

Paul and The Church

When Paul (who at this time is known as Saul) first appears in the New Testament he is not yet a believer in Jesus as The Messiah. Yet, he has an intense and fervent desire to serve God! Saul (later to be known as Paul) goes off in an effort to do what he thinks is right and Godly! Yet, he is lacking in true understanding. Thinking that he is doing one thing, he ends up doing something else. Blinded by his own overwhelming desire to serve God (remember the passage in John 16:2 “They will kill you and think they are doing God a service”). This is exactly where Saul (or Paul) was.

Thinking that he was serving God;

When in truth he was dead wrong!

Yet, fervently believing he was right;

All because of his over whelming zeal to serve God!

Paul is a person that seems to have been someone that would charge in, full speed a head. While at the same time, far too often, he is lacking in what might be said, was the proper amount of prudence, which he probably should have had. Today we might say he had a tendency to go off half-cocked, at times. Charging ahead without fully understanding what he was actually doing. One such example is when Paul was still known as Saul, before his Damascus road experience.

Acts 7:55-58 (NIV)

(55) But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

(56) “Look,” he said, “I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”

(57) At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him,

(58) dragged him out of the city and began to stone him.

Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.

Paul’s sincerity and devotion is not in question, as he aids by watching over the coats of those who were stoning Stephen. Or later when he is hunting down the Messianic Believers, in order to inflict what he thought was the proper punishment on them. All the time Saul (or Paul) fully believing that he is serving God. After Paul’s Damascus road experience it is with this same zeal that he goes charging off in his new direction. In both of these cases it seems as though Paul, with an overwhelming zeal to serve God, is charging off with what seems to be a form of tunnel vision.

This exuberance and tunnel vision, along with Paul’s rambling style of writing, has resulted in his epistles being easily mis-interpreted. Especially when the reader is a person from a different culture and mind set, two thousand years later, living on the other side of the planet.

2 Peter 3:15-16 (NIV)

(15) Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him.

(16) He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.

After Paul's Damascus road experience Paul (or Saul) did not lose this overwhelming zeal. He merely redirected it into a different direction; it was now being expressed in a different form and manner. This is one reason that many people hold Paul's writings in such high regard. Because of his whole hearted zeal, and desire to serve God. However, the words of God, Jesus and the Prophets should **not** be relegated to an inferior level of authority when compared to the frequently mis-interpreted Epistles of Paul! Yet, sadly this is what many of those in Christianity have done. How would this relate, if at all, to what Jesus (Yeshua) said in Matthew chapter twenty three?

Matthew 23:4 (Amplified)

(4) **They tie up heavy loads, hard to bear, and place them on men's shoulders, but they themselves will not lift a finger to help bear them.**

For they had **added** to the Laws of God! Therefore Jesus was condemning some of the religious leaders in the Jewish Community for the breaking of God's Law found in Deut.12:32 in most Christian Bibles (however it is Deut. 13:1 in the Hebrew text) where it says; "Whatever I command you, you shall be careful to do; you shall not add to nor take away from it."

Paul, as a Pharisee of Pharisee's, would have been taught not only the Laws of God, but also all of the additions to the Laws of God. These additions would have been taught to Paul as though God Himself had given them! Rather than keeping them as something, which in many cases was an optional practice that God may have allowed as a personal option or choice, but did not require. Yet, when they were made a requirement, claiming that they were part of the Laws of God, the act of requiring them as part of God's Law, became a sin!

Luke 11:45-46 and 52 (NASB)

(45) And one of the lawyers said to Him in reply, "Teacher, when you say this, you insult us too."

(46) But He said, "**Woe to you lawyers as well! For you weigh men down with burdens hard to bear, while you yourselves will not touch the burdens with one of your fingers.**" (You would not lift a finger, to help with the burden.)

(52) "**Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge; you did not enter in yourselves, and those who were entering in you hindered.**"

It appears that even though Paul had come to realize some of these additions as being inappropriate, he may never have been able to recognize and discern all of them; to know which

parts were truly from God and which parts were the additions. Jesus had condemned the additions to God's Law, because of God's prohibition, where God had forbidden for them to add in anything as part of His Laws! Even though some or even most of them would have been permitted as a personal option; they were not allowed to be added to the Laws of God.

Notice: that even today when it comes to Seville Law, it is sometimes used as a tool by those who desire to dominate others. The temptation to mis-use this authority seems to be overwhelming to some individual who inwardly are craving power and dominance. People were the same then as now.

Sadly, in Biblical times this same tendency also overflowed in to the realm of God's Biblical Laws. Where many of the optional things which God permits as a personal option, tradition or custom end up being elevated by some people and become additions to God's Laws; at least in the minds of some or even most. But what did God have to say about this (Do not add to or take away from). So as long as these things were personal options, traditions or customs, and they do not break any of God's Laws, then they are fine! But as soon as they are elevated to the status of Biblical Law, its elevation becomes a SIN! Even though as a personal option, tradition and/or custom they are perfectly acceptable to God. It is the fraudulent elevation of them to a mandatory requirement of God that is the SIN!

The disciples (students) of Jesus (Yeshua) had been with Him 3½ years. In that time they were taught by Yeshua (Jesus), both in a group and one on one. The disciples were well versed as to where the dividing line was on each of these things before the death of Jesus; as well as receiving further instruction from Him for another 40 days after the Resurrection of Yeshua (Jesus). Yet, Paul never received such training and instruction from Jesus! All that Paul had, was a brief experience, that of being struck blind and hearing a question. "Why are you persecuting me" to which Paul ask a question and got an answer. This appears to have been the only direct interaction Paul ever had with Jesus? So why then do most Christians think that Paul knew far more than any of the Disciples, who were now Apostles? The Apostles who had been the Disciples of Jesus (Yeshua) had received very personalized and direct teaching and instruction tailor made for each one of them, as well as group instruction for 3½ years, plus another 40 days of special instruction after His Resurrection. All of which Paul never received!

The ingathering of the Gentiles had **not** begun with Paul, **but with Peter!** We read in Acts chapter ten of how God had given Peter a vision so that he would respond favorably to the men who were sent to him by Cornelius. Even so what does Peter say in verse 28?

Acts 10:28 (NASB)

(28) And he said to them, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him; and yet God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean.

Peter said: It was not lawful for him to associate with a Gentile.

Which Law was this?

Made by who?

Was it a Law made by Men?

Was this a Law of God?

Or, was it a Law that was added by Men to the Laws of God;
which God had forbidden for them to add to?

Is it possible that this was an addition by men to the Laws of God, which Peter still had difficulty recognizing and therefore still may have had problems properly dealing with it. If so this may have been the reason that God needed to give him a vision to help him understand what was expected of him?

The question is, had this originally been just a reasonably general rule of thumb, made by men, that had been FRAUDULENTLY elevated to the Level of one of God's Laws, or not?

Deuteronomy 4:2

“You shall not add to the words which I am commanding you, nor take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you.”

Deuteronomy 12:32 (in most Christian Bibles)

(Deuteronomy 13:1 in the Hebrew text)

“Whatever I command you, you shall be careful to do;
you shall not add to nor take away from it.”

So, why have we gone through all of this when the Title of the Booklet is “Paul and The Church”? The purpose is to lay a foundation upon which to build a proper understanding, in order to recognize when someone is applying an inappropriate amount of authority to someone's words and elevating them to a level where they are, taking away from or adding to, the Laws of God.

Today most Christian's recognizer Paul as their Supreme Religious Christian Authority. Some will say; “No!” “Jesus is our Supreme Authority!” While others will say, “God is our Supreme Authority!”

But, when push comes to shove, do they really? Or have they (perhaps unwittingly) turned the Apostle Paul into their High Priest of Christian Theology? The foundation of many Denominations seems to be based on their concept of the Trinity. Though they would never say it, most tend to behave and act as though the Trinity refers to the Father, Son and Apostle Paul! With the Apostle Paul being the greatest of them all?

Even when the Heavenly Father says something and Jesus (Yeshua) confirms it, and the agreement for this statement progresses along with the Prophets and all of the Disciples and other Apostles supporting and reaffirming this statement. However, if Paul appears to say something differently; then by all means the words of Paul become Supreme. At least in the minds of far too many of today's Christians. For them the words of Paul will overrule them all!

In far too many Church's it is as though Paul has become the supreme embodiment of the Holy Spirit. It seems like Paul's authority (in the minds of most Christians) was, and is, the only true expression of the Holy Spirit. In most of Christianity's theological practices this means, in effect, Paul has been elevated almost to divine status. He ends up being, at least to them, the only true and complete expression of what should be established as Doctrine on any topic. If Paul says something or at least (in that translation) appears to say it, then that seals it, in the minds of most Christian theologians. This is done even when this would, in effect, overrule the words and authority of Almighty God the Heavenly Father as well as His Son. This transforms the Apostle Paul into the final and totally Supreme Authority on everything. They are thereby setting his SEAT OF AUTHORITY and his words, above both Almighty God and His Son (The Messiah).

Many will still tend to set their concept of Jesus above that of His Father as they read through Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. As they continue reading, from the latter part of Acts and on into the Epistles of Paul, there is a subtle transition, so that the words of Paul become elevated even above the words of Jesus in most Christian Denominations.

This seems to occur even though a great deal of the Church claims that Paul, at least in his early ministry, kept BACKSLIDING into Judaism. Yet, most believe that he was finally able to overcome this problem and become a true Christian.

When Christians endeavor to establish a Doctrine, by using Paul's testimony in his Epistles, shouldn't they also require at least two or more additional confirming passages to be presented from other witnesses in Scripture?

Deuteronomy 19:15 (NIV)

(15) ... A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.

Numbers 35: 30 (NIV)

(30) "... 'But no one is to be put to death on the testimony of only one witness.' "

1 Timothy 5:19 (NIV)

(19) "Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses."

Deuteronomy 17: 6 (NIV)

(6) On the testimony of two or three witnesses a man shall be put to death, but no one shall be put to death on the testimony of only one witness.

Hebrews 10:28 (NIV)

(28) Anyone who rejected the Law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses.

Matthew 18:16 (NIV)

(16) "..., so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses."

2 Corinthians 13:1 (NIV)

(1) ... "Every matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses."

Remember what we read earlier in Second Peter!

2 Peter 3:15-16 (NIV)

(15) Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him.

(16) He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.

When the student of Scripture stops and takes a good, hard look at the life and action of The Apostle Paul, what we find is far different than what most Christian would ever have heard in most any Church service. For example, if we look at the New Testament to see how the New Testament Church as well as Paul himself viewed the practice of Animal Sacrifice.

Most people believe that after Jesus's Death, Burial and Resurrection; that the requirement for Animal Sacrifices stopped. At least they think that the Disciples and the other followers of Jesus quit engaging in them. By the day of Pentecost (when most believed the Church began) the practice of offering Animal Sacrifices were no longer being practiced by the followers of Jesus. At least that is what most Christians believe. Those who believe Animal Sacrifices were now finished are sure that to continue them after the day of Pentecost would be improper.

The question is now, are they correct? After Pentecost did the followers of Jesus quit keeping the Laws of God? Did they believe that Jesus, by fulfilling the Law, had somehow abolished God's Laws or at least had done away with their obligations to keep them? Did they sincerely believe, that because of the Death of Jesus on the Cross, the need for Animal Sacrifice was abolished and/or done away with?

If so, wouldn't the New Testament show this? Or does it indicate something very different? As strange as it may sound to most Christians it actually does not assert this. On the contrary, it shows that the New Testament believers were still offering Animal Sacrifices and keeping the rest of the Laws of God (sometimes called the Law of Moses, because God transmitted them through him). Some 18 to 20 years after the Crucifixion of Jesus, those who had been taught by Jesus in person for years during Jesus's ministry, were still keeping the Laws of God and offering Animal Sacrifices, which are part of the Laws of God. Jesus had appeared to many of these people after his resurrection to teach and instruct them how to proceed. Following his guidance, they were still keeping the Laws of God and offering Animal Sacrifices! Nevertheless, some others had been spreading lies about Paul, saying that Paul was telling the Children of Israel who were living among the Gentiles that they were to no longer keep God's Laws!

Acts 21:23-24 (NASB)

(23) "Therefore do this that we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow;

(24) take them and purify yourself along with them, and pay their expenses in order that they many shave their heads; and all will know that there is nothing to the things which they have been told about you, but that you yourself also walk orderly, keeping the Law.

We see that Paul had earlier also taken a similar vow, as these four men had.

Acts 18:18

(NIV)

(18) ... Before he sailed, he had his hair cut off at Cenchrea because of a vow he had taken.

(NASB)

(18) ... In Cenchrea he had his hair cut, for he was keeping a vow.

Paul is either starting the vow or he has accidentally been defiled and is renewing or restarting the vow! In Numbers 6:2-21 you will see the Nazirite vow is set forth and it is required to shave ones hair in order to start the renewal processes of the vow. As we see in the latter portion of this quote, Animal Sacrifices are required to complete the vow. Paul is there to offer the appropriate Animal Sacrifices for himself, to fulfill his vow. And he is encouraged to also pay for, four others to complete their vows as well (apparently by purchasing the needed Animals for the Sacrifices, that the others needed to complete their vows).

So here we have Paul along with the four others, which he was helping financially, are all in the Temple and in the process of offering the appropriate Animal Sacrifices. In the middle of all of this, Paul is arrested and eventually he is shipped off to Rome.

As was pointed out earlier, many if not most of the believers in Jerusalem had the privilege of being taught by Jesus, face to face, during His earthly ministry. As well as having had the advantage and the blessing of having Jesus appear to them after His Resurrection, to explain what all of this meant. These believers never stopped keeping the Laws of God or refrained from offering Animal Sacrifices!

Acts 21:20 (NASB)

(20) ... “You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed, and they are all zealous for the Law; ...”

And it appears that when the truth is known (to the best of his understanding) Paul always had been and still was, “zealous for the Laws of God”. Just as he always had been! And just like all of these Believers who were in Jerusalem that are being pointed out to Paul.

For many years after the Crucifixion of JESUS, those who had been taught by JESUS, in person, for years during JESUS’s ministry, were still keeping the LAWS OF GOD!

Yet today most, if not all, of Gentile-Christianity claims that JESUS did away with **THE LAW** and instituted “**Grace**” as the only means for the True Believer to become saved and receive ETERNAL LIFE!

However, *as was pointed out earlier*, many if not most of these Believers in Jerusalem, mentioned in the BOOK OF ACTS, had the privilege of being taught by THE MESSIAH, face to face, during His earthly ministry. As well as having had the advantage, and the blessing, of having JESUS appear to them after His Resurrection, to explain what all of this meant and how to proceed. These Believers in the book of Acts **never** refrained from offering Animal Sacrifices while there was still a Temple nor did they stopped adhering to any of the LAWS OF GOD!

The question is: “Were these Judaeo-Christians **wrong** to follow JESUS and worship in the manner that **He, JESUS**, taught them to worship?

Or, **NOT?**