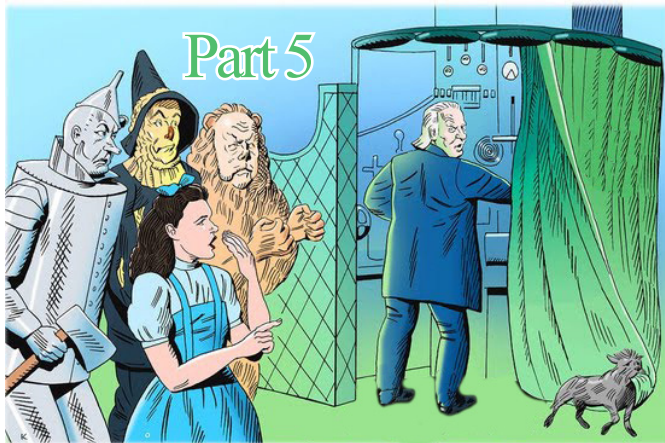


ROMANS Part 55

Chapter 6: 17-19



Death of the Old Humanity

17 Now thanks be to God that you were slaves of Sin, yet you obey from the heart the type of teaching to which you were given over. 18 Now, being freed from Sin, you are enslaved to Righteousness. 19 As a man am I saying this, because of the infirmity of your flesh.

Ask a church person how to be free from sin, and he will tell you, “Stop sinning.” Ask Paul how to be free from sin and he will tell you, “You already are.” Thinking twice about it, he would consider the question itself ridiculous, as it assumes an inherent power within a human being to enact such an astonishing thing as freedom from a force so powerful as Sin. Doubling the stupidity, the question assumes that Jesus Christ did nothing about Sin. It’s like asking Churchill in 1946 if he thinks the war can be

won—with groundhogs. God would never leave the abolition of Sin to weak and woeful human beings. Were Paul to mull the question for another minute, I think some righteous irritation would erupt: “What do you mean, ‘How do you be free from sin?’ How dare you diminish Christ’s work, nay, deny it?”

We return to the fair and lovely point of last week that freedom from Sin is not victory over it, but death to it. It’s not that one ever stops sinning, but that the guilt and dread and condemnation of Sin hold no more power with which to lord it over one. The scary voice is gone. The “Wizard of Oz” has been exposed as an old man behind a curtain with smoke, special effects, and a killer PA system.

PAST TENSE, SO DON’T BE TENSE

It strikes me how Paul says here, “Now thanks be to God that you *were* slaves of Sin, yet you obey from the heart the type of teaching to which you were given over.” He puts the Romans’ slavery to Sin in the past. Has someone informed Paul that not one of the Romans ever sins anymore? Of course not. The startling reason why the Romans were now free from Sin follows in the same sentence: “Yet you obey from the heart the type of teaching to which you were given over” (verse 17). They simply grasped a teaching. The result of grasping the teaching? “Now, being free from Sin, you are enslaved to Righteousness.”

Remember that the word “obey” means “to hear and to heed.” The reasons the Romans were free from Sin exactly where they stood was that they heard and heeded Paul’s message. That’s it. Nothing else had changed. They accepted a teaching. They believed a fact concerning them. They said, “Hm, sounds great,” and that was that; they were free from Sin from that day forward without altering an ounce of behavior.

TYPE-CAST

I like the phrase, “the type of teaching to which you were given over.” What a difference between Paul’s “type of teaching” and the type of teaching that says, “Behave yourself for Christ!” Paul’s type of teaching is as clear today as it was then—and so is the other type. There are really only two types of teaching today concerning Sin; one type is more popular than Elvis, and the other barely known. The extremely popular type of teaching is the Christian variety which challenges and shames people into eradicating Sin from their lives. I would call this the self-oriented type of sin teaching. The self-conquering of Sin—or at least the pathetic attempts at it—please the self, just as it pleased Elvis to swing his hips and make girls scream.

The other type of teaching—Paul’s—is the unpopular, non-Elvis, boring type of teaching that puts Sin and the responsibility for its dismissal on the shoulders of Jesus Christ. (Feel like yawning yet?) Since the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for Sin is an historical fact (how boring), then so is freedom from Sin (how uninspiring; where is the challenge?) Paul’s type of teaching, therefore, says, “Freedom from Sin is a done deal; you’re already free.” Poor Paul. This truth would die on its feet on Christian television. Imagine some dull guy just standing there in front of the camera and a live studio audience saying, “Well, there’s nothing to see or do here, folks. Christ has already vanquished Sin.” The studio audience, lusting for struggle, tears, emotional pleas for forgiveness, or exciting new tales of “overcoming,” would throw popcorn and boo the so-called evangelist. The studio execs would cancel the show after one airing. How do you stage an engaging life-and-death conflict if that life-and-death struggle occurred two-thousand years ago, before the invention of video?

DEFAULT FAULT

Christianity claims to put Sin on Christ’s shoulders, but claiming it and doing it are two different things. As one enters the portal of Christianity, one’s default setting is clearly communicated to be that of a hell-bound sinner. This is the first point of any “good” evangelist program or sinner’s prayer: make the spiritual aspirant feel the weight of his or her guilt and doom; make them feel lost without Jesus. (But wait a minute. Didn’t Jesus already die for these people two thousand years ago?” Stop asking logical questions.) The only way out of this

doom, according to the aforementioned religion, is to miraculously overcome Romans 3:11-12 and believe in Jesus. Romans 3:11-12, I remind you, says that, “not one is understanding; not one is seeking out God; all avoid Him.” Forget about that, just “make a decision for Christ.” In other words, come to the altar and, in spite of Romans 3:11-12, please promptly manage *to* understand God, *to* seek Him out, and *not* to avoid Him—and you better do it now because a bus might run you over on the way home



This is not Paul’s exciting teaching on Sin.

and you will go to hell forever. (Poor Jesus! Another one bites the dust having dodged His best efforts on the cross.)

What is purposely, by Satanic design, unclear to the pathetically pewed is that this type of teaching lays salvation on the shoulders of the sinner rather than the Savior. With this type of teaching, the Savior merely made salvation possible. Despite His six hour torture-fest in the interest of eradicating the sin of the world, salvation is still only theoretical and dependent upon the sinner to contribute the vital half of the salvation equation:

Jesus + Nothing = Nothing
Jesus + Sinner Contribution = Everything

THE SINNER'S PRAYER

“The Sinner’s Prayer” is actually a Wikipedia entry. Here’s what Wikipedia has to say about it:

The Sinner’s Prayer is an evangelical term referring to any prayer of repentance, prayed by individuals who feel convicted of the presence of sin in their lives and desire to form or renew a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. It is a popular phenomenon in Protestant circles, and has been called “a hallmark of evangelical conversionism.” It is intended to be an act of initial conversion to Christianity, and the only way to receive salvation. The “Sinner’s Prayer” takes various forms, all of which have the same general thrust. Since it is considered a matter of one’s personal will, it can be prayed silently, aloud, read from a suggested model, or repeated after someone modeling the prayer role. The Sinner’s Prayer, as popularly known today, has roots in Protestant Christianity. Some affirm that it evolved, in some form or another, in the early days of the Protestant Reformation movement, as a reaction against the Roman Catholic dogma of justification by means of meritorious works.

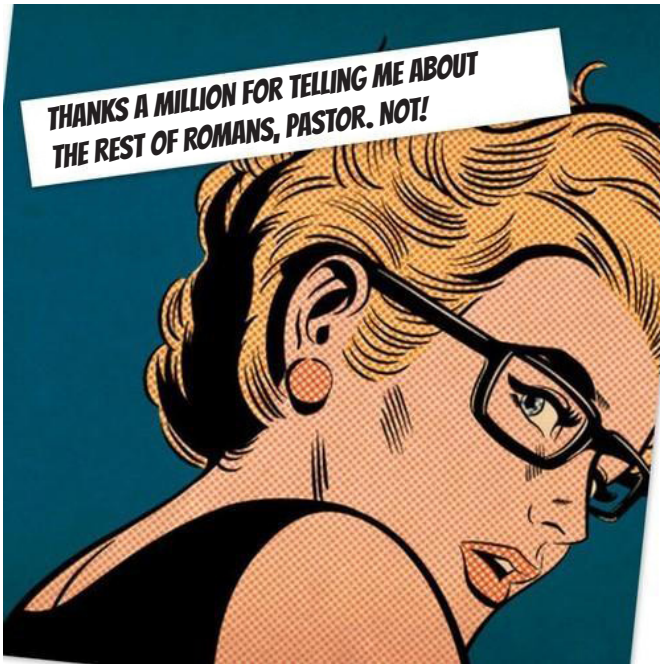
Note the first requirement of a good Sinner’s Prayer: “a conviction of the presence of sin.” This is not the type of teaching given over to the Romans by Paul. Who needs a conviction of the presence of sin? Isn’t it obvious that we all miss the mark? It is true that Paul convicts humanity at the very beginning of Romans, but this is only from 1: 8 through 3:20. From 3:21 to the end of chapter eight, it’s all about what Christ did to solve the problem. Paul jumps from the end of the problem (Romans 3:20) to the beginning of the solution (Romans 3:21), in one verse. That’s, like, a one-second gap.

This is where so-called evangelicals should start—with Romans 3:21. They should start with what Christ already did. We already know that we’re sinners, goddamn it. What’s the solution? But no. The Sinner’s Prayer takes us back to the “bad news” sections of Romans (1:18-3:20)—and leaves us there. Everyone is still stuck at Romans 3:20. Instead of playing the rest of the “song,” Christianity takes the needle off the record at this point and says, “Okay, that’s enough! You have to take it from here!”

Modern evangelicalism acts as though the rest of Romans doesn’t exist. This is like telling the families of the victims of a plane crash: “We are sorry to tell you that the flight of your loved ones has crashed into the ocean,” and then waiting three days to tell them, “Oh, sorry, we should have



mentioned that everyone was rescued.” In the world of Sin, we already have the rescue. Let’s tell people about what was accomplished! But no. Time somehow stops after Romans 3:20 so that, in the standard Christian “gospel” presentation, there is no historical remedy (Christ). Freedom from Sin inexplicably now comes down to a modern act of a modern person who better be quick about it. We’re all still in the lurch. In spite of the cross, we are all still sinners doomed to hell. *What happened to the rest of Romans?* Forget about it. The news of the rescue is not withheld for three days, it is withheld for 2,000 years. To modern evangelicals, the answer to Sin’s bondage is not to teach the solution, but to bog one down in the problem. *You’re a sinner bound for hell.* They crazily decide not to teach concerning Christ’s accomplishment (that is, the solution; Paul’s type of teaching), but rather to challenge hopefuls to kneel at a man-made altar to pray a prayer of their invention, and you better say it from the bottom of your heart with all the sincerity you can muster because if you don’t then that bus



is probably on its way and you will die without having done anything about your sin. Pay no attention to anything after Romans 3:20 because you, *the sinner*, have not yet personally jumped the chasm between Romans 3:20 and Romans 3:21. Here comes the official announcement: “We will *not* be resuming the book of Romans until you have done something worthy and admirable against these universal problems of Sin and Death. Mrs. Hooperdogan will now be playing some nice organ music to help you with your decision.”

“Some affirm that [the Sinner’s Prayer] evolved, in some form or another, in the early days of the Protestant Reformation movement, as a reaction against the Roman Catholic dogma of justification by means of meritorious works.” What a joke: the Protestants, rebelling against the Roman Catholic dogma of justification by means of meritorious works, invented a different meritorious work: the Sinner’s Prayer. Wow. There’s progress for you.

INSTANT FREEDOM

Paul says in Colossians 1:3-7—

We are thanking the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, always praying concerning you, on hearing of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints, because of the expectation reserved for you in the heavens, *which you hear before in the word of truth of the evangel*, which, being present with you, according as in the entire world also, is bearing fruit and growing, according as it is among

you also, *from the day on which you hear and realized the grace of God in truth*, according as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow slave, who is a faithful dispenser of Christ for us.

The destiny of the Colossians had already been “reserved for [them] in the heavens.” It remained only for the Colossians to become aware of it. Paul pushed upon them a fact—not a challenge—and the Colossians believed it. This belief in no way birthed their calling and glorious future, for that happened at the cross. The belief “merely” ushered that secured future into the Colossians’ practical experience. Now they could enjoy it. This happened on “the day on which” they heard and realized the grace of God in truth.

My point is that this realization of the truth happened in a moment, on a day. It happened on the day that a man named Epaphras came to Colosse, cleared his throat, said something like “gather around,” and told the Colossians about what had already been reserved for them in the heavens, secured by Christ. Epaphras did not implore them to pray the Sinner’s Prayer. There is no record of Epaphras challenging the Colossians in the manner of Billy Graham: “Invite Jesus into your heart!” Paul never once did this, so neither does Epaphras. To Paul and Epaphras, salvation was a truth, not a tease. It was an announce-

“There is no record of Epaphras challenging the Colossians: ‘Invite Jesus into your heart!’”

ment of Another’s historical achievement, not a personal challenge to a modern hopeful. It was a glad announcement that Jesus Christ had broken down the doors of Sin and Death. This is “the word of truth of the evangel.” Rather than the proposal of a possibility, it is the exclamation of Divine accomplishment.

Forget Instant Karma, for here was Instant Freedom.

Transfer this now to the Romans and that people’s (and ours) freedom from Sin. Paul does not come announcing a “30-Day Journey to Holiness!” or tell the Romans how to “Enjoy a Sin-Free Life In Less Than Five Minutes a Day!” He declares them to be already free from Sin. The Romans will *feel* this fact the moment they believe Paul’s word concerning it. Thus, freedom from Sin comes, not after five minutes a day of dedicated application, not after

30 days of fasting and prayer, but instantly, after hearing and believing (“obeying”) a simple announcement.

Like the expectation reserved in heaven, freedom from Sin is a done deal. It is awareness of the deal that makes it practical in one’s life and eases the mind. I can deposit ten million dollars into a new bank account I’ve established in your name, but until someone tells you about it, you will remain sad and worried over your many debts. The disclosure doesn’t *make* you rich; you’ve been rich from the day of deposit. That was a big day. The next biggest day is the day you *believe* the deposit.

It should be easy now to apply this to Christ. Since the moment Jesus Christ died on the cross, you have been free from Sin. But because you’ve never heard about it (I know you haven’t heard about it in church; they slam Romans shut after the bad news and refuse to open it again until you’ve jumped through their hoop), you still feel guilty, still beg God for forgiveness, and still bemoan the many ways you’ve failed God and man. Want freedom from Sin? *There. You’ve got it.* The question is: Will you believe it? Whether you believe it or not cannot affect its truth; but wouldn’t you like to start “withdrawing cash” from this delicious account?

SINNING AND FREEDOM FROM IT, SIMULTANEOUSLY

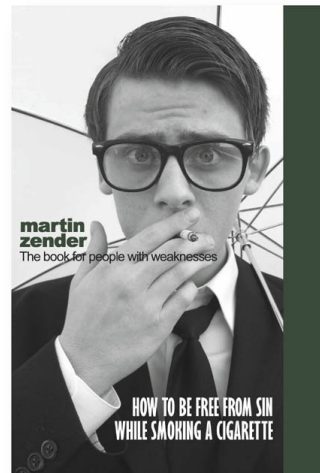
Speaking of “on a particular day,” I will always remember the day on which this passage we’re now discussing delivered me from bondage to Sin. In verse 17, Paul tells the Romans, “you were slaves of sin.” In verse 18 he calls them “freed from Sin.” (It’s the same fact stated negatively, then positively.) The reason for the *former* slavery and *present* freedom had nothing to do with the Romans’ behavior, but rather with “the type of teaching” to which they were handed over and had accepted (verse 17), namely, that their old humanity was “crucified together with Christ” (Romans 6:6). Verse 19 was the life-changer for me: “As a man I am saying this, because of the infirmity of your flesh.”

O. M. G. The Romans were still infirm in the flesh—present tense. But they were also free from sin—present tense. The revolutionary conclusion was: *The Romans were infirm in the flesh and free from Sin at the same time.* The only way this could be true is if freedom from Sin concerned an objective declaration of God based, not upon human behavior, but upon an accomplishment of Christ. Rather than a deliverance from Sin itself, the freedom from Sin promoted here had to be freedom from the anachronistic accusations leveled at us by Sin.

These accusations are the voice of Satan. Satan wants worship. To receive it, he must divert attention from Christ and toward himself. He does this by convincing humans that, in spite of Christ’s sacrifice, their sins still hang over their heads. In light of the historical accomplishment of Calvary, how could Satan possibly succeed with this ruse? Yet he does. Christians extol the cross in all their songs, at the same time denying it in their doctrines. With every ounce of their energy, they embrace Satan’s lie. Satan plays this sick yet ingenious trick with appalling success in every church in the world, but especially in the Christian variety, for here he attaches the very name of Christ to his deception. Only Paul exposes the lie. The last message Satan wants anyone hearing is “the type of teaching” forwarded by Paul. Satan would rather preoccupy humans with sacrifice, prayers, church attendance, altar calls, and every other homemade Sin fix. What a devious means of deflecting attention from the *fact* of the death of the old humanity. Satan can’t change a fact, but he can obscure the daylights out of it until error resembles truth, and truth error. What amazing darkness.

... WHILE SMOKING A CIGARETTE

This truth inspired a book from my pen, *How To Be Free From Sin While Smoking a Cigarette*. The surprising word in that title is “while.” Who could imagine that one



could be engaged in sin and free of it simultaneously? (Not that smoking is necessarily sin; I chose something commonly considered so; insert your own particular vice into the title.) This is the radical message of grace, announced only by Paul in his thirteen letters. You will not find a hint of this truth in either Matthew, Mark,

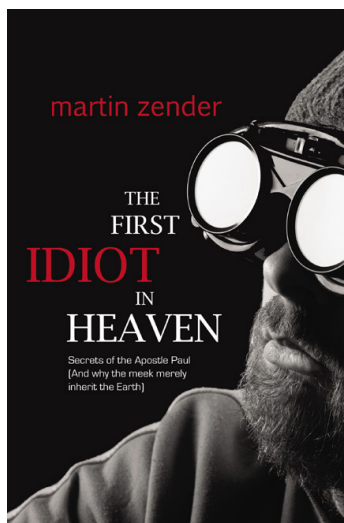
Luke, John, or any of the other Circumcision writings. No one there speaks of justification, only forgiveness. In the four accounts of Christ, penitents are still on their knees weeping for a pardon. How can a new creation be announced (wherein there is neither Jew nor Greek) when Jewish blood holds such preeminence in the king-



“Basically, I’m engaged in sin and free from it simultaneously.”

dom? No one in the four accounts heralds anything like justification to the nations, but rather pardon and forgiveness to Israel and her proselytes (Matthew 15:24). Paul’s message is unique to him. He received a distinct commission from the glorified Christ (Galatians 2:7), boldly calling it “my evangel” (Romans 2:16; 16:25).

To learn more about Paul’s specific call and his divinely divergent message, order my book, *The First Idiot in Heaven*. Here, you will at last realize why the Bible seems to contradict itself, but doesn’t. Are we saved by law or grace? Ah—it depends on whether we are discussing Israel or the nations.



I thank God that He has commissioned me to herald this word of freedom. I feel like a lone voice sometimes, but there are a few others—thank God—who realize and announce this glad tiding. Today, I thank God that there are those that He has raised to receive the message: *you*. Like Paul, I am thanking the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ on hearing of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints, because of the expectation reserved for you in the heavens, which you hear before in the word of truth of the evangel, which, being present with you, is bearing fruit and growing, according as it is among you also, from the day on which you hear and realized the grace of God in truth, according as you learned it. From whomever you learned it, I thank God for that person. —MZ (*To be continued.*)

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HEY ZENDER

Dear Martin,

I have become confused lately with a teaching claiming that every one of Paul's letters up until his so-called "Prison Epistles" (Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians) have to do with Israel's earthly expectation and not the expectation of the body of Christ. In fact, this teaching actually claims that the expectation presented in Paul's early letters is "identical" to the expectation of the Circumcision believers: reigning on earth. How can this be? Doesn't Paul unveil the "snatching away" of the body of Christ in 1 Thessalonians? Doesn't he talk about the secret of our radical change in 1 Corinthians, chapter 15? This confusing teaching depends heavily upon Paul's statement in Acts 28:20 to some Jews in Rome, "For on account of the expectation of Israel this chain is lying about me," and also upon some similar wording between Paul's early letters and the Circumcision writings. Does similar wording mean identical expectation? I know you're busy, but thanks in advance, Martin! —RS

Dear RS,

Do not be troubled by this teaching. I am aware of it. The teaching is mistaken. While Paul does wait until Ephesians to explicitly unveil the location of the destination ("expectation") of the body of Christ (Ephesians 2:6), he certainly lays the groundwork for it in earlier epistles in passages that must be warped beyond recognition to make them "identical" to Israel's earthly call. As you rightly suspect, similar word-

ing does not an identical expectation make. Let's first deal with the Acts 28:20 "proof text," then the so-called "proof" of similar wording, and then we will look at those passages in Paul's early letters that definitely and happily clash with Israel's expectation.

The use of Acts 28:20 to "prove" that Paul taught nothing before this *other than* the expectation of Israel, is ludicrous. Paul is not about to broach the topic of his ministry among the nations to these people—that is, not if he can help it. In the presence of Jews, he will keep his testimony as broad and as Jewish as possible. After all, he had learned back in Jerusalem that even the mere mention of his work among the nations sends even Jesus-believing Israelites into apoplectic fury (Acts 22:21-22). Paul is not so stupid as to repeat that scene at the outset of his Roman incarceration.

Paul is in Rome because on three occasions the Jews in Jerusalem tried to kill him (Acts 21:31-33; Acts 23:10; Acts 23:12). The trouble began when the Jews falsely accused Paul of taking Trophimus, a Greek, into the sanctuary (Acts 21:29). In order to save himself from the Jews, Paul exercised his rights as a Roman citizen and appealed to Caesar (Acts 25:10). He is first escorted to Caesarea (Acts 23:33), then to Rome (Acts 28:14). Here, he calls together "those who are foremost of the Jews" (Acts 28:17). As you can already see, all of Paul's trouble centers around trouble with Jews. Therefore, he will center his defense around his many righteous dealings with Jews, and will find as much legitimate common ground as he can between him and them.

Back when Paul was defending himself in Jerusalem before appealing to Caesar, he told a mixed gathering of Saducees and Pharisees in the Sanhedrin, "Men! Brethren! A Pharisee, son of Pharisees am I. Concerning the expectation and resurrection of the dead am I being judged" (Acts 23:6). Paul was obviously, in his mind, no longer a Pharisee. It had been twenty-three years since his conversion on the Damascus road. Since that time, he had taught the death of the old humanity (Romans 6:6), and the new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). Based on these dual truths, he had already written that, in Christ, "there is neither Jew nor Greek" (Galatians 3:28). Not only did Paul no longer consider himself a Pharisee, he no longer considered himself a Jew. But here in this den of bloodthirsty religious chiefs, currying favor with his persecutors could save his life. Therefore, Paul pulled out his "Pharisee" card and played it to good effect, just as he did with his "Roman Citizen" card on other occasions. Is Paul stupid enough now to proclaim the truth that, "there is neither Jew nor Greek?" Does he produce a copy of his letter to the Galatians? Um, no.

That wouldn't be too smart, would it? Rather, Paul draws upon a common truth between himself and at least half of the Sanhedrin, stating, "Concerning the expectation of the resurrection of the dead am I being judged."

Paul was smart, and here was a brilliant play. Both he and the other Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the dead. The Saducees did not. There was no reason to explore distinctions in various resurrections. Certainly Paul knew that these distinctions existed, but he stuck to the general truth. Part of Paul's ploy, of course, was to set these two factions against one another. It worked brilliantly (Acts 23:7-8). My main point is that, in this company of antagonistic Jews, it served Paul well to come off as Jewish as possible. Isn't this his stated *modus operandi*? He writes in 1 Corinthians 9:19-22—

For, being free of all, I enslave myself to all, that I should be gaining the more. And I became to the Jews as a Jew, that I should be gaining Jews; to those under law as under law (not being myself under law), that I should be gaining those under law; to those without law as without law (not being without God's law, but legally Christ's), that I should be gaining those without law. I became as weak to the weak, that I should be gaining the weak. To all have I become all, that I should undoubtedly be saving some.

Here in the Sanhedrin, Paul is not trying to save others, but himself. To do that, he becomes a Jew to them. Furthermore, though not being, himself, in his own mind, a Pharisee, he becomes as one in the midst of other Pharisees.

Back to Rome now, and Paul has called together some of the foremost Jews and says to them—

I, men, brethren, doing nothing contrary to the people or to the hereditary customs, was given up a prisoner out of Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans, who, examining me, intended to release me, because not one cause of death existed in me. Now at the contradicting of the Jews, I am compelled to appeal to Caesar—not as though having anything of which to accuse my nation. For this cause, then, I call for you, to see and speak to you. For on account of the expectation of Israel this chain is lying about me.

Now you know the context. Paul seeks to curry whatever favor he can with these foremost Jews. He is soft-pedaling himself, to be sure. He calls these men, "brethren." He had not taken Trophimus into the sanctuary, and this alone informs his claim to have done nothing

contrary to the hereditary customs. There is no talk here of his ministry to the nations; no mention of the death of the old humanity; not a whisper of "neither Jew nor Greek," nor of Israel's God-inspired national blindness expounded by him in Romans (11:25). Certainly, then, it would not have served Paul an iota to have even hinted at the superior, radical change expected by Gentiles (over Jews) that would suit their bodies to a celestial destiny high above Israel's. He had written of such remarkable truths prior to this meeting (1 Corinthians 15:49; 2 Corinthians 5:1-2; 1 Thessalonians 4:15-16), but was wise enough to keep such "heresies" out of view.



What, then, was "the expectation of Israel" that Paul had promoted and defended, and for which he was chained? Was resurrection an expectation of Israel? Certainly (*cf* Matthew 22:29-32; John 11:24). Had Paul taught resurrection? Yes. (*cf* 1 Corinthians 15:12-58). What about Israel's expectation of a terrestrial kingdom? Wasn't that a part of "the expectation of Israel"? Of course. Had Paul taught upon it? In detail. He spent three chapters in his letter to the Romans (9-11) explaining the advantage of the Jew, the apostasy of the Jew, the setting aside of the Jew, and, especially, the fulfillment of the Jew "according as it is written" (Romans 11:26-29).

And yet, in spite of being the best friend of the Jew, it was the Jew who had painted him into this corner of Roman appeal. Paul had throughout his career spoken the truth concerning Israel—good and bad—and yet here he sat in chains of Roman construction, but ultimately of Jewish design. His very brethren forced his hand into saving his own skin. What had he done to deserve such chains? According to his testimony here, nothing (Acts 28:17). Not

only that, but he was on record, everywhere, as promoting Jewish interests. Certainly he contemplated no formal case against the nation itself (Acts 28:19). Most importantly, he had, in synagogues everywhere, promoted Christ as Israel's promised Messiah (Acts 9:20-22; Acts 18:5).

Paul's ministry and care for the expectation of Israel is, wisely, the only ministry referenced here before these foremost of his brethren. He had every reason to legitimately boast of it. The unintermittent pain in his heart for his brethren (Romans 9:1-5) was real, not feigned. So was his teaching concerning them. But what about Paul's little "side job" that he doesn't mention here; that is, the reason he was born; that is, the duty for which he had been chosen from before the eons; that is, his office as administrator of the grace of God among the nations? (*cf* 1 Corinthians 4:1; 9:17). Well, when you're sitting with stone-ignorant,

**“When you're sitting with
stone-ignorant, single-minded,
riot-prone Israelites, some
things are best left unsaid.”**

single-minded, riot-prone Israelites, some things are best left unsaid. For Paul to unsheathe his premiere ministry in this company would be the equivalent of unsheathing quantum physics to first graders. We saw what happened when Jesus attempted to explain something as simple as the new birth—an Israelite truth—to an esteemed and “learned” member of the Sanhedrin, Nicodemus. Let's give Paul some credit here, shall we? He was out of their league and they were out of their minds.

To insist, then, that because Paul references *only* his work among Israelites to these Jews (“the expectation of Israel”) as the reason for his chains (it is certainly the most immediate reason), that therefore he never taught anything *besides* this among the nations, is absurd. To use Acts 28:20 as a proof text claiming 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 (the “snatching away” passage) to be referencing Israel's expectation and not that of the body of Christ, betrays the desperation of this argument. It is like insisting that, because a quarterback discusses his pass completion percentage in the post-game interview, therefore he never throws a baseball with his kids. It is this ridiculous of a disconnect. The “similar wording proof” is weaker still, but I will defer comment upon this until next week.

I am aware of the confusing of the “last trump” of 1 Corinthians 15:52 with the “seventh trump” of Revelation 11:15. It is a common enough mistake. Do the saints

of Israel rise from the dead at the sound of the seventh trump? They certainly do not. As for the body of Christ, when it meets the Lord in the air at the snatching away, does it return to earth? No. Earth is not its realm of ministry. Christ removes His body to celestial spheres, though we must find this proof in other passages, and find it we will—next week. Yes, the body of Christ is manifested together with Christ in glory (Colossians 3:4), but how does it get there? By osmosis? Fairy dust? No! By the snatching away, of course.

RS, do not let anyone take away the blessed expectation of your body of humiliation being changed in an instant to a glorious body, of meeting the Lord in the air, and of being taken to your celestial home. As fantastic as these truths seem, they are as real as the back of your hand. Let no one explain these truths away by any means, let alone ridiculous ones. Our apostle Paul teaches body-of-Christ truth from the beginning of his ministry to the end, even while lingering over his beloved brethren. It is Israel that is his “side job,” not that of administrator of God's secrets (1 Corinthians 4:1; one of Paul's earliest letters). Paul's ministry to the nations goes from glory to glory within itself (2 Corinthians 3:18), not from an earthly expectation to a heavenly one at the drop of a dime. Its centerpiece was always a heavenly expectation, revealed in glorious increments from beginning to end. More next week. —MZ

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