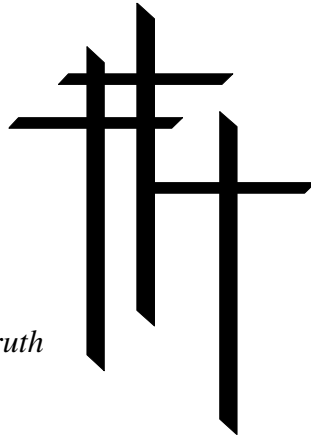


Timely Messenger



*Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth
Speaking the Truth in Love*

Volume 66 No. 5

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PAUL — AN APOSTLE OF JESUS CHRIST

by Gregg Bing

“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God.”

These are the opening words of Paul’s epistle to the Ephesians, words that are often taken for granted, but words that are of great importance if we are to understand the Scriptures and properly discern God’s plan and purpose for believers in this present dispensation of grace.

Most believers make no distinction between Paul’s ministry and that of the Twelve. They lump Paul’s

writings in with Peter’s, John’s, and even Jesus’ earthly teaching, assuming they all teach basically the same thing and they are all written to us for our obedience. While some might think this would encourage unity among believers, it has resulted, instead, in unanswered questions, confusion, and disunity.

Paul was an apostle of Jesus Christ, and while his ministry and apostleship were not the same as that of the Twelve, he was sent out in accordance with “the will of God.” Believers

who stress the importance of studying the writings and ministry of Paul are often criticized as being “Paulites,” sometimes even accused of placing Paul above Christ. What these critics fail to see is: the unique nature of Paul’s ministry and apostleship, the special revelation given to Paul by the risen and ascended Lord Jesus Christ, and the vital importance of Paul’s writings for believers today.

In order to understand the nature of Paul’s apostleship, we will address three key questions: (1) How did Paul come to be an apostle? (2) What was Paul called to do? and (3) What was the nature of Paul’s ministry?

Paul’s Dramatic Conversion

Paul was originally known as Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:11, 21:39). His father was a Pharisee, one of Israel’s religious leaders (Acts 23:6). Saul was, therefore, raised according to the strictest sect of the Jews’ religion (Acts 26:5). He was trained in Jerusa-

lem at the feet of Gamaliel, one of the most respected teachers of the law (Acts 22:3). As a student, Saul advanced in Judaism beyond many of his contemporaries, “being exceedingly zealous for the traditions of the fathers” (Gal. 1:14). While Saul had a tremendous “zeal for God” (Acts 22:3), it was misplaced, for what he did, he did “ignorantly in unbelief” (1 Tim. 1:13).

We are introduced to Saul of Tarsus at the stoning of Stephen. Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, was falsely accused by the Jews of speaking against the temple and the law of Moses. Stephen was brought before the Jewish Sanhedrin and given an opportunity to defend himself against the charges. He used the time to witness to these Jewish leaders. At the close of his testimony, Stephen brought an indictment against the Jews, accusing them of resisting the witness of the Holy Spirit. By betraying and murdering the Lord Jesus, they had followed in the footsteps of their fathers, who killed the proph-

ets God sent to them. The Jewish leaders were indignant, stopping up their ears and dragging Stephen outside to be stoned. The witnesses laid their coats down at the feet of the young man, Saul of Tarsus (Acts 7:58), who was in complete agreement that Stephen should die (Acts 8:1).

Saul had a zeal for God, but, like the majority of the Jews of his day, it was “not according to knowledge.” Saul, in his religious zeal, thought he could “establish his own righteousness” by keeping the traditions of the fathers, but he was “ignorant of God’s righteousness” and refused to believe in God’s righteous Son, the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 10:1-4). Thus, Saul became the chief persecutor of the church, that is of all who believed that Jesus of Nazareth was Lord and Christ. Paul later would describe himself this way:

“Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. This I also did in

Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities.” (Acts 26:9-11)

It was while on the road to Damascus, where he intended to continue his persecution of Jesus’ disciples, that the life of Saul of Tarsus was changed forever. As he neared the city, suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. As he fell to the ground, he heard a voice from heaven saying, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” Saul answered, “Who are You, Lord?” and the Lord said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.” Saul, trembling and astonished, responded, “Lord, what do You want me to do?” (Acts 9:3-6)

What a tremendous conversion this was—a life completely turned around, and all because of God’s marvelous grace. Saul was not seeking to know God through Christ, he was persecuting Him. Yet, when brought face to face with the Lord Jesus Christ, Saul came to see and believe that Jesus of Nazareth was truly Israel’s Messiah, the very Lord of glory. Saul later wrote to Timothy and described it this way:

“And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life.” (1 Timothy 1:14-16)

Saul’s salvation serves as a pattern to all who will

believe in the Lord Jesus as Savior. If God’s grace could save Saul of Tarsus, after all the terrible sins he committed, it can save anyone, for “where sin abounded, grace abounded much more” (Rom. 5:20). Saul was saved when He heard the word of truth, from the Lord Jesus Himself, and believed it. It was not because of any goodness within him or because of any works of righteousness on his part (Tit. 3:5), but by simple faith in God’s Son (Eph. 2:8-9, John 3:16).

Saul, whom we will call Paul from this point on, was saved by God for a purpose, but his calling was distinct from that of those who were apostles before him. Next month, we will continue this study, looking at

Paul’s Distinct Calling

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.

—Ephesians 1:7

TIMELY MESSENGER

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GIVING UNDER GRACE

By R. B. Shiflet

The increasing emphasis on money in most churches is causing many people to study the Word of God for the truth on this important subject. Each year brings new schemes to raise money to support the increasingly top-heavy ecclesiastical organizations with which so many of God's own are affiliated. A professor in a large institution of higher learning recently was heard advising several hundred young preachers to get new members to sign tithing cards as soon as they joined the church, "before someone tells them they are not under the law, but under grace." A large first church in an east Texas city has

rated its members according to the amount they contribute to the church each year, while another first church of the same denomination in another Texas city has developed a slogan: "Would you want your neighbor to know how much you give?" These clearly are efforts to play on the desire for social approval and the wish to outdo one's neighbor, and to use these urges to increase the funds coming into the church organization. The question we are considering is not "to give or not to give," but a study of giving as a member of the body of Christ, under grace, in contrast with giving as an Israelite under the law.

In the first place, the word "tithe" is found in only one portion of Scripture this side of Calvary, and that is Hebrews 7:1-10, which refers back to Genesis 14:17-24. Many glory in these passages, insisting that since Abraham paid tithes, tithing ante-dates the Mosaic Law, and is therefore binding today. By this same argument, one would have to accept circumcision, (Genesis 17:9-14);

animal sacrifices, (Genesis 4:4; 8:20); the seventh day Sabbath (Genesis 2:2,3); etc. Some hold that Hebrews 7:8, which says "men that die receive tithes" would indicate, by the verb tense, that they are still being received. In the same book, chapter 10 and verse 11, however, we read that priests were still offering daily sacrifices, but that does not indicate that God required either the tithe or the sacrifice at that time.

Tithing definitely was incorporated into the law program, as is brought out in Leviticus 27:30-34. Note how carefully God links this with Israel. After giving the law of the tithe, He says: "These are the commandments, which the Lord commanded Moses for the children of Israel in mount Sinai." (Leviticus 23:7-34.) By reading Leviticus 25:8-24, one can see how the "year of jubilee," which saw the land redistributed at regular intervals, would make the tithe a fair system under that economy. From Deuteronomy 12:5-18; 14:22-29; and 26:12-14, it seems that a second tithe was taken each

year, with possibly a third tithe each third year. Hence, instead of 10%, as much as 30% may have been taken in some years. Modern tithers make no effort to carry this over.

Nehemiah 10 gives an account of the revival and restoration after captivity, which included a revival of tithing. Again, it is clearly linked with Israel (Nehemiah 10:39) and with God's law given by Moses (Nehemiah 10:29).

In Malachi 3:7-15, we have the verses that are overworked by preachers today who accuse believers of robbing God if they do not tithe. The "storehouse" of verse 10, they tell us, is the local church treasury, and church members are told that they have actually given nothing until they have paid the tithe to the storehouse. Anything above the tithe, they say, is an offering. Actually, God nowhere calls the local congregation of members of the body of Christ a "storehouse." The storehouse, under law, was the Jewish temple. Note again how God tags the verse in Malachi with Israel (3:6-

"Jacob"). He calls tithing his ordinance (3:14).

Any believer with only a superficial knowledge of the Word knows we are "not under the law, but under grace." (Romans 6:14-15). Colossians 2:14 assures us that the ordinances (cf. Malachi 3:14) have been blotted out, nailed to His cross. How does this affect our giving?

First, our motive for giving is infinitely greater. Instead of bringing a tithe into an earthly storehouse because a legal ordinance requires it, we give because we have received God's unspeakable gift (2 Corinthians 8:5), eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 6: 23).

Who should give? Every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ has the privilege of giving (1 Corinthians 16:2; 2 Corinthians 9:7).

How much should be given? It is here that confusion arises, when truth which God gave to Israel under the dispensation of the law is brought over and forced upon members of the body of Christ, living under grace. Two princi-

ples are laid down to guide the member of the body of Christ as to how much he should give. He is to give "as God hath prospered him." (1 Corinthians 16:2). This suggests giving in proportion to our income, and giving systematically. As the consecrated believer's income increases, his love gifts to support the work of the Lord will increase. The second principle regarding the amount to be given is laid down in 2 Corinthians 9:7. Here we learn that the believer is to give "as he hath purposed in his heart." The yielded believer prays much about his giving as to the amount, the phase of the Lord's work to which the gift will go, etc. The amount the believer under grace gives, then, is based on the amount of his income and the amount he purposes in his heart to give. The question of purposing in the heart leads to the method of giving. Much can be gleaned from 2 Corinthians chapters 8 and 9.

The giver is to have a willing mind (2 Corinthians 8:12), that is, a desire to give without coer-

cion. When one gives on that basis, it is accepted according to what a man hath, and not according to that he hath not. Does this not eliminate pledging, which is actually giving out of that which one does not have?

Besides giving with a willing mind, we are to give cheerfully (2 Corinthians 9:7). The Greek word for “cheerful” is “hilarious,” from which we get our word “hilarious.” God loves a cheerful giver — one who gives joyously — a happy giver.

This same verse (2 Corinthians 9:7) teaches us that we are to give freely. Our gifts should be made without compulsion, “not of necessity.” Contrast because a strict law demands that we give, with giving cheerfully, not because we are bound to, but because it is our desire!

The believer under grace is to give bountifully and abundantly (2 Corinthians 9:6; 8:7). Many have been enabled to give far more than the legal tithe, and have done so. One well-known Christian business man has consistently

given 90% of his profits to the Lord’s work, and used the other 10% for personal needs, and God has prospered him. On the other hand, God has many choice saints with a meager income, barely able to meet life’s needs, whose financial contributions are not much in numbers, but are acceptable in God’s sight on the basis of the above standards. Many who have been unable to give financially to the support of the gospel have spent much time in prayer and witnessing, and they are accepted according to what they have, and not what they have not. Under the law, one day out of seven and one tenth of the income were set apart for God. Under grace, all we are and all we have belong to Him. “Ye are not your own; ye are bought with a price.” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). Giving can and should be a means of worship. But giving is a matter that should be strictly between the believer and His Lord; no man or men have Scriptural authority to dictate the lowliest believer how much he should give nor how he

should give it. When believers are taught the Word of God, which includes not only the gospel of grace, but truth concerning our position in Christ and our walk as believers, they will get a joy out of giving, and the high-pressure schemes will be unnecessary.

By way of warning, we urge everyone to be very careful and prayerful about giving. Are you sure how the money you give is being used? Many of the churches which are strongest in demanding a tithe are affiliated with the atheistic National Council of Churches (formerly Federal Council) and a part of your gift may be going to help this organization in its campaign to deny the Word of God. Speaking of this organization, John T. Flynn, in his book *The Road Ahead* says “... this powerful Council issues periodicals, pamphlets, books and booklets and sends out preachers to preach the gospel, and that it is by all odds the most powerful apparatus in existence for propaganda among the Christian laity of America. And I know

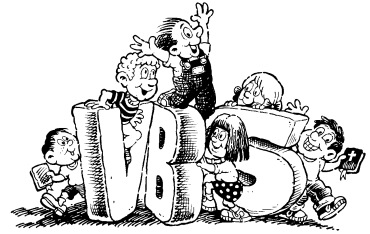
moreover, and assert, that many of the men most powerful in directing its affairs are using its machinery to promote the interests of a Socialist revolution in America. The humble communicants of countless thousands of little churches all over this broad land dedicated to the worship of God and the spiritual needs of their people are paying the bills for this propaganda drive. I do not believe that they realize what is being done by leaders.” (pp. 107-108). Are you one of those who is supporting this anti-Christian organization which wears a Christian name? It might pay to check up. The above quotation comes, not from the pen of some over-wrought fundamentalist, but from a recognized sociologist of our day.

To summarize, every believer in Christ has the privilege of giving to the Lord’s work because we have received His unspeakable gift and have given ourselves to Him. We are to give as God hath prospered us; that is, we are to give systematically. There

is nothing wrong in giving a tenth, so long as it is understood that we are not legally bound to any tithing ordinance of Israel. These gifts are to be given as we have purposed in our hearts, with a willing mind, cheerfully, freely, bountifully and abundantly. We are saved by grace; let us live under grace; let us learn the superiority of giving under grace to tithing as though we were under law.

Every man,
according as he
purposeth in his
heart, so let
him give, not
grudgingly, or
of necessity:
for God loveth
a cheerful giver.

2 Corinthians 9:7



Vacation Bible School

*Grace Bible Church
Fort Worth, TX*

June 5-9, 2006

Grace Bible Church will hold their Vacation Bible School on June 5-9 this year from 9:30 to Noon each day. We will have pizza and ice cream for lunch on Friday. There will be classes for ages 3 to 14.

Vacation Bible School

*Eleventh Avenue Church
Mineral Wells, TX*

June 5-9, 2006

Eleventh Avenue Church will hold their Vacation Bible School on June 5-9 this year from 6 to 8 PM each night. There will be an ice cream supper on Saturday, June 10, with games and skits.

BIBLE STUDY BOOKS

The following Bible study materials are available free of charge for your personal use or for use in teaching a Bible class.

by Charles Wages

- Written for Our Learning
- Stepping Stones to Truth
- Past Pentecost to Paul
- Points to Ponder
- The Ages
- Saved by Grace
- Ministry of the Church
- The Perfect Will of God
- Once in a Lifetime
- Fellowship in Christ
- Hidden in God
- Thoughts on Vision
- Spiritual Fitness
- What Saith the Scripture
(Set of 6 Diff. Tracts)

by Mrs. Charles Wages

- Seasons
- Spiritual Thoughts for Young Minds
- A Man Named Paul
- Studies for Women

by R.B. Shiflet

- Informal Study: Philippians
- Informal Study: Ephesians
- Personal Meditations on Paul's Post-Acts Ministry
- Giving Under Grace
- Ultradispensationalism
- The Lord's Supper

by Ike T. Sidebottom

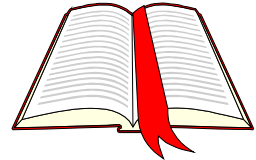
- The Book of Acts
- Through the Bible Dispensationally
- Prophetic Gleanings from Daniel and Revelation
- Saved, Settled and Sure
- Fellowship of the Mystery

by Gregg Bing

- Keys to the Word : Understanding the Bible
- That I May Know Him
- Making Good Choices
- For God So Loved the World
- It is Finished!
- Conformed to the Image of His Son
- The End of the World
- Assurance : Can We Know that We are Saved?

by John D. LaVier

- Yokefellows : Paul and His Companions
- Sure Words of Prophecy
- The Lord has Spoken
- Why is Heaven Silent?



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