

Doctrine of Paul's Reversionism

Introduction: Paul like all people made mistakes and had bouts with negative volition to the Word of God. This doctrine is designed to teach three of Paul's such reversions. The three selected are: his trip to Jerusalem, his failure to apply impersonal love toward John Mark and his refusal to teach at Troas.

1. In c. 58 AD Paul had plans to continue his third missionary journey into Spain, with a stop at Rome.

Rom 15:24 **Whensoever I take my journey into Spain, I will come to you:** for I trust to see you in my journey, and to be brought on my way thitherward by you, if first I be somewhat filled with your company.

1.1 He was in Ephesus when he decided instead to go to Jerusalem before going to Rome.

Rom 15:25 But now I go unto Jerusalem to minister unto the saints.

Rom 15:26 For it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem ...

Rom 15:28 When therefore I have performed this, and have sealed to them this fruit, I will come by you into Spain.

Rom 15:29 And I am sure that, when I come unto you, I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ.

1.1.1 Also see Rom 1:10 ..." if by any means I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you."

1.2 Paul dearly desires the approbation of the Jewish Christians at Jerusalem and finds exhilarating the thought of taking an offering from the Gentile churches at Macedonia and Achaia to the much persecuted Judaeo Christian Church at Jerusalem headed by James the half-brother of Jesus.

1.2.1 Paul has on more than one occasion bragged of being a "super law keeper" and has even performed certain acts of law keeping while on missionary journeys to bring the gospel to the gentile world. Though Paul knows God has told him the Jews of Jerusalem would never listen to him, he finds exhilarating the thought of taking an offering from the gentile churches at Macedonia and Achaia to the much persecuted Judaeo Christians at Jerusalem.

1.2.2 Paul has repeatedly taught gentiles to avoid the legalism of the Mosaic Law but clearly he, at this point of time in his life, sees nothing wrong with such Law keeping by Jews. As we will see, it will take significant discipline for Paul to finally understand he is not the Apostle to the Jews, but the Apostle to the gentiles.

1.2.3 After Paul's first imprisonment Paul will write various Epistles excoriating Mosaic Law keeping and urging both Jew and gentile to keep the perfect law of liberty outlined in his later Epistles. The same message is the subject of the Book of Hebrews: avoid the

liturgy of the Mosaic Law and fulfill instead the protocol found in the perfect law of liberty.

1.3 Paul goes into reversionism by electing to go east instead of west toward Spain. Paul wants to arrive at Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost. It is in the Jerusalem Church he wants to preach and be recognized as one of the early leaders of the Jewish Christian faith.

1.4 Paul has continually warned his gentile congregations to avoid the Mosaic law with its evil feast days with its legalism and law keeping charade.

Col 2:16 Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days:

Col 2:17 Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.

Gal 2:16 Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

Gal 2:19 For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God.

Gal 2:20 I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

Gal 2:21 I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.

1.5 Paul openly addresses the error of certain Jews from Jerusalem who had arrived in the Province of Galatia and taught that salvation and spirituality must be sought by law keeping. Paul taught, as we have seen and will see, that gentiles were under no such burden and in fact should avoid the onerous liturgy found in the Mosaic law.

Gal 3:1 O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?

Gal 3:2 This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?

Gal 3:3 Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?

Gal 3:4 Have ye suffered so many things in vain? if it be yet in vain.

Gal 3:5 He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?

Gal 3:6 Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.

Gal 3:10 For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.

Gal 3:11 But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith.

Gal 3:12 And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them.

Gal 3:13 Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree:

Gal 3:24 Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

Gal 3:25 But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.

Rom 3:20 Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

Rom 10:4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.

Rom 10:5 For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them.

1.6 The driving force behind this reversionism seems to be his desire to do what makes him feel good and his OSN needs the recognition of people like James, Peter, John etc.

1.6.1 Paul is in the throes of reversionism, he is suffering from emotional revolt of his own soul. As to what obligation Paul thought Jewish believers had toward practicing Jewish liturgy will be covered later.

1.7 Paul recall has not had the "success" of those Apostles working in Jerusalem where Christian Jews were numerous. The error of Paul has certainly been replicated today; numbers often drive preachers toward crowd pleasing gimmicks and away from teaching.

1.7.1 It has been said jokingly "Pastors go to Bible teaching seminaries to learn the Bible and then join popular denominations in order to economically survive." Then many such Pastors cease teaching the Bible, sinking to the level of three points and a poem. Paul in writing to Timothy called it scratching "itching ears."

2Ti 4:3 For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.

1.8 Paul's ministry of teaching small numbers of gentiles in home settings seems to be very troublesome to the great Apostle. It would seem the great Apostle is willing to do what ever is necessary to gain the approbation of James and his Jewish friends. Acts 21:18-24

Acts 21:18 The next day Paul and the rest of us went to see James, and all the elders were present.

Acts 21:19 Paul greeted them and reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.

Acts 21:20 When they heard this, they praised God. Then they said to Paul: "You see, brother, **how many thousands of Jews** have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law.

Acts 21:21 They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs.

Acts 21:22 What shall we do? They will certainly hear that you have come,

Acts 21:23 so do what we tell you. There are four men with us who have made a vow.

Acts 21:24 Take these men, join in their purification rites and pay their expenses, so that they can have their heads shaved. Then everybody will know there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law.

1.9 Clearly, there is no question Paul has been teaching the gentiles to avoid the liturgy of the Mosaic Law. It would seem to be equally clear Paul does not teach that Jews should avoid these same liturgical practices. Paul is dead wrong on this matter but it will take prison discipline to convince him that all Christians, Jews and Gentiles are to forsake law keeping for spirituality.

2. The desire on the part of Jews to mix grace and legalism will continue even up to and including the imposition of the fifth cycle of discipline (c. 70 AD) and the end of the Jewish age. Let's read a few passages from the Book of Hebrews. Recall the book was written by an anonymous writer in c. AD 68; Paul's first imprisonment took place in c. AD 58.

Heb 7:4 Just think how great the Jebusite King Melchisedec was: Even the patriarch Abraham gave him a tenth of the plunder!

Heb 7:5 Now the law requires the descendants of Levi who become priests to collect a tenth from the people-- that is, their brothers--even though their brothers are descended from Abraham.

Heb 7:6 Melchisedec, however, did not trace his descent from Levi (recall he was a gentile), yet he collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed Abraham, who had the promises ...

Heb 7:11 If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood (for they were the ones who gave the law to the people), why was there still need for another priest (Christ) to come -- one in the order of Melchizedek, not in the order of Aaron?

Heb 7:12 For when there is a change of the priesthood, there must also be a change of the law.

Heb 7:13 He (Christ) of whom these things are said belonged to a different tribe, and no one from that tribe has ever served at the altar.

Heb 7:14 For it is clear that our Lord descended from Judah, and in regard to that tribe Moses said nothing about priests.

Heb 7:15 And what we have said is even more clear if another priest like Melchizedek appears,

Heb 7:16 one who has become a priest not on the basis of a regulation as to his ancestry but on the basis of the power of an indestructible life.

Heb 7:17 For it is declared: "You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek."

Heb 7:18 The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless
Heb 7:19 (for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God.

Heb 7:20 And it was not without an oath! Others became priests without any oath,
Heb 7:21 but he became a priest with an oath when God said to him: "The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: 'You are a priest forever.'"

Heb 7:22 Because of this oath, Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant.

Heb 7:23 Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office;

Heb 7:24 but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood.

Heb 7:25 Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.

Heb 7:26 Such a high priest meets our need-- one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens.

Heb 7:27 Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself.

Heb 7:28 For the law appoints as high priests men who are weak; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever.

Heb 8:1 Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such a high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens;

Heb 8:2 A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man.

Heb 8:3 For every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices: wherefore it is of necessity that this man have somewhat also to offer.

Heb 8:4 For if he were on earth, he should not be a priest, seeing that there are priests that offer gifts according to the law:

Heb 8:5 Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount.

Heb 8:6 But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises.

Heb 8:7 For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second.

Heb 8:8 But God found fault with the people and said: "The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.

Heb 8:9 It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to my covenant, and I turned away from them, declares the Lord.

Heb 8:10 This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.

Heb 8:11 No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.

Heb 9:19 For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book, and all the people,

Heb 9:20 Saying, This is the blood of the testament which God hath enjoined unto you.

Heb 9:21 Moreover he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle, and all the vessels of the ministry.

Heb 9:22 And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission.

Heb 9:23 It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.

Heb 9:24 For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us:

Heb 10:1 For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect.

Heb 10:2 For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshipers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins.

Heb 10:3 But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year.

Heb 10:4 For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins

...

Heb 10:8 Above when he said, Sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings and offering for sin thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure therein; which are offered by the law;

Heb 10:9 Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second ...

Heb 10:26 For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins,

Heb 10:27 But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.

Heb 10:28 He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses:

Heb 10:29 Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?

2.1 Paul is about to be disciplined; by the time he comes out of prison, he too, like the anonymous writer of the Book of Hebrews, will realize all believers are now under grace and not law. But at the time of his first imprisonment he has no idea of the warning "How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?"

3. Oh how believers today need to understand that we too are under the perfect law of liberty, a new grace covenant - the perfect law of liberty. Jam 1:25

Jam 1:25 But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.

4. James and the Jerusalem elders realized that Paul, because of his teachings about grace and legalism, had become most unpopular with the legalistic Jews in Jerusalem.

5. James felt that something must be done to show the Jewish Christians that Paul did not teach Jews to forsake the keeping of the law.

6. James suggests that Paul perform an overt obeisance to the Law to prove to the Jews that he did not advocate the abolishment of the Law for Jewish Christians. At this point in Paul's life Paul believed it was ok for Jewish Christians to continue their Jewish rituals but not gentile Christians. For example Paul himself practiced certain liturgy even as late as the second missionary journey - c. AD 51.

Acts 18:18 And Paul after this tarried there yet a good while, and then took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila; having shorn his head in Cenchrea (a port city on the eastern shore of the Isthmus of Corinth): for he had a vow.

Acts 18:19 And he came to Ephesus, and left them there: but he himself entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews.

Acts 18:20 When they desired him to tarry longer time with them, he consented not;

Acts 18:21 But bade them farewell, saying, I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem: but I will return again unto you, if God will. And he sailed from Ephesus.

Acts 18:22 And when he had landed at Caesarea, and gone up, and saluted the church, he went down to Antioch.

7. There were four Jews who had taken a Nazarite vow and were ready to burn their hair and pay an offering, thus ending their vow.

8. It was suggested to Paul that he identify himself with these four and practice the common Jewish custom of paying their offering.

9. This, it was thought, would prove to the Jewish church that Paul himself accepted the Jewish customs. Paul's desire to teach those in Jerusalem and thus gain some measure of favor would lead to his incarceration.

10. This desire for approbation is understandable, though evil. You could in the flesh certainly empathize with the poor man but for one salient fact. God made clear to Paul that He did not want him to go to Jerusalem.

11. Jerusalem was a very evil church full of Jewish Christians who were lovers of the Law and the pleasure of "big time liturgical worship."

12. Paul was given a ministry of hard nosed Bible teaching with small crowds of people interested in the mind of Christ.

13. Paul has been told not to go to Jerusalem.

Acts 21:3 After sighting Cyprus and passing to the south of it, we sailed on to Syria. We landed at Tyre, where our ship was to unload its cargo.

Acts 21:4 Finding the disciples there, we stayed with them seven days. **Through the Spirit they urged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem.**

Acts 21:5 But when our time was up, we left and continued on our way. All the disciples and their wives and children accompanied us out of the city, and there on the beach we knelt to pray.

Acts 21:6 After saying good-bye to each other, we went aboard the ship, and they returned home.

Acts 21:7 We continued our voyage from Tyre and landed at Ptolemais, where we greeted the brothers and stayed with them for a day.

Acts 21:8 Leaving the next day, we reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven.

Acts 21:9 He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied.

Acts 21:10 After we had been there a number of days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea.

Acts 21:11 Coming over to us, he took Paul's belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said, "The Holy Spirit says, 'In this way the Jews of Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.'"

Acts 21:12 When we heard this, we and the people there pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem.

Acts 21:13 Then Paul answered, "Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."

14. Paul chooses his very own will over God's will and the result is discipline from the Lord - a four year prison sentence.

15. As noted earlier there were two other examples of Paul reversionism. There was his failure to apply grace with reference to John Mark and his failure to teach positive volition at Troas.

16. First let's study his failure to readily forgive John Mark for leaving the 1st missionary journey.

Acts 15:36 And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do.

Acts 15:37 And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark.

Acts 15:38 But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work.

Acts 15:39 And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus;

17. Paul's attitude toward Mark seems to have changed in his later years to wit: during his second imprisonment.

2Ti 4:11 Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry.

18. Our second and last act of Paul's reversionism was his failure to teach at Troas. There would seem to be two potential motivations for his error.

18.1 The simplest explanation could have been that he was concerned for Titus' well being and therefore could not preach until he knew Titus had safely arrived.

18.2 Recall travel in those days was hazardous especially given the hatred of the Jews for Paul and his team.

2Co 2:12 Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, and a door was opened unto me of the Lord,

2Co 2:13 I had no rest in my spirit, because I found not Titus my brother: but taking my leave of them, I went from thence into Macedonia.

18.3 The best explanation in my view relates to the subject of 2Co 7:5-9 where Paul is seen waiting for Titus to arrive with a report of Corinth's reaction to his scathing letter of reprimand.

2Co 7:5 For, when we were come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears.

2Co 7:6 Nevertheless God, that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus;

2Co 7:7 And not by his coming only, but by the consolation wherewith he was comforted in you, when he told us your earnest desire, your mourning, your fervent mind toward me; so that I rejoiced the more.

2Co 7:8 For though I made you sorry with a letter, I do not repent, though I did repent: for I perceive that the same epistle hath made you sorry, though it were but for a season.

2Co 7:9 Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing.

19. And so in conclusion we see a great man of God failing and yet God in his sovereignty and permissive will leads him to an incarceration where he can write the four prison epistles: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon. Paul, after this will truly become the Apostle to the Gentiles.