

*Of which I was made a servant, according to the stewardship of God
which was given me toward you, to fulfill the word of God,
the mystery which has been hidden for ages and generations.
But now it has been revealed to his saints, to whom God was pleased to make known
what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles,
which is Christ in you, the hope of glory; whom we proclaim,
admonishing every man and teaching every man in all wisdom,
that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.
(Col 1:25-28)*

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Paul's Gospel in relation to Everyone Today

Introduction

Have we ever wondered why Jesus Christ chose only twelve apostles with him in his earthly ministry? What was Christ's mission on earth? What was the mission of the twelve apostles? Why did Christ after his resurrection call the apostle Paul? And later gave him an abundance of revelations including a final secret hidden in times past? Do we all really have the same understanding of the apostle Paul and the Gospel entrusted to him for the nations (that is, for us Gentiles)? If we really do, especially of the latter, there would not have been so many differing viewpoints as evidenced in the many Christian denominations and sects prevalent today. However much or little we know of Paul and the Gospel meant for us today, it is only beneficial if we do another reflection on it.

Most of us know something about Paul from the Scriptures. In an account before the crowd in Jerusalem Paul said:

"I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, instructed according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God, even as you all are this day. I persecuted this Way to the

death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women. As also the high priest and all the council of the elders testify, from whom also I received letters to the brothers, and traveled to Damascus to bring them also who were there to Jerusalem in bonds to be punished.

(Acts 22:3-5)

Paul gave a brief history of himself in his letter to the Philippians:

Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the assembly; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, found blameless.

(Phil 3:5-6)

In *Acts 9:3-16*, we read of Paul's conversion:

As he traveled, it happened that he got close to Damascus, and suddenly a light from the sky shone around him. He fell on the earth, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" He said, "Who are you, Lord?" The Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise up, and enter into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

The men who traveled with him stood speechless, hearing the sound, but seeing no one. Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened, he saw no one. They led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus. He was without sight for three days, and neither ate nor drank.

Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias!" He said, "Behold, it's me, Lord." The Lord said to him, "Arise, and go to the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judah for one named Saul, a man of Tarsus. For behold, he is praying, and in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in, and laying his hands on him, that he might receive his sight."

But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he did to your saints at Jerusalem. Here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name." But the Lord said to him, "Go your way, for he is my chosen vessel to bear my name before the nations and kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for my name's sake." (Acts 9:3-16)

In another account of his Damascus encounter with Jesus, Paul himself recounted what the Lord said to him:

But arise, and stand on your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose: to appoint you a servant and a witness both of the things which you have seen, and of the things which I will reveal to you; delivering you from the people, and from the Gentiles, to whom I send you, to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive remission of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in me.' (Acts 26:16-18)

Immediately after his encounter with Jesus at Damascus, Paul spent several days there with the disciples and he started to preach.

Immediately in the synagogues he proclaimed the Christ, that he is the Son of God. All who heard him were amazed, and said, "Isn't this he who in Jerusalem made havoc of those who called on this name? And he had come here intending to bring them bound before the chief priests!" But Saul increased more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived at Damascus, proving that this is the Christ. (Acts 9:20-22)

"After many days", Paul encountered resistance from the Jews to whom he preached. He was about to be assassinated, when he was then aided to escape and he went to Jerusalem to preach. There also he was hated for his message, and he was taken away by some disciples to avoid being assassinated (Acts 9:23-30).

We read in *Galations 1:17* that Paul went to Arabia, and in *2Cor 12:7* we read that he received surpassingly great revelations from the risen Christ in heaven.

Paul is very emphatic about the Gospel entrusted to him. In Galations, we hear him saying:

Paul, an apostle (not from men, neither through man, but through Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead),
(*Gal 1:1*)

We hear the same emphasis in the following verses:

But when it was the good pleasure of God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me through his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I didn't immediately confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia. Then I returned to Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Peter, and stayed with him fifteen days. But of the other apostles I saw no one, except James, the Lord's brother. Now about the things which I write to you, behold, before God, I'm not lying.
(*Gal 1:15-20*)

Then after a period of fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus also with me. I went up by revelation, and I laid before them the Good News which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately before those who were respected, for fear that I might be running, or had run, in vain. But not even Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised. This was because of the false brothers secretly brought in, who stole in to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage; to whom we gave no place in the way of subjection, not for an hour, that the truth of the Good News might continue with you. But from those who were reputed to be important (whatever they were, it makes no difference to me; God doesn't show partiality to man) – they, I say, who were respected imparted nothing to me, but to the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the Good News for the uncircumcision, even as Peter with the Good News for

the circumcision (for he who appointed Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision appointed me also to the Gentiles); and when they perceived the grace that was given to me, James and Cephas and John, they who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcision. They only asked us to remember the poor – which very thing I was also zealous to do.

(Gal 2:1-10)

But to the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the Good News for the uncircumcision, even as Peter with the Good News for the circumcision (for he who appointed Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision appointed me also to the Gentiles); and when they perceived the grace that was given to me, James and Cephas and John, they who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcision.

(Gal 2:7-9)

But I make known to you, brothers, concerning the Good News which was preached by me, that it is not according to man. For neither did I receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came to me through revelation of Jesus Christ.

(Gal 1:11-12)

Elsewhere, Paul was equally emphatic about the Gospel he was entrusted with, one meant for the Uncircumcision (the nations or Gentiles).

Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the Good News of God, which he promised before through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, who was declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we received grace and apostleship, for obedience of faith among all the nations, for his name's sake; among whom you are also called to belong to Jesus Christ;

(Rom 1:1-6)

in the day when God will judge the secrets of men, according to my Good News, by Jesus Christ.
(Rom 2:16)

For I speak to you who are Gentiles. Since then as I am an apostle to Gentiles, I glorify my ministry;
(Rom 11:13)

But I write the more boldly to you in part, as reminding you, because of the grace that was given to me by God, that I should be a servant of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, serving as a priest* the Good News of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be made acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.
(Rom 15:15-16)

[* Paul was acting as a priest in the transition during the Acts period until the time when a secret was fully revealed to him as recorded in the book of Ephesians (and other of his letters written towards the close of his ministry). During the Acts period, Israel (the Jews) were witnessed to by all the apostles but the Jews kept rejecting Jesus Christ as their Saviour and they were blinded as a nation (only a remnant of them believed). Their blindness will be taken away in the future and they will then believe in Christ their Saviour. We shall explore this later.]

according to the Good News of the glory of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust.
(1Tim 1:11)

to which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth in Christ, not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.
(1Tim 2:7)

Whereunto I am appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles.
(2Tim 1:11)

Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel: Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound.
(2Tim 2:8-9)

But hath in due times manifested his word through preaching, which is committed unto me according to the commandment of God our Saviour;
(Titus 1:3)

For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles,
(Eph 3:1)

Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ;
(Eph 3:7-8)

Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God; *Even* the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:
(Col 1:25-27)

We notice that PAUL has been emphasizing repeatedly that HE was the apostle carrying the Gospel or Good News to the nations. And we are of the nations (not of Israel). Are we not therefore notified to pay very close attention to all that PAUL teaches and distinguish the differences that he intended for us to know? There must be some real significance in Paul's claims as recorded in Holy Writ. There must be differences between what Paul teaches as the apostle to the Uncircumcision and what Peter and others of the Twelve teach to the Circumcision. Let us notice for example that James writes his letter to the Jews: "the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad" (James 1:1). In another example, we note that Peter writes his letter also addressed to the Jews: "the strangers scattered throughout Pontus..." (1Peter 1:1).

There are two groups of people to whom the gospel of God is preached, the content and scope of each message is not exactly the same, as

we shall try to show. Else why would God call another person apart from the Twelve to preach to the Gentiles? Paul is trying to draw our attention to him, attention to the abundance of revelations which he received from the risen Christ and which he wants to convey to us because they are meant for us.

What OUR APOSTLE teaches US (Gentiles) carry a message of far greater transcendent glory than what any of the twelve apostles teaches to the Circumcision (Jews). This essay aims to show some of the differences.

Does it mean that the letters written by any of the Twelve (e.g. Peter, James, John) are not meant for us or applicable to us? Are they not all based on the foundation of Jesus Christ our Saviour? Indeed, Paul says that:

For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.
(1Cor 3:11)

Paul also says that believers are “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone” (Eph 2:20).

However, note that Paul also said (to his co-worker Timothy who was also to teach others after Paul):

Give diligence to present yourself approved by God, a workman who doesn’t need to be ashamed, properly handling the Word of Truth.
(2Tim 2:15)

Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. (2Tim 2:15 KJV)

Be diligent to present thyself approved to God – a workman irreproachable, rightly dividing the word of the truth. *(same verse, Young’s Literal Translation)*

Hold the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.
(2Tim 1:13)

In this study, we also note the words of a Bible teacher Miles Coverdale of yonder years who said that it would greatly help our understanding of Scripture if we took into account not only what is spoken or written but also:

of whom,
to whom,
with what words,
at what time,
where,
to what intent,
with what circumstances, and
considering what goes before and what follows after.

All scriptures are meant for us, for our learning, but not all scriptures are about us Gentiles, as Paul's letters are. In fact, most of the Old Testament scriptures deal with Israel as the centre of God's plan. Israel, though now blinded, will yet be the centre of things in the future (the Millennium).

Do we notice (in *Matt 15:24*) that Jesus himself said He was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel? This is confirmed by Paul (in *Rom 15:8*) who says that Christ has become a servant of the Jews (Circumcision in the Greek) on behalf of God's truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs.

Paul even told the Corinthians (*2Cor 5:16*):

Therefore we know no one after the flesh from now on. Even though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now we know him so no more.

These contrasts should give us food for thought and a desire to listen with due care to all that our apostle Paul has to say.

Body of Christ

One most important distinction we need to keep in mind is that the church or assembly (Greek: *ekklesia* which means "out-called ones") is known in Paul's usage as the "body of Christ." We read thus:

He put all things in subjection under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things for the assembly, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.
(*Eph 1:22-23*)

For the perfecting of the saints, to the work of serving, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a full grown man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;
(*Eph 4:12-13*)

For the husband is the head of the wife, and Christ also is the head of the assembly, being himself the savior of the body.
(*Eph 5:23*)

He is the head of the body, the assembly, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.
(*Col 1:18*)

... holding firmly to the Head, from whom all the body, being supplied and knit together through the joints and ligaments, grows with God's growth.
(*Col 2:19*)

For even as we have many members in one body, and all the members don't have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.
(*Rom 12:4-5*)

For as the body is one, and has many members, and all the members of the body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free; and were all given to drink into one Spirit.
(*1Cor 12:12-13*)

Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.
(*1Cor 12:27*)

Through Paul's gospel,

... the Gentiles are fellow heirs, and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of his promise in Christ Jesus through the Good News, of which I was made a servant, according to the gift of that grace of God which was given me according to the working of his power.

(Eph 3:6-7)

The church as the spiritual body of Christ is never mentioned or indicated at all in any of the Gospels or letters of the Twelve. Rather, to the "out-called" of saved Israelites according to the flesh, they are called the bride, and in the Second Coming as "bride, wife of the Lamb" (*Rev 21:9*). The figures of "bride" and "bridegroom," and "wife" and "husband" are often used for the relationship between Israel and the LORD in the Hebrew prophecies, as are the words "betroth" and "married" (*Isa 54:5, 62:5, Jer 3:14, Hosea 2*).

The Secret revealed to Paul

Meanwhile, we look at the secret revealed to Paul, which he disclosed fully during his Roman imprisonment towards the last years of his ministry. This is contained in Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Paul's pastoral letters (*1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon*).

For this cause I, Paul, am the prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles, if it is so that you have heard of the administration of that grace of God which was given me toward you; how that by revelation the mystery [secret] was made known to me, as I wrote before in few words, by which, when you read, you can perceive my understanding in the mystery [secret] of Christ; which in other generations was not made known to the children of men, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit;

(Eph 3:1-5)

that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of his promise in Christ Jesus through the Good News, of which I was made a servant, according to the gift of that grace of God which was given me according to the working of his power. To me, the very least

of all saints, was this grace given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all men see what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now through the assembly the manifold wisdom of God might be made known to the principalities and the powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord;
(*Eph 3:6-11*)

The secret that the church comprising of Jewish and Gentile Christians in a joint body in Christ, now with no distinction whatever, was not made known in earlier ages until fully revealed in its glory by Paul after the Acts period when the letter of Ephesians was penned, some time about 63 A.D. (Everything earlier was to “Jews first.”) A glimpse of this secret is seen in an earlier letter of Paul (in the concluding verses of Romans). Even the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms did not know this secret before Paul came on the scene (*Eph 3:10* above).

Only a small portion of the Israelites (the Jews) are now chosen together with the out-called of the Gentiles to form the church which is the body of Christ. Paul says that “at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace” (*Rom 11:5*). The majority of the Israelites are blinded (*Rom 11:7-8*), being in a temporary state of rejection or casting away, “until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in” and then “all Israel will be saved” (*Rom 11:15, 25, 26*). We the Gentile Christians today are not a so-called “spiritual Israel” taking over Israel’s promises, as is popularly understood.

The Old Testament prophecies do not apply to us, as is quite frequently (and inaccurately) quoted by some. Our calling today as the Body of Christ was not known in OT times, as Paul clearly indicated, although there were hints of Gentile salvation “to provoke Israel to jealousy” (*Rom 10:19, 11:11*). The calling of Gentile people referred to in some OT prophecies refers to a period of time yet future of us – during the coming Millennium when Israel will then believe in Jesus Christ, their blindness being then taken away, and they will be restored as the chosen nation of God under Christ who comes back to rule the world from Jerusalem. At that time Israel will

continue to be the channel (as they were meant to be but failed to do so in the past) through whom the Gentile nations are to be blessed. The Gentiles were always subservient to Israel in the OT scriptures and they will also be subservient to Israel in the future millennial rule of Christ. Unlike then and in the millennial future, believers today from both the Gentile nations and Israel are called together to form the spiritual “body of Christ,” both being on equal status, with no distinction at all.

Meanwhile, in chapter 2 of Ephesians we note further details of this secret:

But God, being rich in mercy, for his great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with him, and made us to sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus;
(Eph 2:4-7)

for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, that no one would boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared before that we would walk in them. Therefore remember that once you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called “uncircumcision” by that which is called “circumcision,” (in the flesh, made by hands); that you were at that time separate from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of the promise, having no hope and without God in the world.
(Eph 2:8-12)

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off are made near in the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who made both one, and broke down the middle wall of partition, having abolished in the flesh the hostility, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man of the two, making peace; and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, having killed the hostility thereby. He came and preached peace to you who

were far off and to those who were near. For through him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God, being built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief cornerstone; in whom the whole building, fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit.

(Eph 2:13-22)

For our citizenship is in heaven, from where we also wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will change the body of our humiliation to be conformed to the body of his glory, according to the working by which he is able even to subject all things to himself.

(Phil 3:20-21)

Up to this point, we summarise:

- a) Paul is the apostle to the nations, he is our apostle;
- b) He has been revealed a secret kept hidden from ages past;
- c) The secret is that everyone who is called today belongs to a spiritual group called the Body of Christ;
- d) This Body of Christ is a joint-body between Jewish and Gentile Christians;
- e) Through the blood of Christ, these two groups of people who believe are considered “one new man” reconciled to Christ in peace;
- f) This Body of Christ is now in Christ already seated in the heavenly realms; and their citizenship is in heaven;
- g) This Body of Christ is a “holy temple in the Lord” and has become “a dwelling place for God’s Spirit.”

Brief Gentile History

Let us now look briefly at our Gentile history. We are familiar with the story of Noah and the worldwide flood, in which eight persons were saved. The offspring of Noah's children years later began to build a "tower to heaven" with a view to escape an imagined and feared future flood. God disliked what they were doing and He came and confounded their language so that they were unsuccessful in building the tower of Babel. God gave the people different languages. The people were scattered (*Gen 11:8*) and went in their own ways (*Acts 14:16*) and they tried to seek God (*Acts 17:27*) and worshipped idols (*Rom 1:21-25*) and sacrificed to demons (*1Cor 10:20*). Various people went about to form their own civilisations. These Gentiles were "at that time separate from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of the promise, having no hope and without God in the world."(*Eph 2:12* as quoted earlier).

This Gentile state of affairs continued until the call and separation of Paul (*Acts 13*) who acted as a priest (*Rom 15:15-16*) of the Gospel of God until the end of the Acts period.

We have seen that in the Gospel preached by Paul, that we Gentile believers have been elevated to the status of the Body of Christ, now spiritually considered seated in the heavenly realms, with God's spirit indwelling us. Our citizenship is in heaven, not in a future earth.

We are not "kings and priests of Christ" as this phrase is frequently heard applied to Christians. We are rather, if anything, their Temple! And we are the Body of Christ, and not the bride. The body metaphor conveys a much greater intimacy – the picture of "inseparable-ness" with the Head (Christ). Look at what Paul says so wonderfully:

For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

(*Rom 8:38-39*)

How reassuring are the above words! Do we really believe them? Do we believe every word of them? They call for much praise and meditation!

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ;
(*Eph 1:3*)

Although believers are spiritually in the heavenly realms “in the spirit”, they are not there physically at this time. We still have to live our lives on earth until the coming of the Lord for us. We are exhorted by Paul in his writings to live a holy life, loving one another. Our body is considered dead because of sin but our spirit is alive in Christ (*Rom 6:11, 8:10*).

Set your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, our life, is revealed, then you will also be revealed with him in glory.
(*Col 3:2-4*)

Whilst on earth, we await the resurrection at the coming of Christ. Paul tells us that we will be given an imperishable spiritual body (*1Cor 15:40-58*) when Christ calls:

Now I say this, brothers, that flesh and blood can’t inherit the Kingdom of God; neither does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I tell you a mystery. We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we will be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.
(*1Cor 15:50-53*)

But we don’t want you to be ignorant, brothers, concerning those who have fallen asleep, so that you don’t grieve like the rest, who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. For this we tell you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left to the coming of the

Lord, will in no way precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with God's trumpet. The dead in Christ will rise first, then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air. So we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore comfort one another with these words.

(1Thes 4:13-18)

As seen from the above, the destiny of present-day believers is in the heavenly realms, not on the earth. Now we are in spirit in heaven, but at that time we will be there in actual person, raised and clothed with a glorified body. Some Christians think that we will be resurrected to be on earth in the Millennium because Christ says "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth" (*Matt 5:5*). This booklet will attempt to show clearly that there are two groups of people, each with its own different sphere of calling, both groups being based on the same foundation of Jesus Christ. There will not be confusion if we apply the scriptures correctly.

We must note Paul's usage of scriptural phrases and metaphors in order to properly understand their meaning. Paul tells us:

This I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and all discernment; so that you may approve the things that are excellent; that you may be sincere and without offense to the day of Christ;

(Phil 1:9-10)

And this I pray, that your love yet more and more may abound in full knowledge, and all judgment, for your proving the things that differ, that ye may be pure and offence less – to a day of Christ. *(same verse, Young's Literal Translation)*

We have also read that we should "rightly divide the word of truth" (*2Tim 2:15*). We are also exhorted by Paul to keep to "a pattern of sound words" (*1Tim 1:13*) even as he has taught. If we follow Paul's advice, Scripture will really come alive as never before, giving us a much clearer picture of God's plan. We can understand the Bible clearly. Difficulties will simply vanish – if we distinguish the things that differ.

Now, let us briefly look at:

Israel's History, Prophecy and Hope

“After showing the futility of man’s ways from Adam through the Flood to the scattering of the Gentiles at Babel, God in His plan has selected an individual – Abram (later renamed Abraham) – through whom a chosen race of people was to issue and to become recipient of great physical blessings on earth.” (Chafer’s Systematic Theology)

Now Yahweh said to Abram, “Get out of your country, and from your relatives, and from your father’s house, to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation. I will bless you and make your name great. You will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you. In you will all of the families of the earth be blessed.”

(Gen 12:1-3)

Read the interesting story of Abraham and God’s promises to him in the rest of the book of Genesis. Note particularly:

Abraham’s offspring will be as numerous as the “dust of the earth” (*Gen 13:15-16*) and as the “stars of heaven” (*Gen 15:5*). Abram believed the LORD, and He credited it to him as righteousness (*Gen 15:6*). The boundary of the Promised Land is given in *Gen 15:18-21*. The Abrahamic covenant is unconditional (not dependent on man) and one sided (*Gen 15:8-12, 17*). God repeated His promise to Abraham in *Gen 17:1-8, 15-16*. Abraham was to become a father of many nations, and he was later given the circumcision covenant (*Gen 17:9-14*).

We are familiar with the story of God testing Abraham by asking him to sacrifice his son Isaac. God, after testing Abraham, repeated His promise: “I will bless you greatly, and I will multiply your seed greatly like the stars of the heavens, and like the sand which is on the seashore.” (*Gen 22:16-18*).

God’s promises were again repeated to Abraham’s son Isaac (*Gen 26:3-5*) and again later on to Isaac’s son Jacob (*Gen 35:10-12*) whose name is changed to Israel. The promises are assured on account of Abraham’s obedience (*Gen 26:5*).

Israel had twelve sons and they were the ancestors of the present day Jews (Israelite nation). Israel is God's elect nation (*Matt 24, Mark 13*), a holy people and a special people, a treasured possession above all the nations (*Deut 7:6-8, 14:2*). The Jewish nation is to be the centre of all things pertaining to the earth (*Deut 32:8*).

Later on, because of transgressions, the Mosaic Law was introduced through the intermediary of angels (*Gal 3:19, Acts 7:53, Heb 2:2*). The Mosaic Law carries conditional blessings to those Israelites who kept it and punishment to those who did not keep it. Both blessings and curses are detailed in *Deut 28:1-6*.

In *Exodus 19:5-6*, we read of Moses being told to speak to the Israelites: "Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

Deut 28:58-68 speaks of Israel's punishment for disobedience and worldwide dispersion. Restoration is dependent on repentance (*Deut 30:1-7*). Israel's apostasy was forewarned in *Deut 31:16-23*.

God's unconditional covenant made to Abraham was again repeated to Israel's descendent David (*2Sam 7:11-16*).

When the promised Messiah came, Israel as a nation did not recognise or receive him! "He came unto His own and His own received Him not" (*John 1:11*). This introductory statement from John's gospel account summarises the story of the four gospels – the story of the rejection of the Messiah by Israel.

The mission of the twelve apostles, like Christ's physical ministry, was to the twelve tribes of Israel (*Matt 10:5-6, James 1:1, Acts 11:19*). The twelve apostles were promised to sit on the twelve thrones (*Matt 19:28*) who will then fulfil the "great commission" of converting the Gentile nations during the Millennium. (There is no such thing as apostolic succession.)

After the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ, then came the witness of the Holy Spirit as promised by the Saviour, followed by great demonstration (miracles) of the powers of the kingdom to come.

Yet again, Israel as a nation rejected this great witness as documented in the book of Acts. This resulted in their being blinded and temporarily set aside by God so that grace is now shown to the other nations who hitherto were aliens from the commonwealth of Israel (*Eph 2:12*).

“With the final public witness to the foremost of Jews in Rome, Israel as a nation was temporarily blinded and set aside (*Acts 28:17-28, Rom 11:15*). Priestly mediation and handwriting of decrees were annulled (*Eph 2:13-16, Col 2:13-15*).” (Chafer’s Systematic Theology).

Because of the Israelites’ failure, their blessings are temporarily suspended and a New Covenant will be made by the Lord with them in the Messianic kingdom (*Heb 8:8, Jer 31:31-34*). The New Covenant is not in force now and it is not meant for Christians today. It is yet future and it is for the Israelite nation in the Millennium. Israel was to be witnesses for their Jehovah God to the world. They failed to do so in OT times. They were prophesied to fail and to be blinded (as they are now), but they are also prophesied to be restored (blindness taken away) and they will yet fulfil their role of witnessing to the world in the Millennium to come.

When the time comes, Israel will be un-calloused, their blindness taken away, and there will be a national repentance before the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. They will undergo (some of them will escape and be protected from) the much feared “great tribulation” which is known as “Jacob’s trouble” (*Jer 30:7, Matt 24:15-22, Zeph 1:14-17, Rev 12:12-17*). Jesus taught the Jews to pray that they be not led into “temptation” but to be delivered from the evil one (*Matt 6:13*). The Good News Bible says: Do not bring us to “hard testing.” Clarke’s Commentary translates it as “sore trial.” This sore trial refers to “Jacob’s trouble” as prophesied.

The book of Revelation, addressed to the seven Jewish churches to exist in the period before the end of this era, speaks about, among other things, what is to happen shortly before Christ’s Second Coming to the rule on the earth during the Millennium and thereafter. We have heard of the 144,000 people saved from the great tribulation. These are Jews (they are males and celibates) from the twelve tribes* of Israel (12,000 from each tribe) who are then living and who will rule the earth with Christ (*Rev 7:4-8, 14:3-4*) when He returns to earth. Together with them there is a great multitude (“holding palm

branches in their hands” as in the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles - *Lev 23:40*) called out from among the Jewish people and their proselytes scattered throughout the world at that time and they will be serving God in the temple (*Rev 7:9, 14-15*) day and night.

[* Two of the original tribes Dan and Ephraim were blotted out because of their idolatry and they were replaced by Levi and Joseph, just as Judas was also replaced. See *Deut 29:18-26, Judges 18, 1Kings 12:28-30*.]

Later in *Rev 20:1-4*, we learn that after Satan is bound, the other saints from old times – “the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God” – will be resurrected to be in the Millennium. This is the first resurrection as far as the Circumcision economy is concerned. The rapture is a secret given in this present secret economy (the administration of God’s grace granted to Paul - *Eph 3:2*) which is unknown to the Circumcision saints.

The rest of the dead will not be resurrected until after the Millennium (*Rev 20:5*).

The Millennium will be a time of peace and plenty under the rule of Christ from Jerusalem, ruling the nations with “a rod of iron” with Israel as the head nation who will then fulfil their role as Jehovah’s witness to the world (nations who remain into the Millennium). There are many prophetic scriptures foretelling of this Golden Period on earth as many of us may be aware. For example, there will be worship of the Lord by all mankind (*Mal 1:11*), who will learn God’s ways and there will no longer be wars among nations (*Mic 4:1-3*). The earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea (*Isaiah 11:9*).

Will believers today be in the Millennium on earth? Will they (if they are living when Christ comes back) go through the terrible time of history frequently known as “the great tribulation”?

The Rapture

If we are convinced of our calling today under the Gospel entrusted to our apostle Paul, we know from him that:

- a) Believers are now intimate members of the “Body of Christ” (see scriptures cited earlier)
- b) Believers are “in Christ,” being indwelt by the Spirit of God, hence they are thus sanctified (*1Cor 1:2, 1Thes 5:23-24*)
- c) Believers in Christ are now under no condemnation (*Rom 8:1*)

But God commends his own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we will be saved from God’s wrath through him.

(Rom 5:8-9)

For God didn’t appoint us to wrath, but to the obtaining of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him. Therefore exhort one another, and build each other up, even as you also do.

(1Thes 5:9-11)

and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead – Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come.

(1Thes 1:10)

For this we tell you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left to the coming of the Lord, will in no way precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with God’s trumpet. The dead in Christ will rise first, then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air. So we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore comfort one another with these words.

(1Thes 4:15-18)

The “rapture” is aptly so-called even though this word is not found in the Scripture. It describes the elation that must be felt by believers in meeting with their Head, Christ Jesus when He comes for them. There is no fear of any tribulation because there is none that awaits the saints of the present economy. This calling away of the saints to heaven where they belong will probably happen a short few years before the great tribulation.

Note the order of events: the dead in Christ will rise first and then those in Christ who are living at that time will be caught up together with their risen-from-the-dead brethren to meet Christ in the air. This order is different from that of the Israelites who underwent the great tribulation. Paul is here giving us a clue that we are not associated with the resurrection of the Israelite saints just before the Millennium. These two resurrections must be differentiated. When Christ comes back to earth, the order of events is in the reverse: the 144,000 and the great multitude all living then will be first to be with Christ. It is only after the great tribulation when Satan is bound just before the Millennium starts that “the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus” are then resurrected (*Rev 20:1-6*). For them, the living precedes the dead (by some years) in meeting Christ. The “rapture” of Christians in today’s Gospel of Paul is not the same as the resurrection of the saints recorded in the book of Revelation. Believers today have the assurance that they will not go through the great tribulation. No wonder Paul tells us to “encourage each other with these words.”

The saints (believers in Christ) today have a higher calling. After the rapture, the church (body of Christ) will be “with the Lord forever.” The head Christ is united with the members of His Body and the members share in the sovereignty and glory of the Head (*2Thes 2:14, Col 3:14, 1Cor 1:9*). They will reign with Christ (*2Tim 2:12*) in the heavenly realms, judging the world and the angels (*1Cor 6:2-3*). Being glorified and not having an earthly body but a spiritual one (*1Cor 15:40-49*), the church is distinct from Israel and the nations. The church stands far above Israel. The Jews are God’s earthly people (*Isaiah 60:21*), the church His heavenly people (*Eph 1:3*), and as the heaven is higher than the earth, so are the spiritual blessings of the church higher than the earthly blessings of the converted people of Israel. There are two realms where salvation operates – in the heavens and on earth.

Justification by Faith

As recognised by many, “Paul’s theology” is significantly different from the theology of the circumcision apostles and from that of Jesus Christ himself (whilst he was on earth). This is because there was

an abundance of new revelations given to Paul from the risen Christ, which includes a major secret hushed in previous times.

In the book of Romans, we learn of salvation by grace of God through faith. Believers today are justified for salvation by faith, not by works of the law.

But now apart from the law, a righteousness of God has been revealed, being testified by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ to all and on all those who believe. For there is no distinction, for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; whom God set forth to be an atoning sacrifice, through faith in his blood, for a demonstration of his righteousness through the passing over of prior sins, in God's forbearance; to demonstrate his righteousness at this present time; that he might himself be just, and the justifier of him who has faith in Jesus. Where then is the boasting? It is excluded. By what manner of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. We maintain therefore that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law. *(Rom 3:21-28)*

Or is God the God of Jews only? Isn't he the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since indeed there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith, and the uncircumcised through faith. Do we then nullify the law through faith? May it never be! No, we establish the law. *(Rom 3:29-31)*

What then will we say that Abraham, our forefather, has found according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not toward God. For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." Now to him who works, the reward is not counted as grace, but as debt. But to him who doesn't work, but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness. *(Rom 4:1-5)*

After God promised Abraham to be a father of many nations, and before Abraham was circumcised and long before his son Isaac was born, Abraham believed God and his belief was counted as righteousness.

Yahweh brought him outside, and said, “Look now toward the sky, and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” He said to Abram, “So shall your seed be.” He believed in Yahweh; and he reckoned it to him for righteousness.
(*Gen 15:5-6*)

Likewise, believers today are counted as righteous.

that if you will confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart, one believes unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.
(*Rom 10:9-10*)

and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, that which is of the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith;
(*Phil 3:9*)

Faith and Works

On the other hand, James (the brother of Jesus) in his letter to the scattered twelve tribes of Israel, says that “faith apart from works is dead” (*James 2:17, 20, 26*) – contrary to what Paul tells us!

We note that James illustrates his “faith and works” concept with an event that happened long after Abraham simply believed God’s word. The event is the offering up of Abraham’s son on the altar (*James 2:21-22*). Abraham was by then already given the circumcision covenant. James quotes from the same scripture that Paul quotes (*Gen 15:6*) but James with his illustration of a subsequent event (*Gen 22*) concludes differently.

The Circumcision message entails an emphasis on good works (in addition to faith), and if one sins and repents, there is pardon

("forgiveness of sins") for him. If one does not repent of sins, there is a fearful expectation of severe judgment (*Heb 10:26-31, 12:24-26*). The daily walk for them seems to be one that needs extreme care, as admitted by James – "whoever keeps the whole law, and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all" (*James 2:10*). James therefore does not contradict Paul, as James' criteria of faith and works applies to the Circumcision and this will be seen coming into effect in the approaching Millennium when Christ returns to earth to rule with a rod of iron, where works are extremely important (*Rev 2:27, 12:5, 19:15*).

A righteousness from faith and good works, as James argued accordingly in his letter, seems to make practical sense. Faith must be exhibited with good works in an exemplary life of Christian living. Paul's argument is startling and revolutionary! It is a matter of perspective, and Paul takes on a higher one. The spirit is frequently willing but the flesh is frequently weak. Ultimately, salvation is not dependent upon man's works or deeds. It was God who started the creation going without consulting anybody. It was God who decided to save. More mundanely, every human is born without his consent. The child's existence is dependent on the deeds of another. The goal of God's final purpose hinges upon God's prior decision alone. Human deeds are secondary whereas faith is primary as we have arrived in chapter 1. Paul's argument goes to the primeval root of the matter.

Indwelling Holy Spirit

This essay will attempt to go into some detail of Paul's concept of believers' justification by faith without works. It seems that the key to the transcendent concepts brought by Paul is that those persons who are now called to genuinely believe in Jesus Christ are sealed with the Holy Spirit, which is given as an earnest or deposit (down payment).

in whom you also, having heard the word of the truth, the Good News of your salvation, – in whom, having also believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is a pledge of our inheritance, to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of his glory.

(*Eph 1:13-14*)

in whom you also are built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit.
(*Eph 2:22*)

that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; to the end that you, being rooted and grounded in love,
(*Eph 3:17*)

who also sealed us, and gave us the down payment of the Spirit in our hearts.
(*2Cor 1:22*)

Now he who made us for this very thing is God, who also gave to us the down payment of the Spirit.
(*2Cor 5:5*)

But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, *if it is so* that the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if any man doesn't have the Spirit of Christ, he is not his. *If* Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the spirit is alive because of righteousness. But *if* the Spirit of him who raised up Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised up Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.
(*Rom 8:9-11*)

That good thing which was committed to you, guard through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us.
(*2Tim 1:14*)

God's spirit in the genuine believer is the answer (the substance) which explains a lot of scriptural concepts introduced by Paul, resolving apparent paradoxes. Because of God's indwelling spirit in us, we are said to be "in Christ," Paul's unique phrase which is literally and substantially true.

knowing this, that our old man was crucified with him, that the body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be in bondage to sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. But if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him; knowing that Christ, being raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no more has dominion over him! For the death that he died, he died to sin one time; but

the life that he lives, he lives to God. Thus consider yourselves also to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

(Rom 6:6-11)

in whom you were also circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands, in the putting off of the body of the sins of the flesh, in the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.

(Col 2:11-12)

Because of this Spirit indwelling us (believers) –

- a) Our old self was crucified with Christ ... *(Gal 2:20)*
- b) We are buried with Christ in His baptism ... *(Rom 6:4)*
- c) We are circumcised with Christ in His circumcision ... *(Col 2:11)*
- d) We are dead to sin ... *(Rom 6:2,11)*
- e) We are alive in Christ ... *(Rom 6:11)*
- f) We are raised with Christ ... *(Rom 6:4)*
- g) We are seated with Christ in heaven ... *(Eph 2:6)*
- h) We are justified in Christ ... *(Rom 3:24)*
- i) We are children of God ... *(Rom 8:14-16)*
- j) We are now under no condemnation ... *(Rom 8:1)*
- k) We are a new creation ... *(2Cor 5:17, Gal 6:15)*
- l) Our life is hidden with Christ in God ... *(Col 3:3)*

Paul's scriptures indicate much more than analogies or figures of speech. They are truer in substance than perhaps many believers realise. And Paul tends to speak from God's sure end-view *(Rom 4:16-18)*.

But with God's spirit in us, we do not go to heaven immediately upon death. We still have to await the resurrection (or rapture), at which time we will be given (glorified with) spiritual bodies (put on immortality: *1Cor 15:53-54*). As far as the past dead Christian is concerned, when he next opened his eyes, he will be raised to be with Christ along with his other living brethren, caught up in the air to meet Christ as a fully conscious being with a glorified spirit body.

We are God's workmanship or achievement (*Eph 2:10*), and God's working in us through His Spirit cannot fail because of God's own faithfulness (*Rom 3:3-4*), even if physically we in our human weakness do occasionally or frequently fail. What if we sin, as we invariably do?

... the Spirit also helps our weaknesses, the Spirit himself makes intercession for us with groanings which can't be uttered. He who searches the hearts knows what is on the Spirit's mind, because he makes intercession for the saints according to God.

(*Rom 8:26-27*)

Paul's advice (*Rom 6:1-22*) is: since we died to sin, we cannot live in it any longer. Sin no longer becomes our master, we are now not slaves to sin which leads to death but have become slaves to righteousness which leads to holiness and eternal life. Being slaves to righteousness, we *flee* from *unrighteousness* (bad deeds), from evil (*Rom 12:9*).

In *2Cor 5:10*, Paul says: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad."

In *1Cor 3:10-15*, Paul tells us to build on our foundation in Jesus Christ using materials that can go through the test of fire. Each will be rewarded according to the quality of the materials he used in this life. If he suffers loss of reward for using low quality materials, yet "he himself will be saved." This is so because of God's sovereign grace and His own faithfulness. All believers are sanctified by the Holy Spirit living in them (*1Cor 1:2*, *1Thes 5:23-24*). Thus, they are in their thoughts and actions not to grieve the Holy Spirit (*Eph 4:30*).

Paul admonishes believers to "live by the Spirit" (*Gal 5:16*) and yield forth fruit (not the fruit of our own works, but) – the fruits of the Spirit which are "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, against such things there is no law" (*Gal 5:22-23*). Paul says (v 14): The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbour as yourself."

Incidentally, there is no necessity of keeping the Sabbath or any of the Jewish festivals and their food laws (*Col 2:16-19*). Continuing in *Col 2:20-21*, Paul says since we died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, we no longer submit to its rules like: “do not handle, do not taste, do not touch.” Paul tells us in his latest writings (*Col 2:14-15, Eph 2:16*) that Christ had cancelled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. Some believers have mistakenly told themselves and others that they should not eat or donate or receive blood, and have thus caused a lot of hardships and unnecessary deaths from sicknesses (lives could have been saved from blood transfusion). Whatever “decrees” enacted at the Jerusalem council during the interim period covered by the book of Acts have now been done away with when the fullness of “the gospel of our salvation” (*Eph 1:13*) is revealed by our apostle Paul.

Faith and the Fruits of the Spirit

The believer is justified by his first act: believing in Christ, thereupon he receives a deposit of the Spirit (*2Cor 1:22, Gal 3:2-3*). Works would follow naturally from a truly spirit-filled believer. The believer may falter, but he is to continue in good works that flow from the Spirit, from the heart, from the inside. He is prompted by the internal spirit of the law, going beyond the external letter of the law laid down in codes, in do’s and don’ts.

Paul admonishes us to be rich in good works:

“walk worthily of God” (*1Thes 2:12*)

“don’t be weary in doing well” (*2Thes 3:13*)

that you may walk worthily of the Lord, to please him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to the might of his glory, for all endurance and perseverance with joy; giving thanks to the Father, who made us fit to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light; who delivered us out of the power of darkness, and translated us into the Kingdom of the Son of his love; in whom we have our redemption, the forgiveness of our sins;
(*Col 1:10-14*)

that they do good, that they be rich in good works, that they be ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold of eternal life.

(1Tim 6:18-19)

However God's firm foundation stands, having this seal, "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Let every one who names the name of the Lord depart from unrighteousness." Now in a large house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of clay. Some are for honor, and some for dishonor. If anyone therefore purges himself from these, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, and suitable for the master's use, prepared for every good work. Flee from youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. But refuse foolish and ignorant questionings, knowing that they generate strife.

(2Tim 2:19-23)

in all things showing yourself an example of good works; in your teaching showing integrity, seriousness, incorruptibility,

(Titus 2:7)

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to the intent that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we would live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify for himself a people for his own possession, zealous for good works.

(Titus 2:11-14)

Remind them to be in subjection to rulers and to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, not to be contentious, to be gentle, showing all humility toward all men.

(Titus 3:1-2)

Laws are meant for minors or minor-like outlook. They are a schoolmaster that points us to maturity that has arrived (*Gal 3:24-25*).

Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes. For the believer Christ is wisdom, righteousness, holiness and redemption (*1Cor 1:30*). The believer in his life now yields forth from the inside the “fruits of the Spirit” which are: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, against such there is no law (*Gal 5:22-23*). Such fruits of the spirit are produced from an invigorating internal impulse, not forced out by external do’s and don’ts. So then, all the exhortation to good works emphasized by Christ and the apostles are to be seen from the heart point of view.

The faith of the believer hinges on the prior “faith of Jesus Christ” (in the Greek, in *Rom 3:22, Gal 2:16, 3:22*). Believers are therefore considered chosen before the disruption*¹ of the world (*Eph 1:4*) in view of the deposited spirit in them which was with God way back then. Seen from this early point in time, Paul’s argument of Justification by Faith alone makes perfect logical sense. Justification for salvation by faith still involves a lot of good works coming from the heart in one’s life journey towards salvation. Good works are never done away with; justification from them for salvation is. What levels of human deeds are considered adequately righteous in God’s eyes? From the Scripture’s point of view: None (*Rom 3:10, 23*). The ultimate work relating to salvation is completed by Christ in His death and resurrection, and that work was done as a result of Christ’s own righteous faith in the Father, before any humans came along in God’s creation. “From faith to faith” (*Rom 1:17*) – from Christ’s faith to the believer’s faith.

looking to Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising its shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

(*Heb 12:2*)

The gospel that Paul presents is also a view from the consummation point of God’s plan. That point sees everyone being saved. Unbelievers now will become believers then. See the next chapter for a detailed exposition of this. Human righteousness that derives from keeping the law has a place in the stages of God’s plan

before the endpoint. Works or no works, everyone will be reconciled to God by God's own prior plan – by His Grace – hence our works are not a measure of righteousness for salvation, though they are a measure for rewards (future levels of service and responsibility). Believers now, seen as already seated with Christ in heaven, are given the righteousness which is from God by faith (*Phil 3:9*).

Judgment for Rewards

For we must all be revealed before the judgment seat of Christ; that each one may receive the things in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

(*2Cor 5:10*)

For no one can lay any other foundation than that which has been laid, which is Jesus Christ. But if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay, or stubble; each man's work will be revealed. For the Day will declare it, because it is revealed in fire; and the fire itself will test what sort of work each man's work is. If any man's work remains which he built on it, he will receive a reward.

(*1Cor 3:11-14*)

If any man's work is burned, he will suffer loss, but he himself will be saved, but as through fire.

(*1Cor 3:15*)

Miracles

Does faith need miracles for support? Are miracles for us today? In the Gospels, we see a lot of miracles being performed by Jesus Christ. In the book of Acts, we also see a lot of miracles being performed by the twelve apostles and by the apostle Paul. Towards the end of the book of Acts, however, we notice that miracles have decreased, not mentioned, or even ceased.

First let us look at some of the extraordinary miracles God did through Paul (*Acts 19:11*) and compare them with those miracles done through Peter, and notice the more transcendent nature of those miracles involving Paul, presaging the higher revelations (and greater grace)

that Christ after his ascension to heaven would give through Paul to us.

Peter had to pull the lame man by his right hand to lift him up and heal him (*Acts 3:1-10*). Whereas Paul healed a similarly crippled man by just speaking to him (*Acts 14:8-10*).

Peter's shadow passing over the sick, in close proximity, healed them (*Acts 5:15-16*). Whereas Paul's given-away handkerchiefs not only healed diseases at a distance but also exorcised demons (*Acts 19:12*).

Peter was forcefully wakened from sleep and was led by an angel and escaped from prison (*Acts 12:5-10*). Whereas Paul and Silas were calmly praying and singing hymns in prison when they were unchained miraculously and were later honourably escorted out (*Acts 16:25-40*).

Peter's guards were led away to execution (*Acts 12:19*). Whereas Paul's jailor was saved with his household (*Acts 16:27-34*).

Peter prayed and raised Tabitha, a well-known righteous woman who died, back to life (*Acts 9:36-41*). Paul raised an ordinary little-known young man Eutychus who, listening to Paul's preaching and feeling sleepy, fell to his death whilst sitting precariously on a window sill 3-storey high.

Later in Paul's ministry, we note that there were no miracles of healing of the sick. He advised Timothy to "use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses" (*1Tim 5:23*). Also, Paul left Trophimus at Miletum sick (*2Tim 4:20*).

With Paul's full gospel now available for Christian maturity, there seems to be no need for miracles today. Thomas wanted to see and touch Jesus for himself before he could believe what he heard (that Jesus was risen). Then Jesus appeared and said to him: "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (*John 20:29*). Paul tells us now "We live by faith, not by sight" (*2Cor 5:7*).

There is obvious danger in expecting miracles that are not the mode of God's operation today. We are warned of dangers in relying on miracles for our faith (*Matt 7:21-23, 12:39, 2Cor 11:13-15, 2Thes 2:9*).

During the Exodus period, Israel had the greatest display of miracles, yet they remained rebellious. In the period of the prophets Elijah and Elisha, there was great outpouring of miracles, yet Israel's wickedness was great and Elijah thought he was the only true worshipper left. In the period of Christ and the apostles, great miracles were also performed, yet the people failed to repent permanently; Christ was crucified and the apostles persecuted. Miracles apparently do not make people righteous or obedient or faithful. The early Corinthians desired signs, wonders and spiritual gifts, yet Paul says they were yet fleshly or carnal (*1Cor 3:1-3*). During the final period of miracles in this era at the end time, there will be great deception. Instead of looking for miracles, Paul tells us there is yet a "most excellent way" – the way of love (*1Cor 12:27-13:8*). Miracles may precede and prompt faith, but they do not necessarily sustain it.

Ministry of Reconciliation

Believers today do not have the so-called great commission of Matthew 28 meant for Israel in the future (the time of the Millennium). We have a higher calling and join Paul in the ministry of reconciliation. This is the basis for missions today.

Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old things have passed away. Behold, all things have become new. But all things are of God, who reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ, and gave to us the ministry of reconciliation; namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not reckoning to them their trespasses, and having committed to us the word of reconciliation. We are therefore ambassadors on behalf of Christ, as though God were entreating by us: we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.
(*2Cor 5:17-20*)

Paul in his last days of ministry told his faithful disciples Timothy and Titus to carry on teaching others what they have been taught by him.

You therefore, my child, be strengthened in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. The things which you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit the same to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.

(2Tim 2:1-2)

But say the things which fit sound doctrine.

(Titus 2:1)

But when the kindness of God our Savior and his love toward mankind appeared, not by works of righteousness, which we did ourselves, but according to his mercy, he saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly, through Jesus Christ our Savior; that, being justified by his grace, we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. This saying is faithful, and concerning these things I desire that you affirm confidently, so that those who have believed God may be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men;

(Titus 3:4-8)

“Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” These are characteristic words of greetings in the letters of Paul, who was entrusted with the Gospel of transcendent grace and peace for Christians today.

Paul tells us:

Rejoice in the Lord always! Again I will say, Rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. In nothing be anxious, but in everything, by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus.

(Phil 4:4-7)

Set your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, our life, is revealed, then you will also be revealed with him in glory.

(Col 3:2-4)

Finally, brothers, whatever things are true, whatever things are honorable, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report; if there is any virtue, and if there is any praise, think about these things. The things which you learned, received, heard, and saw in me: do these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

(Phil 4:8-9)

The above is a simple outline of what I have learned and understood from my teachers in the truth, chief of whom is the apostle Paul.

Footnote:

**1. see appendix on The Gap Theory*