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**“The Answer To Conflicts In Paul’s Early Ministry”**

**Acts 26:15 And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. 16 But rise, and stand upon thy feet: *for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose*, to make thee a minister and a witness *both of these things which thou hast seen*, and of those things in the which *I will appear unto thee*; 17 Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, 18 To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.**

**INTRODUCTION**

There is a general assumption amongst bible students and teachers alike that the transition from the “dispensation of the kingdom” (Matthew – mid Acts) and the “dispensation of the grace of God” (Romans – Philemon) was a sharp and distinct one. This is not the case, as we shall see in this study the transition from was a gradual one. As the dispensation of the kingdom was being “diminished” (Rom 11:12) the dispensation of the grace of God was increasing.

**Some Problems In Paul’s Early Ministry**

 The sign gifts

 Water baptism

These are all problems that are solved by the application of: **Acts 26:15-18.**

**The sign gifts**

 **Miracles** – Acts 15:12 Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what ***miracles and wonders*** God had wrought among the Gentiles by them.

Did Paul, by God, work miracles and wonders? Yes, it is evident that he did. Why did he do them? There are several reasons among which progressive revelation is one.

Paul worked miracles and wonders during his early ministry because….

 As evidence of his apostleship. It is important to keep in mind here that Paul’s gospel was not the same as the twelve’s gospel. So it was important to have his apostleship and message validated by God through the working of miracles and wonders. **2 Cor 12:12 Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds.**

 As a testimony to Israel. Rom 11:11-18. Paul’s provoking ministry was designed to show Israel that God was turning to the Gentiles apart from them. The Gentiles would now have the opportunity to be saved, NOT through Israel, BUT in spite to them.

 Of Progressive revelation. We know this is so because early in Paul’s ministry he healed many and yet toward the end of his ministry this gift was no longer active.

Phil 2:25 Yet I supposed it necessary to send to you **Epaphroditus**, my brother, and companion in labour, and fellowsoldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants. 26 For he longed after you all, and was full of heaviness, because that ye had heard that **he had been sick**. 27 For indeed he was sick nigh unto death: but God had mercy on him; and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.

It is evident here (above) that God had mercy on **Epaphroditus**. Whether directly through the laying on of hands by Paul or in answer to prayer. Yet later on Paul has to leave another “solider” behind sick as indicated in this verse. **2 Tim 4:20 Erastus abode at Corinth: but Trophimus have I left at Miletum sick.**

As the dispensation of the grace of God “progressed” and the dispensation of the kingdom “regressed” we see less and less of the miracles, signs and wonders.

As an illustration of this consider the book of Acts. The first 6 chapters are devoted to the ACTS of the 12 after the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. Through these 6 chapters Israel is the dominate theme. Beginning in 7 you see a rapid decline taking place. Chapter 8 you meet Saul of Tarsus and the decline continues. In 9 Saul is saved and the **body of Christ** begins. From this point on the dispensation of the grace of God is the issue! You hear less and less about the 12 and more and more about Paul and his ministry to the Gentiles.

Signs, miracles and wonders belong to the nation of Israel. When God set Israel aside the sign gifts went with them.

 **Water baptism**

Did Paul water baptize in his early ministry? Yes, he did. Did he at some point stop water baptizing? Yes he did. Why? Again there are several reasons among which “progressive revelation” is one and in this case probably the main reason.

Some Points to consider about baptism and water baptism in particular

 There are at least 14 different baptisms in the bible. Some of them are wet some of them are dry. There is : spirit, fire, death, the Hebrew water rite, John’s, cloud, ark, water, etc., etc,. etc.. Baptism in the “bible” means “identification” or “association”. A good case in point is found in Luke 7. **Luke 7:29 And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John. 30 But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him.**

Those who were water baptized were “identified” with **John Baptist** and his ministry. Those who were not water baptized received as it were “the baptism of rejection” because they “identified” themselves with religious Israel.

 Water baptism during the earthly ministry of Christ:

 was FOR the remission of sins: This means that the content of their salvation package included “water baptism”

**Mark 1:4 John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance *for* the remission of sins. 5 And there went out unto him all the land of Judaea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all *baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins*.**

**Acts 2:38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ *for* the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.**

 Water baptism during the earthly ministry of Christ was for the nation of Israel and her proselytes.

**Acts 2:22 Ye men of Israel,….**

**Acts 2:36 Therefore let all the house of Israel know….**

**Acts 2:41 Then they (Israel ) that gladly received his word were baptized…**

 Paul’s early ministry, as we have already established, included a provoking ministry to Israel. This provocation continued until Israel was set aside. Historically, in your bible, we are talking about Romans chapter 11. For it is in Romans 11 that we read… **Rom 11:11 I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy. 12 Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness? 13 For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office:**

It is clear from these verses that Israel first stumbled, then fell and God now turns to the Gentiles.

**Rom 11:25 For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.**

Is it any wonder then that we now find Paul telling the Corinthians: **1 Cor 1:17 For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. 18 For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.**

Peter, James & John did not “preach the cross” as good news but as a symbol of murder to a rebellious nation.

Peter could never say, under any circumstances, that Christ sent me not to baptize!!!

Peter could never say as Paul said… **1 Cor 1:14 I thank God that I baptized none of you..!!** Because water baptism was the door into the Kingdom for the nation of Israel. It is not, however, the door into the **body of Christ**.

 When you apply the principles of “progressive revelation”, i.e. Paul did not receive all his instructions at one time, the sometimes misunderstood events in the ministry of the apostle Paul disappear.

CONCLUSION

As one dispensation comes to a close and another dispensation begin there is some overlapping that takes place. Paul showed the “signs” of an apostle to demonstrate his authority during his early ministry.

Paul also had a provoking ministry to the nation of Israel which was gradually set aside. Most of these problems occur in the book of Acts which is transitional in nature.

Through progressive revelation we learn that Paul did not receive all his instructions at one time.

Therefore we can conclude that “in Paul’s early ministry he did some things that are not entirely consistent with his latter epistles”. Where those conflicts arise we apply our understanding of “progressive revelation”.

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