was betrayed into unbecoming heat for his kinsman's sake. “For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and faith.” Grace sealed his visit also; “and a large crowd was added to the Lord.” Can we doubt that the work had still its mixed character, with Barnabas a fellow-workman in what drew out his joy?

Again there is another trait very characteristic of this “good man,” and not only so but of the real working of the Holy Spirit, both in sending him to Antioch and now in his going off to Cilicia. “And he went forth unto Tarsus to seek for Saul; and on finding him brought him unto Antioch” (ver. 25). Is it thus that we feel and act in presence of a large field of service where we are honored by the Master's use? Do we in the midst of it remind ourselves of another who might be yet more efficient? Or does jealousy still hinder—still play its dark and deadly part to the dishonor of Christ and the loss of souls within and without? It was not so with Barnabas, who had already done a brother's office when all were alas! afraid of Saul (Acts 9:26, 27). Now, having learned his value as a bold preacher when going in and out of Jerusalem, he bethinks him of the help Saul might render at Antioch; and acting on it, he is enabled to execute his desire. “And it came to pass that even for a whole year they were gathered together in10 the assembly, and taught a large crowd, and that the disciples were first called11 Christians in Antioch” (ver. 26). It was Christ's flock, not that of either; and His love animated them both, as others also no doubt, to care for it. In those days not one said that the assembly was his own, but served in it the more lovingly and holly because they always remembered that it is God's, and not man's.

It is not without interest that the Spirit of God here adds that Antioch, notoriously famous of old for witty or scurrilous nicknames, first gave the designation of “Christians” to the disciples, within styled faithful, brethren, saints, &e. It was a name which Gentiles gave in reproach; as Jews called them “Nazarenes,” and Julian the apostate at a later day, “Galileans.” Jews would never think of “Christ” as the ground of a contemptuous term: what they scorned was that Jesus is the Christ.

“Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem unto Antioch; and there stood up one from among them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that a great famine was about to be over all the habitable earth; which came to pass under Claudius.12 And according as any one of the disciples had means, they determined each of them to send help [lit. for service] to the brethren that dwelt in Judaea: which also they did, dispatching [it] unto the elders by hand of Barnabas and Saul” (ver. 27-30).

It is a joy to see that the free activity of the Spirit which began the work and founded the assembly in Antioch was no more restive at the special gifts that ministered in their midst, than it distrusted what the Lord had wrought by simple believers evangelizing as they could. It was not Barnabas and Saul only who labored there, but prophets came down from Jerusalem, and one of them, Agabus, predicts a great dearth (as we know there was more than once) in the time of Claudius. Is it not of deep interest, the faith and love which responded to this, though it was no charity sermon, without waiting for a call from saints already impoverished by their generous love after the great Pentecost which first saw the assembly here below? They believed in the coming scarcity, and thought of the saints in Jerusalem as truly one body; and perhaps we may apply here, if one suffer, so do all, and as they sympathize, they succor also. So even the Jews in Ezra's day were roused by the prophets to build, before the renewed intervention of their foes drew out the great king's decree that canceled the usurper's prohibition. It is blessed to act on heavenly motives in earthly duties; and that what we do should be in the faith that ever honors God's word. So the links of love are maintained on both sides between Jerusalem and Antioch; and this, in things spiritual, yet more than in the carnal, which it was their duty to repay, as Paul afterward did not fail to remind others. The task was entrusted to Barnabas and Saul through “the elders,” of whom we bear for the first time in the associations of the assembly. How they were installed in Judaea we know not from the New Testament; but we have definite instruction in the sphere of the Gentile assemblies, as we may see in Acts 14:23.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 11:1-18

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

Never had there been so important a step taken by man on the earth; never one demanding faith so urgently and evidently as now. Hence, though the assembly was then in its pristine order and beauty with the twelve acting together, notwithstanding the dispersion after Stephen's death which had scattered the saints generally, the Lord acted by a single servant of His whose own Jewish prejudices were notoriously of the strongest. The assembly is responsible to act together in all ordinary questions of godliness and discipline; it is bound to guard practically the foundations of truth and righteousness according to the written word. But a new departure needed and found a suited instrument, chosen and filled of God to initiate His will, and to take the new step in advance assuredly gathering the will of the Lord.

Peter's faith was severely tried. For the first time since Pentecost he had to encounter doubts on the part of those who stood first in the church, and the fierce opposition of such as knew least of God and His ways. It was now not mere fleshly feeling of the Hellenists against the Hebrews, but the very serious question whether the foremost of the twelve had not compromised the testimony of Christ by the formal reception of Gentiles at Caesarea.

“But the apostles and the brethren which were in Judaea heard that the Gentiles also received the word of God. And when Peter went up unto Jerusalem, they of the circumcision contended with him, saying, Thou wentest in onto men uncircumcised and didst eat with them. But Peter began and set forth to them in order, saying, I was in the city of Joppa, praying, and in a trance I saw a vision, a certain vessel descending like a great sheet, let down by four corners out of heaven, and it came as far as me. On which having fixed mine eyes, I considered and saw the quadrupeds of the earth and the wild beasts and the reptiles and the birds of the heaven. And I heard also a voice saying to me, Arise, Peter, slay and eat. But I said, In no wise, Lord, because common or unclean never entered into my mouth. But a voice answered a second time out of heaven, What God cleansed make not thou common. And this was done thrice, and all were drawn up again into heaven. And, behold, immediately three men stood at the house in which I was, sent from Caesarea unto me; and the Spirit bade me go with them, doubting nothing. And there went with me also these six brethren, and we entered into the house of the man; and he reported to us how he saw the angel in his house, standing and saying, Send to Joppa, and fetch Simon, that is surnamed Peter, who shall speak words unto thee, whereby thou shalt be saved, thou and all thy house. And on my beginning to speak the Holy Spirit fell upon them as upon us also at the beginning And I remembered the word of the Lord how He said, John baptized with water, but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit. If then God gave to them the same gift as also to us when we1 believed upon the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could forbid God? And when they heard these things, they were still and glorified God, saying, Then indeed also to the Gentiles did God give repentance unto life” (ver. 1-18).

It was undeniable on the face of things that Peter had openly traversed the distinction so long set up by God between Jew and Gentile. This he had to justify by God's authority; and so he does by the simple recital of the vision already before us in the preceding chapter, which he repeats for the conviction of the brethren in Jerusalem. The moment was come for the seeds which the Lord Jesus Himself had sown to germinate and bear fruit visibly. Had He, who in Matt. 10 forbade the twelve to go to any way of the Gentiles, not also when risen told them expressly to go and make disciples of all the Gentiles? The vision of Peter was merely the reduction of this great commission, or at least a kindred one, to practice. For in Luke 24 the Lord about to ascend had declared that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name unto all the Gentiles, beginning from Jerusalem. And so it was. With Jerusalem they had begun. But now the tide was turning. From Jerusalem the saints had been scattered abroad. Samaria had already received the word of God, not by the church agreeing to it, nor even by the action of the apostles. And now God had left nothing ambiguous as to His will about the Gentiles. The gospel, henceforth, must go out indiscriminately. The holiness of Israel had come to naught in the cross of Christ. By virtue of the blood of the cross God could and would wash even the Gentiles clean. Ritual had come to its end. Henceforth there must be reality by faith. And as the cross of Christ pronounced all alike ruined, so now salvation was going forth to any that believed, Jew or Gentile alike. Such was the purport of the vision; and grace reasoned with Peter when he in the ecstasy ventured to controvert the Lord Himself. Who then so proper as he to convince the obstinate men of the circumcision? If they were contending with him, could he not tell them truly that he had himself dared to contend even with the Lord, Who had repeatedly and emphatically reproved his prejudices and forbidden him to deem common what God had cleansed?

Peter told them also how the three men from the Gentile Cornelius appeared at that very moment, in person, before the house in Joppa, and how the Spirit bade him go with them without a question. Such a threefold chord could not be broken; each part was independent of the other, and all of them from God. For Cornelius in Caesarea had a vision no less than Peter in Joppa. But Peter had in addition, while he thought on his vision, the Spirit directing him to go with the messengers of Cornelius before he knew that the three men were making inquiry at the gate.

Nay, there was more than this. God had manifestly used His word as only He could. “As I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell upon them, as also upon us at the beginning.” It was the gospel of their salvation. To them also the Spirit was supplied, Who wrought powers among them beyond possibility of cavil or question. The promise of the Father was therefore fulfilled in the Gentiles, as much as in the Jews who believed, according to the word of the Lord in Acts 1:4, 5.

Again, let us remark how clearly this discourse of Peter distinguishes new birth from salvation.2 Cornelius was assuredly born of God before Peter visited him at Caesarea. Nevertheless Peter was to speak unto him words whereby he should be saved. It is a gross mistake to suppose that the salvation which he now found is not far beyond new birth. Present salvation is the first foundation privilege of the gospel. To be born again was always true from Abel downwards. But those who are merely born again do not enter Christian ground, until they have received at least the first and most needful blessing, to which the accomplishment of Christ's work entitles all who believe.

The remarkable care with which God introduced the new standing-point to the Gentiles makes this confusion inexcusable. Now, while faith never was without suited mercy from God, it is one of the most marked signs of unbelief to ignore the peculiar privilege which God is now giving, and to go back to that mode or means which may have been at a former time. Here, as has been already and often pointed out, the Evangelicals are as dark as the Sacramentarians. For, if the latter party attach exorbitant efficacy to the mere sign of the blessing, the former are as ignorant of what is signified. Both agree in making the initiatory institution of the gospel to be the sign of life or the new birth; whereas it is really of the remission or washing away of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16), and death with Christ (Rom. 6, Col. 2), i.e., of salvation (1 Peter 3). Cornelius learned from the apostle that for a Gentile it was no question any longer of God's uncovenanted mercy. He himself, already born of God and acquainted with the Messiah come for the deliverance of His ancient people by faith, had now to learn of salvation's door open to the Gentile believer as truly as to the Jewish. It is not promise, as hitherto even to an Israelite; it is the work accomplished, and soul-salvation henceforth given to all believers without distinction. As the seal of it, the Holy Ghost was manifestly imparted as on the day of Pentecost.

This was conclusive, for the objections of the circumcision then. Who was Peter, as he triumphantly closed his argument, who they, to resist God? None but He could give that gift, which He had granted alike to Jews and Gentiles by faith of the gospel.

But the principle is of immense importance permanently, and as much now as ever. The tree ground of reception is not the acceptance of certain articles of faith, expressed or understood; still less is it a certain measure of intelligence about the one body and one Spirit, which it is improbable that a single soul in Jerusalem then possessed definitely. It is a far weightier fact, the possession of “the like gift.” If not so baptized of the Holy Spirit, one is not really a member of Christ's body. To be born again never did suffice. One must have, through faith of Christ as the gospel proclaims Him and His work, the Spirit given to one as a believer. Without known remission of sins one may be quickened, but there cannot be what scripture calls “salvation,” any more than the Spirit of adoption whereby we cry Abba Father. There may be conversion, a divinely-given hatred of evil and love of good, God's word prized, and prayer; there may be conscience toward God, yet a real but imperfect looking toward God, with a real but imperfect looking to Christ. But till one knows by faith of the gospel that all is clear between the soul and God through the sacrifice of Christ, the Holy Spirit does not seal the person; when there is submission to, the righteousness of God, He does: then the believer is actually made a member of the one body of Christ. Of course such an one is or ought to be baptized with water; but this is never in scripture connected with that corporate and everlasting relationship. It is individual and bound up with individual confession of Christ; so much so, that whatever God may do in sovereign grace, no intelligent saint would think of presenting a soul for fellowship of the church, unless he had previously taken the ground of a baptized person. But baptism of the Holy Ghost is wholly distinct from water baptism; and this is not even a sign of that, but of salvation by Christ, or burial onto His death.

Even the stoutest defenders of Jewish exclusiveness were overwhelmed by the accumulated and crowning proof that God gave to the Gentiles also repentance unto life. It was now an incontestable and blessed fact. They were more than silenced; they “were still.” Grace had triumphed, as it ought, over law, in Jerusalem, and among none but Jews that believed. It was not yet a day of ruin, when the least right are apt to be the most self-confident and jubilant. It was grace made them glorify God in reversing their previous judgment.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 10:34-48

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

It was a serious moment for the apostle of the circumcision, prepared though he was by God's dealings with himself and with Cornelius. But there could be no doubt of the Lord's will, and the first step in the new departure must be taken then and there by himself.

“And Peter opened his mouth and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth Him and worketh righteousness is acceptable to Him. The word which He sent forth to the sons of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all1)—ye know the matter that came to pass throughout the whole of Judaea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism which John preached—Jesus of Nazareth, how that God anointed Him with [the] Holy Spirit and power; who went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil, because God was with Him And we [are]2 witnesses of all things which He did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom also3 they slew, hanging [Him] on a tree. Him God raised on the third day and gave Him to be manifest, not to all the people, but to witnesses that were chosen before by God, to us which ate and drank with Him, after He arose from [the] dead. And He charged us to preach to the people and testify that this is He that is ordained by God judge of living and dead. To Him all the prophets bear witness that every one that believeth on Him shall receive remission of sins through His name” (ver. 34-43).

The coming and work of Christ have put all things in their true place. Only since then has God Himself been either manifested or vindicated; for during previous ages, since the flood or at least the law, God seemed the God of Jews only, and not of Gentiles also. Now it is made evident that He cares for Gentiles no less than Jews; but it never was evident in the fullness of the truth, till the Son of God was come and has given us an understanding that we may know Him that is true. Not till we know His Son Jesus Christ, can we say, This is the true God and eternal life. Nor had any one more difficulty to pierce through the cloud of Jewish prejudice than the instrument here employed; but God had cast the true light of the cross more fully on his soul; and now he could say, “Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons” (even were they Hebrews of the Hebrews); “but in every nation he that feareth Him and worketh righteousness is acceptable to Him.” Of this Cornelius and perhaps others of his house were already to a certain extent a living but hidden example. The principle, however, was now to be extended immensely, and what had been comparatively hidden to be avowed and made public through the gospel. The very piety of Cornelius kept him from appropriating to himself as a Gentile what he knew God had sent forth to Israel, till grace sent it him also. Thus should the charge of the risen Lord, hitherto suspended as it were, be applied no longer partially but in all its wide extent: “Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation.” The law had been proved and declared powerless; and pretension to keep it unto life became the plain proof that no life was there. Christ is all. “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, and he that disbelieveth shall be condemned.” Peter understood all this as he never did before. Legal mist was passing away from his eyes. But nothing was farther from the truth than that there could be among Gentiles any more than Jews one to fear God or work righteousness without faith in Jesus. The Jewish feeling which denied to any nation save their own the possibility of the acceptableness with God, he declares to be unfounded. His mission on God's part to Cornelius was expressly to assert His indiscriminate grace, as well as to begin authoritatively, by one whom God set in the first place in the assembly, the sending of the gospel to every creature.

Cornelius and those with him already knew the word which God sent forth to the sons of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ. But Peter carefully adds that Jesus is Lord not of the Jews only but of all. That which was a thing spoken of throughout Judaea, beginning from despised Galilee of the Gentiles, after the baptism which John preached (as we read in Mark 1:14, 15, where the Lord Himself called men to repent and believe the Gospel), is the only salvation for Jew, or for Gentile when afterward called as he now began to be. Jesus of Nazareth is the object of faith, whom God anointed with the Holy Spirit and power.4 He was come to whom all pointed that had ever been anointed of God. The love of God to sinful man was evident in Him and that love effectual in deliverance; for He went abort doing good and healing all that were oppressed of the devil, because God was with Him. He was the true Messiah, but both in Himself and in His work immeasurably more; and this came out into the brightest evidence on His rejection. Yet was there ample testimony to Him before that rejection; so that man was without excuse. “And we are witnesses of all things that He did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem; whom also they slew, hanging Him on a tree.”

Whatever appearances may say, the will and word of God stand forever; and faith knows it. “Him God raised on the third day and gave Him to be manifest, not to all the people but to witnesses that were chosen before by God, to us who did eat and drink with Him after He arose from the dead.” The resurrection is the pivoting and clenching of the gospel. If unbelief hold out against its testimony, what clearer than that man hates both the love and the truth of God, and will not be saved at any price? The same resurrection of Jesus separates those who believe according to the value of Christ's death before God, making in their measure witnesses of Christ men who bowed to the testimony of the fore-appointed witnesses. Be whom they slew on a tree ate and drank with His own after He arose from the dead: not that He needed the food, but they needed the testimony that He was alive from the dead, a truly risen Man, who, having loved His own that were in the world, loved them to the uttermost.

He it was who charged His disciples to preach to the people and testify that this is He that is ordained of God judge of living and dead. Such a testimony clearly goes beyond Israel to take in all mankind within its scope, as the resurrection demonstrated beyond controversy. For if the Son of God deigned to be born of woman, born under law, His rejection by Israel, His death on the cross, broke all links with that people and left Him free for the display of sovereign grace in righteousness now while He is in heaven, as surely as He is determinately appointed by God judge of living and dead when He comes again in glory. What has the risen Man to do with one nation more than another? He is the divinely defined Judge of living and dead by and by, as He is now Savior of all that believe be they who they may. Judgment and salvation are equally cleared by the gospel and concentrated in His person. The law made nothing perfect. The prophets, on the failure of all, bore their precious intermediate testimony; and Peter appeals to them. “To Him bear all the prophets witness that through His name every one that believeth on Him shall receive remission of sins.”

To be born again, as has often been remarked, is not a proper privilege of the gospel, as all the Catholic sects of Christendom suppose; for the new birth was always true for souls that believed (before, within, and without, Israel) since sin was in the world. The Old Testament saints were as truly begotten of God as any of the New. Remission of sins is the primary boon of the gospel; though of course the new birth attached by grace to the same persons, and the privileges of the gospel go far beyond that gracious beginning. Here all is confusion, especially in the Christian bodies which boast of antiquity. Nor were even the Reformers at all clear in this fundamental and necessary truth.

Lutherans, Calvinists, Anglicans, and others, made baptism to be the means of life! either to all the baptized, or to the elect among them. According to God's word, they are all wrong, and inexcusably so. For Scripture never treats baptism as the sign even of life-giving, but of death with Christ to sin, and of sins washed away, for such as are already quickened. Christian baptism is a blessed institution, as the initiatory sign of the peculiar though primary privilege of the gospel. Blinder than the Jews are they who pervert it into a quickening ordinance, denying too as generally they do that the life given in the Son is eternal life: so that sacerdotal pretension is as vain as the doctrine is false.

And so we find in this very context. “While Peter was yet speaking these sayings, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those that were hearing the word. And the faithful of the circumcision, as many as came with Peter, were amazed, because upon the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Spirit. For they heard them speaking with tongues, and magnifying God. Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid the water, that these should not be baptized, which received the Holy Spirit even as we? And he directed them to be baptized in the name of5 Jesus Christ. Then they entreated him to abide certain days” (ver. 44-48).

It is striking to notice the various ways of divine wisdom. At Pentecost the believing Jews had to be baptized before they received the gift of the Spirit. They must solemnly take the place of death with Christ to all the had previously trusted. And even to this day the Jews feel its force; for when one of them is baptized to Christ Jesus, he is viewed and treated as dead to them and their religion. And so do the Brahmins, Mahommetans, or any who are not indifferent to their own profession. But the believing Gentiles as we see received the Holy Spirit while hearing the word, as most—perhaps all of us—have done; and baptism follows. Who could refuse the outward sign to the manifest recipients of that divine seal? Their gifts in speaking with tongues and magnifying God proclaimed the more precious and the ever-abiding gift of the Spirit. His seal is the true ground why those having it should be owned as members of Christ's body: not ecclesiastical intelligence in them; still less the will or the consent of other men. Our business is to honor God and obey, not to legislate. If ways unworthy of Christ be done and persisted in, there is the remedy of Scriptural discipline.

Here, whatever his old prejudices might have been, even Peter bowed. And they were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, it would seem, not by Peter, but at his direction by one or more of the brethren who accompanied him. There was neither vanity nor superstition in getting it done by Peter, though he took care in obedience to the Lord that it was duly done. It was of moment that they of the circumcision should go thoroughly with the mighty work of God's grace, in sealing Gentile no less than Jew that believed. It was not too soon to be of moment that all should know that a simple brother may lawfully baptize even in a great apostle's presence, and that the act derives no value from office or gift. Only the evangelist should see that it be done after an orderly sort. No room was left for circumcision or the law. All is of grace reigning through righteousness.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 10:17-33

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

Very careful is the Spirit of God to give as full details: so grave a change as the reception of Gentiles on the same footing as a Jew was not made or owned lightly.

“And as Peter was perplexed1 in himself what the vision which he had seen might mean, behold, the men that had been sent by Cornelius, having sought out the house of Simon, stood at the gate, and having called were inquiring whether Simon surnamed Peter lodged there. Now while Peter was pondering over the vision, the Spirit said to him, Behold, three men seek thee; but arise, go down, and journey with them, nothing doubting, because I have sent them. And Peter went down unto the men and said, Behold, I am he whom ye seek: what is the cause for which ye are here? And they said, Cornelius a centurion, a man righteous and fearing God, and attested by the whole nation of the Jews, was divinely warned by a holy angel to send for thee unto his house: and to hear words from thee. Having therefore called them in he lodged [them]. And on the morrow he arose and went off with them, and some of the brethren from Joppa went with him” (ver. 17-23).

Men were employed throughout after the angelic mission to Cornelius; but God is apparent in every part to disarm prejudice, own righteousness, display grace, and put honor on the name of Jesus to the blessing of man and His own glory, for all which weighty ends the law, of which Israel boasted, had proved altogether unavailing. The great apostle Peter was indebted under God to the Gentile's invitation, to solve the problem of his vision. But the Spirit is the agent of all blessing, intelligence and power in the believer; and so His place is made conspicuous here (ver. 19, 20). It must be a divine impulse, and not a mere deduction of reasoning: a lesson for us and all of inestimable value. At first no doubt, sensible signs and extraordinary power ushered in His presence and manifested the new truth of His action in man; but the reality abides, as He abides with us, forever, though outward signs in divine wisdom are no longer vouchsafed. This draws greater importance than ever to Scripture in these last days when unbelievers turn from it more and more to unprofitable and mischievous fables.

It was thus made plain, beyond doubt, that God it was, not man nor yet the church, nor even the apostles, who opened the door to the nations, equally as to the Jews. So the gospel intrinsically wrought and proclaimed; but even the believer is dull to appreciate the full import of what he has really received, and is wholly dependent on God's word and Spirit to give him growth and progress. The hour was come for the formal and public owning of believing Gentiles in the enjoyment of full gospel privileges. And it was meet that he who was beyond none of the twelve should be the one employed, rather than he who, already called, was designated to be the apostle of the uncircumcision. Thus was the uniting bond of the Spirit best maintained in peace. But it was of all moment that man's will should be excluded as well as man's wisdom. What could be more effectual to this end than the vision of Cornelius on the one hand and of Peter on the other? The character of each gave special weight to what they saw and heard; and their concurrence, as attested by the “three men” from Caesarea, as well as the “six brethren” that accompanied Peter from Joppa, was of high value and unmistakable significance. Men were largely employed, as they were concerned in the deepest way, but so as to demonstrate to every upright mind that God was the moving spring in it all. The “devout soldier” with the two domestics has his lowly but valuable place and was soon to share the blessing as well as the devout centurion on whom he waited closely: a blessing which is as distinctly characterized by the power of grace that brings down far higher than Cornelius, and lifts up far lower than the Roman soldier, uniting all believers even here below in one heavenly and indissoluble relationship to Christ.

The message delivered by the men from Caesarea was to the point. For a Roman officer in a garrison town to have the good report of the whole nation of the Jews was no small thing; but it was more for his own household to bear witness that he was a righteous man and God-fearing, as his soldier-attendant evidently was also. And the prevalence of Jewish Sadduceanism did not lead to any toning down of the divine communication which was calmly affirmed by men accustomed to frank uprightness. Cornelius, they said, “was oracularly warned by a holy angel to fetch thee unto his house and hear words from thee.”

What a clear communication to Peter when his vision was followed up by the Spirit's application of it! Nor can anything be plainer than the divine authority with which the Spirit speaks and acts here as elsewhere. “I have sent them:” He is God.

How vividly too is set forth the value of “words” in the gospel! Let the law demand “works” of man to prove his powerlessness and that the offense may abound, so as to overwhelm him with despair of himself and cast him only upon Christ. The gospel makes known in its “words” the true God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent, and is thus the means of life eternal to every one that believes. The Jew might claim the law as imposed on His people in the solitude of Sinai; not so God's gospel concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, dead, risen, and glorified in heaven, which is now as open to the Gentile as to the Jew, but to neither save by the faith of Christ and His redemption.

Peter then set out with the rest from Joppa. “And on the morrow he entered into Caesarea; and Cornelius was awaiting them, having called together his kinsmen and his near friends” (ver. 24).

Dear reader, have you nothing to learn from the zeal now, as well as the habitual piety and devotedness we saw before (ver. 2, 22), in the Roman centurion? Are we to be less zealously affected because we are more familiar with the wondrous grace and truth that came by Jesus Christ? Sorrowful fruit, not indeed of better light, but of fleshly indifference and worldly ease, which hinder the due activity of divine affections that others may live, as well as our own souls grow, by the knowledge of God.

“And when it came to pass that Peter entered, Cornelius met him and, falling at his feet, did homage; but Peter raised him, saying, Rise up, I myself also am a man” (ver. 25, 26). It was the more remarkable, as a Roman in general never offered the salaam of prostration to a stranger. But the lowly and pious mind of Cornelius was wrought to such a pitch of expectation by the angelic message that he failed to sever the preacher from the truth he was sent to make known, and was thus disposed to pay more than honor meet to him whom God had directed him to send for. On the other hand the dignity which accompanies the truth is not only compatible with the deepest humility but produces and increases it in proportion to the power which grace acquires over the soul. Impossible not to be humble, if we are consciously in God's presence; and this the gospel is calculated above all things to make good habitually, as it does in the measure of our faith and spirituality. Peter refused such mistaken homage at once.

O you who claim to be Peter's peculiar and exclusive successor, are you not ashamed? Why are you of all men the most distant from his ways, the most opposed to his spirit? Silver and gold you have, which he had not; but the faith he preached you deny and corrupt, and the lowliness he practiced even to an unbaptized Gentile pronounces the most solemn rebuke on your pride, when you (installed as Pope) seat yourself “on the very spot where the pyx containing the host usually stands,"2 and the cardinal princes of the empire repeatedly adore you, each prostrating himself before you and kissing the slippered toe as well as the covered hand. Can contrast be more complete? And this is succession!

“And conversing with him he entered and findeth many come together; and he said to them, Yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to join himself or come unto one of another race. And me God showed to call no man common or unclean: wherefore also without gainsaying I came when sent for. I ask then on what account ye sent for me. And Cornelius said, Four days ago till this hour I was fasting and the ninth [hour] praying in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing and says, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms had in remembrance before God: send then unto Joppa, and call for Simon who is surnamed Peter. He lodgeth in the house of Simon a tanner by [the] sea. Forthwith then I sent unto thee, and thou hast done well in arriving. Now then we are all here before God to hear the things that have been commanded thee of the Lord” (ver. 27-33).

Peter, after entering not only the house but the apartment where Cornelius had his company waiting to hear the gospel, explains first what they all knew, then what God had just shown to himself. For their part, they were aware that for a Jew to be familiar with a Gentile was unlawful; he on his had it shown of God that he was not to call any man common or unclean. Now that the true light shines, the old distinction is gone. It was not so at the beginning; it is no longer in force. If God was entitled to institute such a difference, He was no less free to annul it; and so He had shown Peter in special preparation for Cornelius whom God had directed to send for Peter, who had thereon come “without gainsaying,” as became him. For what has faith to do in such circumstances but to obey? If Christ Himself was beyond all the Obedient Man, the apostles differed from others not more in their gift and power than in the measure of their obedience. And to this is every saint sanctified by the Spirit—to the obedience of Jesus Christ, as distinctly as to the sprinkling of His blood. Let us exhort one another to this, and so much the more as we see the day approaching.

Cornelius then in answer explains why he sent for Peter. It was not without divine authority. He had been four days also praying, if not fasting also (for the reading is seriously questioned); on that afternoon an angel in a man's guise told him that his prayer was heard, and that he was to call to him Peter, who had well done in coming, as they were all there to hear all the Lord's commands through him.

Hear it, you that desire to honor Peter truly, that you may be saved from the destructive superstitions of his false successors. Were there succession, surely the first and head is peculiarly to be regarded. See how readily he comes, without a word to say against it, at Cornelius' request. Ah! it is not Peter who demanded or received worldly pomp and human honor; it is you who have lost the word of truth, the gospel of salvation, and are under the dominion of dark and evil traditions which make God's word of none effect, and play into the hands of the god of this age who has blinded the minds of the unbelieving that the light of the gospel of Christ's glory should not dawn on them. Listen to Peter, I beseech you, and learn, not merely your error in departure from the living God, but the precious truth which is able to save your souls.

Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 10:1-16

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The sovereign grace of God toward all men was about to have another and yet more conclusive formal seal. It was not enough that the scattered Hellenists were preaching the gospel in the free action of the Holy Spirit, or that Philip in particular had evangelized Samaria. It was not enough that Saul of Tarsus had been called from his persecutions to bear Christ's name before the Gentiles no less but more than before the sons of Israel. The apostle of the circumcision must now openly act on the grand principle of Christianity which knows no distinction between Jew or Greek. As the cross proves them alike sinful and lost (Rom. 3:22, 23), the gospel meets them alike where they are (Rom. 10:12), and proclaims the same One to be Lord of all and rich unto call that call upon Him. This was now to be publicly demonstrated by Peter's preaching to the Gentiles, and their entrance into the privileges of the gospel on precisely the same terms of gratuitous, unconditional, and everlasting salvation by the faith of Christ, as to the Jews at and since Pentecost. Henceforth there is no distinction: for whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

The circumstances of a change so momentous bore the unequivocal marks of divine authority; though, long before, the Lord Himself had announced it (Luke 24:47) to the unwilling and therefore unintelligent ears of His disciples, and Peter had in terms affirmed it (Acts 2:39), however little he seems to have as yet apprehended the force of what he then uttered. Indeed we are here and now carefully shown how reluctantly he set his hand to the work of indiscriminate grace till God left excuses no longer possible. But He would have the activity of His grace tarry no more for the dull sons of men: His message of love to the lost must ran forth in power; and the great apostle of the circumcision must be the one formally to open the gates of the kingdom not to Jews only but to Gentiles also. The moment was come the man with whom to begin appears.

“Now a certain man in Caesarea, Cornelius by name, a centurion of a cohort that was called Italian, pious and fearing God with all his house, 1giving much alms to the people, and entreating God continually, saw in a vision manifestly about ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in unto him and saying to him, Cornelius. But he gazing on him and being affrighted, said, What is it, Lord? And he said to him, Thy prayers and thine alms have gone up for a memorial before God. And now send men unto Joppa, and fetch [one]2 Simon who is surnamed Peter: he lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea. And when the angel that spoke to him had departed, he called two of his domestics and a pious soldier of those in close attendance, and having recounted all to them, sent them to Joppa” (ver. 1-8).

The Spirit of God is thus careful to make known the godly life of Cornelius. He was already a converted man, though a Gentile. But he did not know salvation proclaimed in the gospel. Therefore was Peter to be sent for, as Peter himself afterward explained (Acts 11:14): else he could only have hoped for his soul in the mercy of God. But now the gospel is to teach sinful man, without distinction; and it seemed good to the all-wise God to bless thereby such an one as this devout Roman, as He had already in the same grace paid honor to the crucified Savior by converting as well as tilling with peace the penitent robber who hung by His side. They were as different tributes to the grace which came by Him as could well be conceived; but each was seasonable, each to the glory of Jesus, each a display of what God can afford to do through redemption. The pious centurion was only entitled to know his sins remitted on God's message of grace through the blood of Jesus.

The Evangelical school, ignorant of the new and peculiar privileges of the gospel, were wont to regard Cornelius as a self-righteous philanthropist, because they did not distinguish between conversion and the known forgiveness of sins or salvation. But this was their ignorance. Even Bede knew better, when he said albeit in dubious phraseology that he came through faith to works, but through work was established in faith. Had Bede said through the gospel, instead of “through works,” it would have been more in accordance with the truth; but those who cite him approvingly seem not more intelligent than the venerable light of the dark ages. It was really God putting honor on the accomplished sacrifice of Christ; and now, that the Jews nationally had rejected their Messiah, calling Gentiles into equal privilege with believing Israelites by the gospel.

But the known godly character of Cornelius was suited to silence the prejudices of the ancient people of God. He looked to God and served Him in faith, before He knew present salvation. If it were too much to say as Calvin does that, before Peter came, he had a church in his house, we are told on the highest authority that he was devout and feared God with all his household: no idol, we may be sure, was tolerated there. Instead of the rapacity of a Roman abroad, with contempt unbounded for the Jew, he abounded in alms-giving to “the people” in their low estate, and this in Caesarea where Gentiles predominated. Best of all he entreated God continually. To suppose all this in one destitute of life is absurd. Cornelius was born of God and walked accordingly, though he had not yet peace; and God was now about to meet the wants and longings of his soul by the full revelation of His grace in the gospel.

An angel of God he sees in vision by day. It was broad daylight, in the afternoon; nor was he asleep, but inquiring learns that God, not unmindful of his prayers and alms,3 bids him fetch Simon Peter from Joppa. As the great apostle of the uncircumcision wrote at the end to instruct the slow mind of the believing Hebrews, so the great apostle of the circumcision was to be employed at the beginning in evangelizing at God's command the Gentiles. Does this beautiful interlacing offend you? If so, it proves how little you have entered into the divine ways which cut off all room or excuse for human independence. Neither in Judea nor in Rome (pace Eusebu) nor anywhere else was there to be, if God were obeyed, the unseemly suicidal sight of a Jewish church distinct from a Gentile church. The assembly was on God's part meant to be one on earth, let there be ever so many assemblies; the saints composing but one assembly, of which in due time it could be said, even when Corinthians were splitting into divisions, “all things are yours, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas.” Here however it was a question of getting the gospel, as necessarily is the true order, though the church follows in its proper course: individual blessing must be known before collective privilege and responsibility.

On the other hand, while these messengers were approaching Joppa, about noon of the next day, Peter retired to pray and, growing hungry, saw, in a trance into which he fell, a sheet of striking significance, which he soon learned to apply.

“And on the morrow, when they were journeying and drawing near to the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray about the sixth hour, and he became hungry and desired to eat; but while they made ready, a trance came over him, and he beholdeth heaven opened and a certain vessel descending4 as a great sheet by four corners let down upon the earth in which were all the quadrupeds and reptiles of the earth and [the]5 birds of the sky. And there came a voice unto him, Arise, Peter, slay and eat. But Peter said, By no means, Lord; because never did I eat anything common and unclean. And a voice [came] again a second time unto him, What God cleansed deem not thou

common. And this was done thrice; and straightway6 the vessel was taken up into heaven” (ver. 9-16).

Peter had not departed from that condition of dependence on God which he had expressed on the occasion of choosing “the seven” to their diaconal service in Jerusalem. “It is not fit that we [the twelve] should forsake the word of God and serve tables.” “Look ye out therefore…But we will give ourselves closely to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” So he assuredly was doing now when a special mission was being assigned him by God. He had withdrawn to be alone before Him. It was no question of repairing to the temple as once, or even to an oratory. The housetop sufficed; but it is well, when forms vanish, if the spirit abides and grows stronger as here. We cannot afford to be slack in that which God honors in the apostle. The needy should not grow weary in telling out their need to Him and in counting on Him to act worthily of His great Name.

Peter receives a threefold testimony of God's purifying the Gentiles by faith, instead of separating Israel by circumcision. The cross had changed all, and put no difference between believers, Jew or Gentile. The former had lost thereby their old superiority according to flesh; both were now open alike to incomparably better blessings in Christ by faith. It was no question now of the law or of becoming a proselyte, or even of laying hold of the skirt of a Jew. From the opened heaven light streamed on the cleansing power of the blood of Jesus, and grace declared the uncleanness gone which Sinai had denounced for a while with rigor. For all was over with the first man under law. The Savior speaks from heaven where such a distinction as Jews or Gentiles has no place, and acts on the efficacy of that blood which has procured everlasting redemption for all believers equally, be they Jew or Greek, barbarian or Scythian, male or female, bond or free. A Jew could hitherto no more eat of an unclean animal than with a sinner of the Gentiles. But the sheet which came down from heaven and was taken up there taught him in due time the immense change which hinges on the cross, answers to the glory of Christ on high, and drew from him on a later day even in Jerusalem itself the gracious confession, “We believe that we shall be saved by the grace of the Lord Jesus, even as they also:” not merely the Gentiles as the Jews, but the Jews in like manner as the Gentiles.

How far the saints or even the apostles anticipated the grace of the gospel must be evident to the least attentive reader of the inspired narrative. Even up to this hour Peter had no thought of, and ventured to object in the vision to, what the voice commanded from heaven. So little was the special character of the gospel in its free grace indebted to the hearts or minds of its most blessed preachers; so incontrovertibly does the word of God prove that what concerns us incalculably above all else for time and eternity proceeded from God alone, feeling and acting for Christ in His own love and to His own glory, though for these very reasons to our best and surest blessing.

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