

THE GREAT APOSTASY

How believers' rejection of Paul's gospel
led to the formation of Christianity

John D. Clark, Sr.

The Great Apostasy

How believers' rejection of Paul's gospel led to the formation of Christianity

© 2026 John David Clark, Sr.

ISBN-13: 978-1-934782-40-8

Cover design by Donna Nelson

For information, write to:

Books – The Great Apostasy
PO Box 99
Burlington, NC 27216-0099

For more information, please visit these helpful websites:

www.PastorJohnsHouse.com
www.GoingtoJesus.com
www.Isaiah58.com
www.youtube.com/TheSpiritIsTheWitness

And for good music all day long, go to:

www.SongsofRest.com

Author's Notes

- In English, there is no difference in the singular and plural forms of “you”. However, in biblical Hebrew and Greek, the difference is obvious. To more accurately convey the biblical writers’ messages in verses where the word “you” appears, I have italicized the “y” of all plural forms, such as *you*, *your*, *yours*, *yourselves*.
- Translations of Old and New Testament scriptures are my own. Following standard practice, when a word is added to the translation for clarification, it is italicized.
- Punctuation appears inside quotation marks only when that punctuation is part of what is quoted. To include all periods and commas within quotation marks, as many grammarians demand, leaves too much room, in my opinion, for misrepresentation of the quoted material.

BOOKS OF THE BIBLE AND THEIR ABBREVIATIONS

Old Testament Books

Genesis	Gen.	Ecclesiastes	Ecc.
Exodus	Ex.	Song of Solomon	Song
Leviticus	Lev.	Isaiah	Isa.
Numbers	Num.	Jeremiah	Jer.
Deuteronomy	Dt.	Lamentations	Lam.
Joshua	Josh.	Ezekiel	Ezek.
Judges	Judg.	Daniel	Dan.
Ruth	Ruth	Hosea	Hos.
1Samuel	1Sam.	Joel	Joel
2Samuel	2Sam.	Amos	Amos
1Kings	1Kgs.	Obadiah	Obad.
2Kings	2Kgs.	Jonah	Jon.
1Chronicles	1Chron.	Micah	Mic.
2Chronicles	2Chron.	Nahum	Nah.
Ezra	Ezra	Habakkuk	Hab.
Nehemiah	Neh.	Zephaniah	Zeph.
Esther	Esth.	Haggai	Hag.
Job	Job	Zechariah	Zech.
Psalms	Ps.	Malachi	Mal.
Proverbs	Prov.		

New Testament Books

Matthew	Mt.	1Timothy	1Tim.
Mark	Mk.	2Timothy	2Tim.
Luke	Lk.	Titus	Tit.
John	Jn.	Philemon	Phlm.
Acts	Acts	Hebrews	Heb.
Romans	Rom.	James	Jas.
1Corinthians	1Cor.	1Peter	1Pet.
2Corinthians	2Cor.	2Peter	2Pet.
Galatians	Gal.	1John	1Jn.
Ephesians	Eph.	2John	2Jn.
Philippians	Philp.	3John	3Jn.
Colossians	Col.	Jude	Jude
1Thessalonians	1Thess.	Revelation	Rev.
2Thessalonians	2Thess.		

Introduction

God has appointed a day in which He will judge the world by His Son, Jesus Christ (Acts 17:31), and it is the goal of wise souls to be judged worthy of salvation on that day. To that end, the wise trust what the holy Scriptures say more than they trust the traditions with which they are familiar, and more than the doctrines they have been taught, and more than their own opinions and preferences.

This little book will challenge all those things. It unearths the root of the mass confusion that exists among believers today, and it will deliver from the awful bondage of false religion the Reader who longs to know the truth and be free.

If you are a soul longing for the truth, know that you are precious in God's eyes and that He has heard and answered your humble prayers to know Him by letting this little book come into your hand.

THE GREAT APOSTASY

How believers' rejection of Paul's gospel
led to the formation of Christianity

This book is from the first chapter of *The Synthesis*,
the fourth book in the Iron Kingdom Series,
available for reading or download at
GoingtoJesus.com

John D. Clark, Sr.

The Gospel for the Jews

John the Baptizer said that God sent him to introduce the Messiah to Israel (Jn. 1:31b), not to introduce him to the world. Likewise, Jesus was sent only to the Jews (Mt. 15:24). His determination to obey his Father was demonstrated best by his response to a brokenhearted Gentile mother who came to him for help. At first, he ignored her completely, then he called her a dog, and then, when she admitted that compared to Jews she was indeed a dog, he relented and healed her daughter:

Matthew 15

22. A Canaanite woman from those parts came and began crying out to him, saying, “Have mercy on me, sir, O son of David! My daughter is badly demon-possessed!”
23. But he answered her not a word. Then his disciples came and begged him, saying, “Make her go away! She’s crying after us!”
24. He answered and said, “I am sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”
25. Then she came and prostrated herself before him, saying, “Sir, help me!”
26. But he answered and said, “It is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.”
27. Then she said, “That’s true, Master. And yet, the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.”
28. Jesus then answered and said to her, “O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you wish.” And her daughter was healed from that hour.

The miraculous healing of the woman’s daughter captures our attention and makes it easy to overlook Jesus’ dismissive attitude toward this poor Gentile mother, and Jesus never gave

his disciples a reason to think differently about Gentiles. He obeyed Moses' law, as every upright Jew did, and bluntly condemned the ways of Gentiles (Mt. 6:32; 20:25–26). And when Jesus sent his disciples to preach in the cities of the Jews, among the strict instructions he gave them was this:

Matthew 10

- 5b. Do not go out to the way of the Gentiles, and do not go into a city of the Samaritans.¹
6. Go instead to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

After God sent His Spirit in Acts 2, inaugurating the New Covenant, Jesus' disciples continued to follow his lead. They preached only to the Jews, as Jesus himself had done and had commanded them to do. After all, God had said through the prophet Jeremiah that he would send the Spirit and establish a New Covenant *with Israel*, not with Gentile dogs:

Jeremiah 31

31. Behold, the days are coming, says Jehovah, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah.
-
33. This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says Jehovah: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their heart. And I will be their God, and they will be my people.

God made this covenant with Israel when He poured out His Spirit in Acts 2. No Gentiles were involved. The Spirit was poured out that day only on devout Jews, those locally who believed in Jesus and those who had made the great effort

¹ The Samaritans occupied a spiritual place between Jews and Gentiles. Like the Jews, they claimed Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as their fathers (cf. Jn. 4:12), but they did not keep all the law of Moses, and they completely rejected David's revelation of Jerusalem as God's chosen place of worship. The origin of the Samaritans can be found in 2Kings 17:24–34.

to travel to Jerusalem “from every nation under heaven” (Acts 2:5) to present themselves before God, as Moses commanded (Dt. 16:16). Filled with the Spirit, Peter declared the good news of the Messiah to those law-keeping Jews, and

Acts 2

37. when they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they said to Peter and to the rest of the apostles, “Men and brothers, what are we to do?”
38. Peter started telling them, “Repent and be baptized [John’s baptism with water], every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins,² and you will receive the gift of the holy Spirit [Jesus’ baptism with the Spirit]!”

In Acts 2, when the New Testament was initiated, the call of God, the conviction to repent and believe, the Messiah and his gospel, and the soul-cleansing baptism of the Spirit were all, and only, for the Jews. The only way for a Gentile at that time to partake of the New Covenant that God had made with Israel was to become a Jew by submitting to the law, and then to repent and be baptized with John’s baptism, believing in Jesus. Then, and only then, could he receive the Spirit.

“God Needed Another Man”

The gospel preached by Jesus and his disciples was altogether and exclusively a Jewish gospel, and the disciples, along with every other Jew who believed in Jesus, expected it to remain that way forever. For them, conversion to Christ was part of what it meant to be a good, law-keeping Jew; and at first, that was true, for God gave no Jew who disobeyed the law the grace to believe in His Son. The baptism of the Spirit was

² John’s baptism did not itself remit sin. Everything God commanded under the law, not just John’s baptism, was “for the remission of sins,” but nothing under the law did it. The entire law pointed to the remission of sins which Jesus’ sacrifice of himself accomplished, through his baptism with the Spirit.

not seen as the end of the law; on the contrary, it was seen, and rightly so, as confirmation that the law was of God, for only those who kept the law received it. That held true until a few years after the New Testament began, when God determined that the Samaritans and then the Gentiles should also hear the gospel and be received into His kingdom.

In Matthew 16:19, Jesus promised to give Peter the keys of the kingdom of God,³ and even though Peter did not understand what that meant, the Spirit later empowered Peter to use them. That anointing on Peter opened the door for the Jews to enter the kingdom of God in Acts 2; thus, the first key was used. Then, in Acts 8, under that same anointing, Peter used his key by laying hands on the Samaritans, and they were also baptized with the Spirit into the kingdom. Finally, in Acts 10, after God forced him to go to Cornelius' house, Peter used the last of his three keys of the kingdom to open the door for the Gentiles, and they were also baptized into the body of Christ, "no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and members of the household of God" (Eph. 2:19).

Because Jesus, when he was on earth, sternly commanded his disciples not to preach to the Gentiles, God had to force Peter to go to the house of Cornelius to preach, but when Peter had just begun to speak (Acts 11:15), God shocked Peter and his six Jewish companions by baptizing Cornelius and his Gentile friends with the Spirit (Acts 10:44–46). This was an utterly unexpected event. God had baptized with His holy Spirit people whom Jesus called dogs! He had not required that they be circumcised or water baptized. It was unthinkable! God had welcomed uncircumcised Gentiles into His kingdom who did not observe the rites and rules of Moses' law!

No doctrine existed that could explain what God had done. Not even the apostles understood it. Peter himself did not

³ See the gospel tract, "The Keys of the Kingdom" at GoingtoJesus.com.

know what to do. His baptism of Cornelius with water after Jesus had baptized Cornelius with the Spirit made no sense at all because John's baptism with water was only for Jews, and circumcision (conversion to Judaism) should have been required of Cornelius before receiving that baptism. As one elderly mother in Christ used to testify in our Assembly, "God needed another man." That is to say, God needed a man so empty of his own ways and thoughts that he would believe God even if God were to tell him things that no one else believed, a man who would dare to teach whatever he heard from God, even if it was different from what God's own Son had said while on earth.

Paul's Experience

Unbelieving Jews often hated Jews who believed in Jesus. Among those unbelieving Jews was a young man known as Saul of Tarsus. He helped stone Stephen to death and ravaged the Assembly of saints in and around Jerusalem. "I ruthlessly and relentlessly persecuted the Assembly of God and was trying to destroy it," he would later say (Gal. 1:13b). In his great zeal for the law, Saul, "breathing out threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, approached the high priest and asked him for letters to the Damascus synagogues, that if he found any of the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem" (Acts 9:1-2). Having received those letters, Saul took men with him and left for Damascus.

Acts 9

3. And in his journey, as he was drawing near to Damascus, a light from heaven suddenly shone around him.
4. And he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?"
5. And he said, "Who are you, sir?" And the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting."

6. And he, trembling and astonished, said, “Lord, what do you want me to do?” And the Lord said to him, “Just rise up and go on into the city, and it will be told you what you must do.”

With this, Saul began to realize, to his great consternation, that he had been persecuting righteous Jews, men and women whom God loved and who loved God. He was astounded to realize that he had been deceived by the highly regarded religious leaders he had trusted with his soul. His heart was broken. He had trusted men who should have been, and he had thought were, closest to God of all men, only to discover that they were wrong and that their counsel had inspired him to do much evil. But when God utterly crushed his spirit, that worked in his favor, for it took that degree of brokenness to make Saul willing to hear and believe what God had to tell him. A wise elder in the Faith whom we called “Uncle Joe” once testified with tears in our Assembly that he had learned by experience that Jesus only uses broken bread. That is true. Peter was broken by the crowing of a rooster after he cursed and swore he did not know the Lord (Mt. 26:74–75); Jesus then used him greatly. And Saul was broken on the road to Damascus when he discovered that he had been deceived by men he admired as the wisest on earth.

After Saul learned that precious, bitter lesson, he refused to trust any man, not even the apostles of Christ. He was desperate to hear from God Himself so that he would know for certain what was right, and he withdrew from society so that he might seek God’s face and, if God would, to hear from Him. Later, Saul was called by a different name, Paul, and he told the Galatians,

Galatians 1

15. When God, who set me apart from my mother’s womb and called me by His grace, was pleased

16. to reveal His Son to me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood,
17. nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; rather, I went away into Arabia, and then returned again to Damascus.

There, at Mount Sinai in Arabia (cf. Gal. 4:25), God did speak to Paul, and he heard things from God that he never would have believed had he not first been broken and humbled to the dust. He described his experience in a letter to the Corinthian saints:

2Corinthians 12

2. I know a man in Christ [Paul himself], over fourteen years ago – if in the body, I do not know, or if out of the body, I do not know; God knows. Such a man was caught up to the third heaven.
3. And I know such a man – whether in the body or out of the body, I do not know; God knows –
4. how that he was snatched up into Paradise and heard inexpressible things which are unlawful for a man to speak.

From that point on, Paul taught only what God revealed to him, and God gave Paul some extraordinary revelations (2Cor. 12:7). As a result, the gospel which Paul preached was so holy, so pure, and so full of spiritual wisdom that it tried even the hearts of the apostles, as Peter admitted:

2Peter 3

15. Consider the patience of our Lord to be salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul has also written to you according to the wisdom given to him,
- 16a. as also in all his letters when speaking in them about these matters, among which are some things hard to understand.

The Gospel for the Gentiles

God chose and anointed Paul to be the teacher of the Gentiles (1Tim. 2:7; 2Tim. 1:11), but to equip him for that service, God revealed to Paul a new and unexpected gospel. That gospel differed from the first gospel in one key area, namely, it excluded the requirement to keep Moses' law.

It must have amazed Paul, a devoted keeper of the law, to learn that God never intended for the law to be kept forever, but that He gave it to Israel only as a "shadow" of His Son (Col. 2:17). Paul's entire life had been guided by the knowledge that keeping the law made men righteous in God's sight, but now, he had been made humble enough by God to believe Him when He showed him that "Christ is the end of a law for righteousness" (Rom. 10:4). Young Paul had been desperate to hear from God, to know what was really true, and alone with God in the desert of Arabia, he did, and he spent the rest of his life laboring to persuade both Jew and Gentile believers of the reality and beauty of his revelation.

With that revelation, Paul saw that the Son's life and death under the law fulfilled God's inscrutably wise purpose for the law's handwritten rites and rules. To see that truth thrilled Paul's soul, and he joyfully and boldly proclaimed that in Christ, the Old Testament ritual of circumcision had been transformed into a circumcision of the heart by the Spirit (Rom. 2:28–29); the ritual of baptizing bodies with water had been transformed into a baptism of souls by the Spirit (cf. 1Cor. 12:13); the ritual of feast days requiring the Jews to banquet on the flesh of animals and the produce of vineyards had been transformed into a feast in which God's people banquet on the spiritual flesh and blood of the Son of God (Jn. 6:53–55; 1Cor. 12:13);⁴ and the kind of rest which God now gives those who love His Son is not rest for the flesh, but relief for the soul from the dominion of sin (Rom. 6:18, 20, 22),

⁴ See the gospel tract, "Communion", at GoingtoJesus.com.

which is what Jesus had in mind when he said, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavily laden, and I will give you rest!” (Mt. 11:28).

Every Ceremonial Work

In Paul’s day, the rituals of Moses’ law were the only works that Paul’s Gentile converts could have been persuaded to add to their worship, for they knew well the pagan rites they once observed were vain contrivances of men, or of demons (cf. 1Tim. 4:1). But Paul’s revelation of the worthlessness of rituals included *all* rituals that employed earthly substances, the rituals of the law as well as pagan rituals.

Most translations add *the* in many scriptures where Paul speaks of rites and rules prescribed by law because the great issue of his time concerned whether God required believing Gentiles to keep the law of Moses. But Paul’s gospel excluded not only *Israel’s* ceremonial works; it excluded *any* rite or rule prescribed by custom or law. Note that Paul omitted *the* in several of the following scriptures:

Romans 9

20. Wherefore, by works of a law shall no flesh be justified before Him, for by a law came the knowledge of sin.

Galatians 2

15. We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles,
16. knowing that a man is not justified by works of a law, but through faith in Jesus Christ, we also have trusted in Christ Jesus that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law. Therefore, by works of law will no flesh be justified!

When Paul was speaking specifically of the Mosaic law, he routinely added *the*:

Galatians 2

19. Through the law, I died to the law, that I might live to God.

But Paul had more than Moses' law in mind as he reasoned with his beloved Galatian converts, who were being persuaded to forsake the way of the Spirit and to submit to the law:

Galatians 3

2. This only would I learn of you. Did you receive the Spirit by works of a law or by *the* preaching of faith?
3. Are you so foolish? Having begun in spirit, are you now perfected by flesh?
4. Did you suffer so much for nothing? (If it yet be for nothing.)
5. So then, he who ministers to you the Spirit and works miracles among you, *does he do it* by works of a law or by *the* preaching of faith?
-
10. For as many as are of works of a law are under a curse, for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things written in the book of the law, to do them."
11. That no one is justified with God by a law is obvious, for "The righteous shall live by faith,"
12. but the law is not "by faith"; instead, "The man who has kept these things shall live by them."

Paul's breathtaking revelation was that God had stripped the once-glorious law of Moses of all its glory (2Cor. 3:10–11), which made the rituals of Moses' law as worthless for salvation as pagan rituals had always been. That, in particular, was hard for Jewish believers to hear. How could something so holy become non-holy? Nevertheless, Paul knew it was true, and he boldly taught that worship in this covenant is only in the Spirit, which means that every other form of worship is worthless, even the form of worship God had required of Israel.

Paul taught his Gentile converts that in this covenant, only what Jesus died for, to wit, to make the Spirit of God available to humans, can make a soul clean in God's sight. Nothing earthly can do that. It was foolish, he taught, for those who had received the Spirit and were "new creatures in Christ" to participate in fleshly forms of worship, such as the rituals of the Mosaic law, for merely by participating in those works, they were denying the sufficiency of Christ, by himself, to sanctify and to save. In God's eyes, those children of His were "denying the Lord who bought them" (2Pet. 2:1).

To Paul, it was not that the earthly materials used in rituals were evil; it was that because of the glory of Jesus, they were worthless for obtaining salvation – all of them, whether of Moses' law or not. That is the truth underlying the statement Paul made concerning the law's physical circumcision, which distinguished Jews from Gentiles. "Circumcision is nothing," he said, "and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God" (1Cor. 7:19). That "middle wall of partition" had been destroyed by Jesus (Eph. 2:14).

Paul acknowledged that, for the time being, God was still requiring that generation of Jews to keep the law, and since that was true, he warned the Galatians that if they submitted to circumcision and became Jews, they, too, would be required by God to keep the whole law (Gal. 5:3). But Paul knew the time for that requirement would end. If he wrote Hebrews, then late in his life, he is the one who said that Moses' law was "becoming obsolete and growing old, [and] is about to vanish away" (Heb. 8:13).

In the Flesh

Although believers on earth live in fleshly bodies, Paul taught the Corinthians, they do not use fleshly materials in spiritual battle, "for the weapons of our warfare are not fleshly but powerful through God for the tearing down of strongholds" (2Cor. 10:3–4). Rituals being "in the flesh" means that they

employ physical materials such as water, fire, bread, wine, etc. Once the law's rituals, all of which employed such physical materials, were fulfilled by Christ, they became as worthless as were pagan rituals; in comparison to fellowship with Christ, they were, to use Paul's term, dung:

Philippians 3

3. We are the circumcision who serve God in spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and put no confidence in the flesh –
4. although I do have good reason to trust in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he has reason to trust in the flesh, I have more:
5. circumcised the eighth day; of the nation of Israel; of the tribe of Benjamin; a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning *the* law, a Pharisee;
6. concerning zeal, persecuting the Assembly *of* God, being blameless according to the righteousness that is in *the* law.
7. However, what things were gain to me, these I have counted as loss for Christ.
8. But more than that, I consider all things but loss for the surpassing value of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have suffered the loss of everything. But I consider *it all* dung, that I might gain Christ.

What form of dung have you been taught to cling to?

When Paul was confronted by Jesus on the road to Damascus and discovered that although he had kept the law studiously, he had been doing evil, he was forced to face the fact that keeping the law had neither given him the knowledge of God nor kept him from sin. And when Jesus revealed to Paul a gospel for the Gentiles, it no longer made any difference to Paul – because he now knew that it no longer makes any difference to God – which form of fleshly worship is offered, whether it be the fleshly worship of Moses' law or the fleshly worship of Pagans. It was all powerless to save.

It was all equally useless because in this covenant, only the worship that is offered to God in the name of His Son Jesus is acceptable – and the Spirit is what was given to man in Jesus’ name (Jn. 14:26). Nobody has ever or will ever receive the Spirit of God in the name of any other. Peter, when he was put on trial for his life, boldly declared to the rulers of the Jews, “Salvation is not by any other, for there is no other name given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

The gospel Jesus revealed to Paul was a gospel of dependence upon the Spirit alone to make man’s life and worship acceptable to God. It was revealed to him that God ended the law’s fleshly form of worship when He nailed to the cross His Son’s fleshly body that had kept Moses’ law. When that body died, the law died with it. Paul tried to persuade his Gentile converts in Colossae to believe that astonishing truth:

Colossians 2

13. You, being dead in transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He [God] made alive with him [Jesus], forgiving us of all transgressions
14. after He had blotted out that which was against us, the handwriting of ordinances that was contrary to us [the law], removing it from between us [Jews and Gentiles] when He nailed it to the cross.

Worship “in the flesh” is contrary to worship in the Spirit, which Jesus said is the kind of worship God now demands:

John 4

23. An hour is coming, and now is, when true worshippers will worship the Father spiritually and truly, for the Father is searching for such people to worship Him.
24. God is a spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth.

Paul’s revelation was that when a person receives the Spirit and becomes “a new creature in Christ”, he is free not only

from his old, sinful nature, but also from every form of fleshly, that is, ceremonial, worship. There are no ceremonies in heaven, and in Christ, we are citizens of that country. As Paul said, “Our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we earnestly await the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Phil. 3:20).

“You Cannot Bear Them Right Now”

The night before he died, Jesus told his disciples, “The Comforter, the holy Spirit which the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will bring to your remembrance everything I have told you” (Jn. 14:26). That is the Spirit which taught Paul, and it still teaches those who will have it. But there must be a meeting of the minds. It takes the same anointing to read and understand what Paul and other men of God wrote that it took for them to be able to write it. It takes the same anointing to hear and understand what any man of God says that it takes for him to say it. What the Spirit gives men to teach is always given in Jesus’ name, but what they say must also be *listened to* in Jesus’ name. Before Jesus’ disciples received the Spirit, they were unable to listen or do anything at all in Jesus’ name (cf. Jn. 16:24) because they were still carnally minded, but he told them of a day coming when they would be able to hear what the Spirit would say:

John 16

12. I still have many things to tell you, but you cannot bear them right now.

13a. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth.

One of the things Jesus could not tell his disciples is that after he ascended to the Father, he would call another man to be an apostle and would reveal to that man a gospel different from the one they would be given, a gospel which excluded Moses’ law. Another truth they could not then bear is that God would receive Gentiles into His kingdom without them

observing the law. If Jesus had told his disciples either of those things at that time, they would not have been able to believe him.

The Jerusalem Council

Paul's gospel was not well received in some quarters, especially among Jews who loved the gospel the apostles had preached to them but who were also proud of their Jewishness. As previously explained, before Cornelius and his Gentile friends received the Spirit, God required Gentiles to become Jews if they wanted to be washed from their sins and be part of the body of Christ. But when God's time came for the Gentiles to be welcomed into the kingdom of God without the law, He revealed to Paul a new gospel to explain why God would receive Gentiles into His kingdom. But not many believed Paul had really heard from God, and the issue of whether or not God required Gentiles to keep the law became, by far, the greatest doctrinal controversy among first-century believers. Paul had to deal with it in the majority of his epistles.

Soon after Gentiles began believing in Jesus, some Jewish teachers in Jerusalem felt that they should travel to Antioch and teach the Gentile believers in that city that they must become Jews (by circumcision) and keep the law. But Paul and Barnabas were there, and they vehemently opposed those teachers. The controversy ignited a theological firestorm which resulted in the apostles and elders in Jerusalem calling a council together to settle the matter (Acts 15:1–2).⁵

In that Jerusalem Council, the debate was fierce and went on for hours, but Paul was unyielding. He had heard from God, and he understood now that God had given Moses the works of the law as prophetic symbols which were in force only until the Son came and fulfilled them, though he acknowledged that for the time being, God was requiring the

⁵ For more on this, see Book Two of the Iron Kingdom Series, *The Jerusalem Council*, at GoingtoJesus.com.

Jews to continue with the law. At length, the Council was brought to an abrupt conclusion when Peter arose and reminded everyone present of what God had done at Cornelius' house. Peter did not quote a single scripture, but no one there could deny the truth of his testimony:

Acts 15

7. And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose and said to them, "Men and brothers, you know that a good while ago, God made choice among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles were to hear the word of the gospel, and believe.
8. And God, who knows the heart, bore them witness, giving them the holy Spirit just as *He gave it* to us,
9. and He made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.
10. Now then, why do you tempt God by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?
11. No! We believe we will be saved the same way they *will be* – through the grace of the Lord Jesus."

When Peter finished recounting what God did through him at Cornelius' house, there was nothing left for anyone to say. The apostles and elders agreed that Paul's gospel for the Gentiles was of God, and when the Galatians were pressured to submit to Moses' law, Paul thought it would help them to know of the Council's decision:

Galatians 2

1. I went up to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along also.
- 2a. I went up because of a revelation, and I laid out to them the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles.
3. But even Titus, who was with me though he was Greek, was not compelled to be circumcised,

4. in spite of false brothers stealthily brought in, who slipped in to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus so that they might enslave us [to rites and rules again],
5. to whom we did not yield in submission even for a moment so that the truth of the gospel might continue for you.
6. But as for those esteemed to be something. . . .
7. once they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel for the uncircumcision, as *the gospel* for the circumcision was to Peter,
8. (for He who worked in Peter for the apostleship of the circumcised worked also in me for the Gentiles),
9. and acknowledging the grace that was given to me, James, [Peter], and John, who were esteemed as pillars, gave right hands of fellowship to me and to Barnabas, that we *should go* to the Gentiles, but they, to the circumcision.

At the conclusion of the Jerusalem Council, as I have imagined it, Paul gave this farewell address to the elders and apostles assembled there:

Men and brothers, hear my final word before we ask leave of you to return to Antioch to bring them the report of this meeting, for they are most anxious to hear it.

As you know, Jesus gave to Peter the gospel for this nation, the gospel you all now preach. That gospel, however, the gospel which still applies to every one of us here today except brother Titus, recognizes two bodies as being of God: the Israel descended from Abraham's flesh and the Israel of God who are born of the Spirit out of every nation. Every one of us in this Council today, except Titus, belongs to both these bodies, but only one of them will endure forever. Peter's gospel for the Jews also recognizes two baptisms: the baptism of the flesh that God sent John to preach to Israel and the baptism of the Spirit that Jesus

now ministers from heaven to men everywhere who believe. Only one baptism will endure; the other will soon pass away. Also in the gospel for the Jews are two Lords: one on earth, that is, the high priest of Israel, and one in heaven, our High Priest who sits at the Father's right hand. We Jews who believe acknowledge the authority of both, and submit to both for the time being, but only one High Priest will continue forever; the other priesthood will pass away. In the gospel for the Jews, there are also two hopes: the first is the hope which you who walked with Jesus mistakenly thought he had come to give us now, namely, an earthly kingdom. The second hope is the hope of eternal life, which he actually came to give us. Also in the Jews' gospel, two spirits lead men, for the spirit of man can worship in the rites of the law, but in God's eternal kingdom, acceptable worship is worship in His Spirit alone. In the Jews' gospel are also two faiths: faith in the law and faith in the power of Jesus to save, but when the law passes away, only faith in Jesus will remain. And finally, brothers – hear me well! – for those who continue in Peter's gospel after God finishes with it, there will be two Gods! For just as those who continued to worship in high places after God forsook them and chose Jerusalem as the place for His worship were actually worshipping demons and not God, so when God finishes with the law, those who continue to worship in it will also be worshipping demons instead of God. My gospel, just as I preach it, is eternal; the gospel for the Jews is not, and was never meant to be.

That is what Messiah taught me, and I thank God that He gave me grace to believe him! Beware that you listen to his voice and that you do not continue in the thing God leaves behind, when that day comes! For if you do, then by continuing in the law, you will become

slanderers of the truth, not ministers of it, denying the sufficiency of Jesus alone to save.

And now, my dear brothers, we bid you an affectionate farewell, and we commend you to God until He grants that we return to be among you.

The Apostasy

In spite of the Jerusalem Council's decision, many self-willed Jewish teachers, in their misguided zeal for the law, still went out among the Gentiles, without the apostles' approval, demanding that they keep the law. "They went out from us," the apostle John wrote, "but they were not of us" (1Jn. 2:19a). Tragically, those misguided men were successful in turning the Gentiles against Paul and his gospel.

When the Jewish teachers began persuading Paul's converts in Galatia to add the law's rites to their worship, Paul pleaded with the Galatians to "stand fast in the liberty with which Christ has made us free" (Gal. 5:1). And when he learned that Jewish teachers were also pressuring his converts in Colossae to submit to the law, Paul exhorted them to stand fast:

Colossians 2

16. Do not allow anyone to condemn you in *matters of* eating or drinking, or in regard to a feast, or a new moon, or a Sabbath,
17. which are a shadow of things to come, but the reality is of Christ!

Still, for Gentile believers who wanted to be like Jesus but had not developed the mind of Christ, it sounded believable that they must live and worship as Jesus had lived and worshipped. And the men who taught that doctrine to Gentile believers could add the indisputable fact that Jesus' apostles and everyone else who received the Spirit on the day of Pentecost were dedicated to the law, and still were. Those teachers would have complimented believing Gentiles for

trusting in Jesus and would have spoken reverentially of God. Moreover, they certainly lived respectably, keeping the commandments of the law. Some of them may have even walked with Jesus while he was on earth and could tell fascinating stories. They were, without any doubt, impressive and convincing teachers.

But Paul was unmoved from his revelation. He wrote to Titus, “They profess to know God, but by [ceremonial] works, they deny Him” (Tit. 1:16a). And he told the Corinthians, “From now on, we know no one after the flesh. Though we have known even Christ after the flesh, yet now, we no longer know him that way” (2Cor. 5:17). In other words, the Son of God is no longer a Jew; that is, he no longer has a fleshly Jewish body. The glorified Christ is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither male nor female, young nor old, for he is like his Father. Therefore, to be like Jesus does not mean to be a Jew, for in the body of Christ, the earthly family of God, “there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor freeman, nor male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28). In Christ, there is neither black nor white, American nor Russian, nor rich or poor. Such distinctions among God’s earthly children are fleshly, and they mean nothing to Him.

But fewer and fewer believers of the time were buying into Paul’s claim that Jesus had shown him something different from what Jesus and his apostles preached to the Jews. And because the Jewish teachers were so successful, the great apostle Paul was reduced to begging his own converts to believe him:

Galatians 1

11. I would have you to know, brothers, regarding the gospel preached by me, that it is not according to man.
12. For I neither received it from a man, nor was I taught it, but *I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.*

....

20. The things I am writing to you, behold, before God, I am not lying!

Paul even felt the need to remind Timothy, his trusted son in the Faith, that he was not a deceiver:

1Timothy 2

7. I was ordained a preacher, an apostle – I am speaking the truth in Christ! I am not lying! – a faithful and true teacher of Gentiles.

When Paul learned that some of the Galatians had already been lured away from worship in the Spirit alone, he was heartbroken: “You are estranged from Christ,” he pleaded, “you who are justified by law; you have fallen from grace. For we await the hope of righteousness by faith in the Spirit [i.e. not by observing rites and rules]” (Gal. 5:4–5). “The end of the commandment”, he explained to young Timothy, “is love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and unfeigned faith” (1Tim. 1:5). “Love”, he told the saints in Rome, “does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfillment of *the* law” (Rom. 13:10).

Slavery Instead of Liberty

Paul saw the performance of rituals as spiritual slavery from which Christ had made believers free, but in vain did he labor to prevent his Gentile converts from returning to the emptiness of that form of worship:

Galatians 4

8. Formerly, when you did not know God, you lived as slaves to things which by nature are not divine,
9. but now, having come to know God – or rather, having been known by God – how is it that you want to return again to live – again! – as slaves to weak and worthless elements?

10. You observe days and months and seasons and years.
11. I am afraid for you, that I may have labored among you in vain.

Those “weak and worthless elements” were physical things such as water, fire, holy times, special garments for worship, etc., which were required for worship by both Moses’ law and pagan rituals. When Paul died, he fell asleep in Christ grieving for the apostasy he saw taking place but could not stop. “All they in Asia have forsaken me,” the aged apostle wrote Timothy (2Tim. 1:15). “The more I love you, the less I am loved,” he told the Corinthians (2Cor. 12:15b). And “I may not be worthy to be called an apostle because I persecuted the Assembly of God. Nevertheless, by the grace of God, I am what I am” (1Cor. 15:9–10a). And he pleaded earnestly with the Galatians to remember what he had done for them in Christ and their former feelings for him:

Galatians 4

13. You know that through weakness of the flesh, I preached the gospel to you at the beginning,
14. and my trial which was in my flesh, you did not despise nor reject; no, you embraced me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus.
15. So, who was the *source* of your blessedness? For I bear you witness that if possible, you would have dug out your eyes and given them to me.
16. Have I now become your enemy because I tell you the truth?

By the close of the age of the first apostles, even before the destruction of the temple, the apostasy had spread everywhere. Moses’ law was embraced by virtually the entire body of Christ, and thus, God’s New Testament children started on the path that would lead them to Rome, the path of worshipping in the flesh instead of in the Spirit, of slavery instead of liberty.

The significance of that apostasy can hardly be overstated, for it determined virtually everything that followed for the body of Christ, even to this day.

Disobedience Leads to a Curse

After entering the promised land of Canaan, in a ritual God commanded to be performed atop Mount Ebal, six of the tribes of Israel stood and cried out together, “Cursed be anyone who does not accede to the words of this law, to do them!” and all Israel replied, “Amen!” (Dt. 27:28; Josh. 8:33). That curse on the disobedient remained in effect throughout the Old Testament. Centuries later, disobedience to the law is the only reason given for the destruction and captivity of the ten northern tribes of Israel (2Kgs. 17:7–15). Great blessings were promised for faithfulness (Dt. 28:1–14), but from the beginning, Israel was warned that unfaithfulness would bring suffering and death (Dt. 28:15–68). For that reason, as the time for his departure approached, Moses earnestly exhorted Israel to be faithful. The law, he told them, “is not a vain thing for you; yea, it is your life!” (Dt. 32:47a). And the many prophets who came after him exhorted Israel to be faithful, just as Moses did. But it was to no avail.

The apostle Paul, after listing some of the tragic results of Israel’s disobedience, told the saints in Corinth, “All these things happened to them as examples, and they are written for our admonition. Therefore, let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (1Cor. 10:11a, 12). And referring to the destruction of many in Israel, he admonished the Gentile saints in Rome,

Romans 11

19. You will say then, “The branches [the Jews] were broken off so that I might be grafted in.”

20. That is true. They were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be high-minded, but fear,

21. for if God did not spare the natural branches, He might not spare you, either.

The fact that this is a better covenant (Heb. 8:6) does not mean that we are now allowed to get by with more sin. On the contrary, for “from everyone to whom much is given, much will be required” (Lk. 12:48). If, under the law, disobedience to God’s will resulted in merciless death, how much more surely will we die if we live and worship contrary to His will in this much holier covenant! We have this sobering admonition:

Hebrews 10

28. Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy, by two or three witnesses.
29. Of how much worse punishment, do you think, will he be worthy who has trampled under foot the Son of God, has regarded as a common thing the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has done outrage to the Spirit of grace?
30. For we know Him who said, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay, says the LORD.” And again, “The LORD will judge His people.”
31. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

The rejection of Paul’s gospel by first-century believers could only have had one outcome for them: spiritual death, and damnation afterward. That is what prompted Paul to give this grave warning to the saints in Galatia:

Galatians 1

8. Even if we, or an angel from heaven, bring you a gospel contrary to the gospel we preached to you, let him be cursed!⁶

⁶ There is no English equivalent to the Greek verb form used here. Paul was *commanding* such a man to be cursed, not asking for it. “He is cursed!” is closer to his meaning.

9. As we have said before, and I now say again, if anyone brings you a gospel contrary to what you received, let him be cursed!

The men who persuaded the Gentiles in Galatia to submit to the Jews' gospel were cursed, not because the Jews' gospel was false (it certainly was not!) but because God had not sent them to preach it to Gentiles. After God revealed a gospel for the Gentiles, Peter's gospel was false when it was preached to them. And when the Galatian saints were persuaded to submit to the Jews' gospel, the dreadful curse that was on their teachers came upon them as well. That curse continued among apostate believers until it led them into a union with the pagan Roman Empire in AD 325 under the Emperor Constantine, and the deceitful name they proudly gave their institutionalized curse was Christianity.⁷ It happened to the body of Christ just as both Peter and Paul foretold:

2Peter 2

1. There were false prophets among the [Old Testament] people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will introduce opinions that lead to damnation, even denying the Lord who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction.
2. And many will follow them in licentious ways, because of whom the way of truth will be spoken evil of.

2Timothy 4

3. The time will come when they will not put up with sound doctrine, but will heap up teachers for themselves according to their own desires, having itching ears,
4. and they will turn away from hearing the truth, and be turned over to myths.

⁷ A sister in Christ, Amy French, suggested that the name should be "*Cursed-ianity*" instead of Christianity.

If Paul's curse on false teachers is not still in effect, it is only because God is good. Believers who have joined themselves to Christianity teach so many conflicting gospels – none of them Paul's – that God would have to curse them all, but “as a father pities his children, Jehovah pities those who fear Him” (Ps. 103:13).

The Son's Prophetic Prayer

After the nation of Israel had made its final choice of the law over their Messiah, when the last Jewish soul that would believe had done so, then the very thing that God had given Israel for their greatest blessing – Moses' law – became a snare for their souls, just as the Son of God had long before prayed through David:

Psalm 69

21. They put poison in my food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.
22. Let their table be a snare before them, and the things they are content with, a trap.
23. Let their eyes grow too dim to see, and make their loins continually shake.
24. Pour out your indignation on them, and let your burning anger overtake them.

The Son also prayed through Jeremiah for God's dread curse of spiritual blindness to come upon the Jews who would abuse and reject him when he came:

Lamentations 3

59. You have seen, O Jehovah, the wrong done to me. Judge my cause!
60. You have seen all their vindictiveness, all their machinations against me.
61. You have heard their reproach, O Jehovah, and all their thoughts against me;

62. the lips of those who rise against me and their murmuring are against me every day.
63. Behold their sitting down and their rising up. I am their song.
64. You will return, O Jehovah, a recompense upon them according to the work of their hands.
65. You will give them hardness of heart, your curse upon them.

The way of escape from God's curse was the way of His Spirit, which Jesus suffered and died for man to have, but Israel refused to believe in Jesus and so, God refused to give them His Spirit. Instead, God gave them His curse.

Paul said that whatever happened to Israel happened to them "as examples for us" (1Cor. 10:6; cf. Rom. 15:4). So, what are we to learn from the fact that Israel refused to believe in Jesus and received God's curse instead of His Spirit? The lesson is obvious: "Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts" (Ps. 95:7b–8a; Heb. 3:15).

The Mind of Christ

Paul warned the saints in Rome of the danger of failing to grow spiritually into what he called the mind of Christ (1Cor. 2:16):

Romans 8

5. Those who are after the flesh mind the things of the flesh, but those who are after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.
6. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace,
7. for the carnal mind is enmity against God. It is not subject to God's law; neither indeed can it be.

It is impossible for mankind's natural, carnal mind to comprehend the ways of Christ, as Paul told the Corinthian saints:

1Corinthians 2

14. A natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot comprehend them because they are spiritually discerned.

1Corinthians 1

20. Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?
21. For when, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom did not know God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save those who believe.

To help God's people to grow in grace and develop the mind of Christ was Paul's great desire, for when one has the mind of Christ, he can understand spiritual truths which cannot otherwise be understood. It frustrated Paul when he could not communicate the wisdom Christ had given him. He told the Corinthians,

1Corinthians 3

1. Brothers, I have not been able to speak to you as spiritual people but as carnal, as babies in Christ.
2. I gave you milk to drink, and not meat; for you were not yet able to take it. In fact, even now, you still are not able,
3. for you are still carnal. For as long as envy and strife and dissensions are among you, are you not carnal, and behave like a human [i.e., like someone without the Spirit of God]?

It is not good to remain a spiritual infant for long after being born of God. We must grow in Christ. Paul pleaded with the Corinthians, "Brothers, do not be children in your understanding; rather, be children in malice, but in understanding be mature" (1Cor. 14:20). We are formed in Christ as we approach the time for our new birth, but afterward, Christ must be formed in us. With tears, Paul wrote to the Galatians,

Galatians 4

19. My little children, for whom I am suffering labor pains again until Christ be formed within you,
20. I desire to be with you now and to change my tone, for I am unsettled about you.

Paul was right to be unsettled about those saints, for they were unable to grasp the matchless beauty of Paul's gospel. And in Hebrews, we find the same situation:

Hebrews 5

11. Concerning this matter we have much to say, but it is difficult to explain because you have become hard of hearing.
12. For the time having come when you ought to be teachers, you need someone to re-teach you what are the elementary principles of God's oracles, and you have become such as need milk, and not solid food.
13. Everyone who lives on milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness, for he is an infant.
14. But solid food is for those fully grown, who by experience have their senses trained to discern both good and evil.

The above scriptures show us that we can belong to Christ, yet fail to follow the Spirit and develop the mind of Christ. Believers who do not outgrow their natural, carnal mind will fail to love the truth when they hear it and will believe a lie instead. Paul prophesied more than once of children of God who would do that, as in his second letter to the Thessalonian saints:

2Thessalonians 2

8. The lawless one shall be revealed . . . ,
9. him whose coming is by the work of Satan, with every miracle and deceptive signs and wonders,

10. and with every unrighteous deceit among those who perish because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.
11. And for that reason, God will send them a strong delusion so that they will believe the lie,
12. so that they all might be damned who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in unrighteousness.

This happened to the majority of first-century Gentile believers. They did not develop the mind of Christ, and so, false teachers were able to persuade them that God required all believers to perform ceremonial works. Their carnal minds were persuaded to believe that Paul was wrong, and they rejected Paul's gospel and added rituals to their worship, thinking that was the will of God. The mind of Christ would have saved them, for the mind of Christ never believes a lie; it rejoices only in what is true and good.

When my father was a young convert, he told an elderly mother in Christ how thankful he was that he had been delivered from a sinful life, mentioning specifically being delivered from telling lies. That wise old saint was not impressed. She smiled and said to him, "Oh, but there is something much better than being delivered from telling lies, Brother Clark." Surprised, my father asked, "What is that?" She replied sweetly, "To be delivered from believing them."

The Tunnel

British theologian and academic J.N.D. Kelly (1909–1997) wrote, "The difference of atmosphere becomes immediately apparent as one crosses from the apostolic to the post-apostolic age."⁸ But as great a difference of atmosphere as it was, and it was very great, no distinct line delineating those two ages can be found; instead, in the historical record there is "a gap which

⁸ J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: Harper Collins, 1978), 3.

is somewhat more than the long lifetime of a man,” and it is only “after this gap, from somewhat before the year 200, [that] we come to the beginning of a regular series . . . of documentary evidence.”⁹ I call that gap “the Tunnel”. But we can be more specific than “somewhat before the year 200”, for there is no mention in the New Testament books of the monumental event of Rome’s destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in AD 70, and it would have certainly been mentioned in at least some of them if they had been written after that cataclysmic event. The only reasonable conclusion is that, with a few exceptions, the New Testament books were written before Rome’s destruction of Jerusalem and that the Tunnel years began soon afterward.¹⁰

A Jewish writer has described the plight in which Jews found themselves after Jerusalem fell: “After the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 AD,” he said, “the Jewish leadership was in a quandary. How were they to obey God’s ordinances without the sacrifice system in the Temple? How were they to live as Jews without the Temple?”¹¹ Believing Gentiles who had turned from Paul to worship according the law’s precepts were in the same quandary. What were they to do now, with no place to perform the rituals which they had chosen over the liberty of life in the Spirit which Paul taught?

After AD 70, it is as though believers entered into the long, dark Tunnel, leaving almost no information concerning what happened among them until early in the second century. The difference between pre-Tunnel believers and post-Tunnel

⁹ Hilaire Belloc, *Europe and the Faith* (Rockford, IL: Tan Books and Publishers, 1992), 46–47.

¹⁰ 1 Peter is one of the books that may have been written after the destruction of Jerusalem. It begins by addressing “the chosen sojourners of the Diaspora in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.” Those “sojourners” may have been believing Jews who escaped the destruction of Jerusalem and were dispersed among the nations. For those readers, Jerusalem’s destruction would have been assumed without being mentioned.

¹¹ Stan Telchin, *Messianic Judaism Is Not Christianity*, 66.

believers is undeniable. Inside that dark Tunnel, the priorities of believers were reversed, for they entered the Tunnel a charismatic community with some ceremonial aspects, but emerged from the Tunnel a ceremonial community with some charismatic aspects. They entered the Tunnel refusing Paul and glorifying Moses, neither of whom they rightly understood, but emerged from the Tunnel glorifying Paul and refusing Moses, still not understanding either of them.

The response of some law-keeping Gentile believers to the destruction of the temple was to devise rituals of their own, some of which were similar to the law's rituals. That invention of new rituals must have been the spark which ignited the hostility we find between law-keepers and Christians after the Tunnel time. Ignatius (35–108 or 140), a second-century bishop of Antioch, referred to Jews disdainfully as, “Christ-killing Jews” (Magnesians XI), telling believers that “if anyone expounds upon the way of the Jews to you, do not hear him!” (Mag. XI; cf. Hero. II; Philippians VI).¹² He utterly rejected the first-century apostasy of living according to Moses’ law (Mag. VII). “It is absurd”, he wrote, “to speak of Jesus Christ with the tongue and to cherish in the mind a Judaism which has now come to an end” (Mag. X). “For if we still live according to the Jewish law, we acknowledge that we have not received grace” (Mag. VIII). That is fine and good; Paul said the same. But Paul also taught that it was absurd to “cherish in the mind” *any* ceremonial worship, for Christ put an end to it. Yet, not understanding Paul’s gospel, apostate believers of the second-century scorned the ceremonies of the law, which could no longer be practiced anyway because the temple had been destroyed, and celebrated their new ones instead.

¹² See the sections titled “Anti-Semitism” in my book, *The Apostate Fathers* at GoingtoJesus.com. But it is possible that these hateful anti-Jewish comments were inserted into Ignatius’ writings by later Christians.

The Tunnel Timeline
(Dates approximate)

**AD 1 JESUS IS BORN → 33 THE NT BEGINS → 40 PAUL CALLED
70 JERUSALEM IS DESTROYED → 75–130 THE TUNNEL YEARS**

Paul's Attitude toward the Jews

Paul taught that the law was a holy, good, and just blessing to Israel from God (Rom. 7:12) and that those in Israel who faithfully kept it obtained eternal life (Rom. 10:5; Lev. 18:5). The renowned Christian bishop Irenaeus (130?–202?) seems to have agreed. In reference to Jesus quoting from the law during his Temptation, he asked, “If the law is due to ignorance and defect, how could the statements contained therein bring to nought the ignorance of the Devil, and conquer the ‘strong man’?” (*Against Heresies* 5, XXII.1). That would have been a good question to ask *Mathetes* and other Christian leaders.

Paul loved his fellow Jews even if they did not believe in Christ or in him. He wrote to the Assembly in Rome, “My heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is for their salvation” (Rom. 10:1), and “There have been times I myself prayed to be accursed from Christ for my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are the Israelites” (Rom. 9:3–4a). Paul’s fellow Jews, in the main, had rejected their Messiah, but he still loved them, and in doing so, he was following Jesus’ lead. Approaching Jerusalem for the last time, and knowing that most of the Jews had rejected him, Jesus’ heart broke “when he looked on the city. And he wept over it, saying, ‘Oh, if you had known the things which would lead to your peace! But now, they are hidden from your eyes’” (Lk. 19:41–42).

“Returning to his Vomit”

While the leaders, such as Ignatius, of what I call the Christian Movement of the second and third centuries condemned the first-century apostasy of believers, none of them

attempted to explain when or by whom that apostasy was corrected. But they couldn't do that because they were the spiritual descendants of those Apostates, and their new form of ceremonial religion was only a mutation of the first-century apostasy.

A few of the ceremonies, similar to those under the law, which were devised by the Apostates during the Tunnel and afterward are:

- a water baptism like John the Baptizer's baptism
- a ritual-performing priesthood
- a sacred meal (the Eucharist)
- new ordinances for incense and candle burning
- a new Sabbath
- new holy days
- distinctive ministerial robes

Determined law-keepers, Jews and Gentile converts alike, were no doubt indignant at such a development. By what authority, they would have demanded, did those believers enact such rites and rules? Ironically, for the apostate Gentile believers whom Paul had led to Christ, with their invention of new rituals, the circle was complete. They had begun as Pagans, worshipping God in worthless fleshly forms invented by men, but they were delivered by Christ from that darkness and cleansed from sin. Then, they were persuaded to return to fleshly forms of worship, those prescribed in Moses' law. Finally, after the destruction of the Temple, they returned to worshipping again in worthless fleshly forms invented by men, but this time, the men were apostate believers. It was an apostasy aptly described by Solomon: "Like a dog returning to his vomit, a fool repeats his folly" (Prov. 26:11). The only difference was that these fools claimed that their vomit was holy and had been ordained by Christ for his people.

Post-Tunnel Believers' Contempt for the Jews

Anti-Semitism fills *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, supposedly written in the mid-second century, but probably much later, in which Jews are depicted as hating believers and inciting Roman rulers against them. The Jews are said to have advised the Roman governor to burn Polycarp so completely that there would be no flesh left for Christians to claim and venerate (*Mart. of Poly.*, XVII). It may well be true that some second-century Jews incited people against those who believed in Jesus; after all, first-century Jews did that (cf. Acts 12:1–3; 22:22–24). If, however, the Jews advised Romans to burn Polycarp's dead body so that nothing remained for believers to salvage and venerate, they did those believers a favor, for the veneration of human remains, burned up or not, is perverse, superstitious nonsense.

In the *Epistle of Barnabas*, the Jews are condemned as “wretched” (Ep. of Barn., XVI), and *Mathetes*¹³ ignorantly ridiculed them for ever having sacrificed animals, accusing them of sacrificing animals because they believed that God is in need of the flesh and blood of dead beasts (Math. III, IV).

He further claimed that the Jews observed the sacred months and days of the law because they were waiting on the stars and the moon to do something (Math. IV), condemning such observances as “a manifestation of folly” (Math. IV). That is a blatantly false accusation. The Jews did not observe the law's appointed times because they were waiting for the stars to do anything; they offered sacrifices and observed sacred times because God commanded them to do so.

In the second century, the Christian philosopher Justin insisted that Jews were “utterly incompetent to know the hidden counsel of God” (Dialogue with Trypho CXXIII) and, like *Mathetes*, he taught that the animal sacrifices of Moses'

¹³ *Mathetes* is not actually a name; it is the title of a work by an unknown early Christian.

law had not even been necessary for them to perform (Dial. XXII). Again, that is transparently false. Paul taught that “every man who is circumcised is obligated to keep the entire law” (Gal. 5:3), but Justin denied that, teaching instead that Israel performed the law’s ceremonies because of their ignorance (1Apology, XIII). He condemned the Jews as “senseless” (1Ap. LXIII) and claimed that God gave them the law only because of their great wickedness (Dial. XX; XXI). But God gave the law to Israel as a blessing (Rom. 3:1–2), and “the law” wrote Paul, “is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good” (Rom. 7:12).

The pre-Tunnel Gentiles who converted to the Jews’ religion would have cringed at the contempt for the law exhibited by post-Tunnel believers. But on their part, second-century Apostates would have frowned upon the first-century Apostates who submitted to the law. As Hatch put it, “The old orthodoxy became a new heresy.”¹⁴

This reversal of attitude toward the Jews is as intriguing as it is obvious, and it invites postulations as to how it came about. Feminist theologian Rosemary Reuther (1936–2022) posited that the anti-Semitism which characterized some post-Tunnel believers “entered the picture only when the Christian community assimilated into the Gentile world and took over a pre-existing . . . ‘Pagan hate’ for the Jews.”¹⁵ But while it is true that some Pagans disdained the Jews’ religion as foolishness, few if any of them reviled the Jews with the viciousness expressed by early Christian leaders. That kind of hatred was entirely their own.

The few Apostates who exited the Tunnel still striving to keep the law as the Jews did were considered old-fashioned by other Apostates, who labeled them as Ebionites, or

¹⁴ Hatch, *Greek Ideas and Usages*, 132.

¹⁵ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism, Introduction by Gregory Baum* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1997), 23.

Nazaræans.¹⁶ The Ebionites held fast to what the first-century Apostates were persuaded to believe, to wit,

Jesus was the Jewish Messiah sent from the Jewish God to the Jewish people in fulfillment of the Jewish Scriptures. They also believed that to belong to the people of God, one needed to be Jewish. As a result, they insisted on observing the Sabbath, keeping kosher, and circumcising all males. . . . They retained the Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament) as the Scripture par excellence.¹⁷

Like the Gentile believers of Paul's time who rejected his gospel and submitted to the law, the Ebionites

did not accept any of the writings of Paul. Indeed, for them, Paul was not just wrong about a few minor points; he was the archenemy, the heretic who had led so many astray by insisting that a person is made right with God apart from keeping the Law and who forbade circumcision, the "sign of the covenant," for his followers.¹⁸

As before mentioned, Paul once asked his Galatian converts who had been persuaded to receive circumcision, "Have I now become your enemy because I tell you the truth?" (Gal. 4:16). The answer was yes, he had. And the Ebionites still felt that way.

A Definitive End

The law of Moses had a definitive beginning when God proposed a covenant to Israel and Israel accepted the proposal,

¹⁶ Hatch, *Greek Ideas and Usages*, 132.

¹⁷ Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*, 100–101.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 101.

and Moses initiated it with blood (Ex. 24:3–8). The law also had a definitive end when Rome destroyed the temple, making it impossible for the law to continue as it had been for over a thousand years. The blindness of second-century Apostates was the direct result of God bringing about the end of the law coupled with their refusal to repent and return to the truth which Paul taught. To them, worship in spirit and in truth, which according to Jesus is now the only acceptable form of worship, was not even an option. They were fully committed to ceremonial worship and invented ceremonial works to replace the works of the law that Christ had fulfilled a century before.

“Christian”

When the Tunnel years ended, we find that apostate believers had begun calling themselves Christians instead of living such godly lives that they were ridiculed as “Christians” by others, as was the case for the believers of Paul’s day. “Christian” was not a title given to believers by God; it was a sarcastic term coined by clever Pagans in Antioch for believers, whom they despised (Acts 11:26). The second-century Apostates wanted to be identified with the persecuted, Spirit-filled saints of the first century, but being unworthy of it, they resorted to merely claiming the title.

Prophesying of New Testament saints, the prophet Isaiah said, “They shall call them ‘the holy people, redeemed of Jehovah’” (Isa. 62:12). My father often emphasized the fact that Isaiah did not say, “They shall call themselves the holy people.” When religious people are not holy people, they must claim to be holy because the world ignores them; unholy religious people are boring. However, sinners cannot ignore those who are truly holy, and they *will* call them holy, even if they do so sarcastically. Sinners labeled John Wesley and his

friends at Oxford University “the holy club,”¹⁹ and sinners have often referred to modern Spirit-filled saints as “holy rollers”.

Seeking Glory

Jesus offered us this profound insight into the human heart: “He who speaks on his own is seeking his own glory, but he who seeks the glory of the One who sent him, he is true, and no unrighteousness is in him” (Jn. 7:18). If when Jesus preached, he had been expressing his own opinion, then his real purpose for preaching would have been glorification of himself. Just so, ministers who teach doctrines formulated by man, doctrines not revealed to them by Jesus, are seeking their own glory, not God’s. In most cases, I feel sure, those ministers do not realize that is what they are doing, but Jesus knows man’s heart (cf. Jn. 2:24), and what he said about it is true. Always.

Based on what Jesus and Paul taught, we may justly conclude – indeed, we must conclude – that when the Apostates of the early centuries devised their Christian rituals and doctrines, they were not seeking God’s glory but their own. The way of Christ is a “new and living way” (Heb. 10:20); it is “a new covenant, not of letter [handwritten instructions] but of spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2Cor. 3:6). That is why Paul was so grieved when his Gentile converts were persuaded to submit to the rules and rites of Moses’ law. Other than using the name of Jesus to justify doing so, they were returning to a way of worship which had been practiced before Christ came: worship using fleshly materials. To worship God in this covenant in a way that was possible before the Spirit came is to worship Him in vain.

This is an important point because there is a curse attached to the crime of teaching one’s own opinion as gospel. False doctrine is nothing more than somebody’s opinion, and in this

¹⁹ Wesley, John. *The Journal of John Wesley*, 21. Christian Classics Ethereal Library, accessed 01/14/26.

covenant, to teach God's children to worship God with rituals is an opinion that is contrary to Christ. Paul uttered his curse upon men who were subverting the faith of the Gentiles with a gospel that was actually nothing but their opinion, and he prayed that those men, although they were brothers in Christ (Gal. 2:4; 2Cor. 11:26), would be cut off from God (Gal. 5:12), that is, be damned. That is how important a matter it was to Paul because he had learned that that is how important Jesus is to God.

Another Jesus

The real Jesus is unique and his power, under his Father, is supreme. He is "able to save completely and forever those who come to God through him" (Heb. 7:25). He is "the head of every ruler and authority" (Col. 2:10), and "the head of the body, the Assembly of God" (Col. 1:18). And "God was pleased for all His fullness to dwell in him" (Col. 1:19). The witness God gives concerning His Son, the credentials that prove that Jesus is the Messiah, is the baptism of the Spirit, just as John the Baptizer said: "I baptize you with water upon repentance, but after me is coming one who is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to remove. He will baptize you with holy Spirit!" (Mt. 3:11).

But not long after the New Testament was established by the coming of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, men began to proclaim a different Jesus. Paul warned his converts to beware men who taught "another Jesus, whom we did not preach, or a different spirit, or a different gospel" (2Cor. 11:4), for with ceremonial works, some were offering to men another Jesus, a different spirit, and a gospel different from the true one. This is the basis of all Christian sects. Every church group proclaims what amounts to its own Jesus when it proclaims its own distinctive doctrines, ordains its own ministers, and establishes its own rituals. They all praise the apostles of Christ as great men of God even as they misrepresent what the apostles taught.

The real Paul, especially, they ignorantly contradict, for his gospel was entirely of the Spirit, and when it is preached, it exposes every doctrine and ceremony that Christians have ever devised as false, as nothing but somebody's opinion.

The more the early Apostates shaped their new religion, the more it shaped them and deepened their spiritual darkness, and the multiplied millions of Christians who have followed them since have joined them in their ditch. None of those early Apostates, caught up as they were in the contest to be crowned Orthodox, realized what was happening; they were too busy competing for recognition, and they continued quarreling over whose doctrines and rituals were legitimate until the Roman Emperor Constantine put an end to the contest in AD 325 by crowning as Orthodox the version of their apostate religion which he preferred.

Conclusion

No other element of early Christian culture, as important a role as it may have played in leading believers to blend with the Roman Empire, can compare with the importance of the first-century apostasy of believers from Paul's gospel. The addition of rituals to their worship was the beginning of the darkness. And their invention of new rituals after God made the performance of the ones He gave Israel impossible sealed their hearts against the love of God. In separate letters to young Timothy, the apostle Paul foretold it:

1 Timothy 4

1. The Spirit is saying explicitly that in the latter times, some will fall away from the faith, following after deceptive spirits and doctrines of demons,
2. speaking lies in hypocrisy, their conscience seared with a hot iron,

3a. forbidding to marry and commanding to abstain from foods.²⁰

2 Timothy 4

3. The time will come when they will not put up with sound doctrine, but will heap up teachers for themselves according to their own desires, having itching ears,
4. and they will turn away from hearing the truth, and be turned over to myths.

With Rome's destruction of the temple, which ended the law, believers who had rejected Paul in order to keep the law were confronted with three options:

- (1) They could humble themselves to confess that Rome's destruction of the temple was confirmation from God of Paul's gospel. Those who chose this option were few.
- (2) They could cling to the law and find a way to justify doing so, even if the law could no longer be practiced. This option led the believers who chose it into the emptiness of Rabbinic Judaism.
- (3) They could devise ceremonies similar to those they used to practice under the law and claim that God ordained those ceremonies for believers. This option led believers who chose it into a unity with Rome and to form the abomination of Christianity.

The rise of societies based upon the wrong choices made by the vast majority of apostate believers made life difficult for those who understood the gospel Paul preached. It is not that

²⁰ After post-Tunnel believers blended with Rome in AD 325, leaders of the Roman Church forbade their priests to marry (a rule that is still in effect). They also forbade the eating of meat on Fridays in order to honor Jesus' suffering, which they claim happened on a Friday. That rule was modified in the United States in 1966, remaining in effect only on Fridays during Lent, on Ash Wednesday, and on Good Friday.

God lost control of anything, for using it all, in His fathomless wisdom, God created the situation in which the few in each generation who understand the truth must demonstrate the faith of Abraham to live by it. When God calls to His children, “Come out of her, my people!” (Rev. 18:4), those with Abraham’s kind of faith respond by coming out of Christianity, in all its forms, even if, like father Abraham, they feel alone and do not yet know where the Spirit will lead them. Still, Christ exhorts us to remember Abraham:

Isaiah 51

1. Hear me, you who pursue righteousness, who seek Jehovah! Look to the rock from which you have been hewn, and to the hole of the pit from which you were dug!
2. Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you, for I called him alone, and I blessed him and multiplied him.

Since AD 325, when Christianity was established by Constantine, those who call themselves Christians have persecuted many innocent souls who dared to trust God and embrace the perfect liberty of Christ. The apostle John was given an astonishing vision of the rise of Christianity as an international power:

Revelation 17

1. Then one of the seven angels who had the Seven Vials came, and he spoke to me, saying, “Come. I will show you the judgment of the Great Whore who sits on many waters,
2. with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and by the wine of her whoredom are the inhabitants of the earth made drunk.”
3. So, he carried me away in spirit into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet-colored Beast that was full of blasphemous names and that had seven heads and ten horns.

4. And the woman was arrayed in purple, and scarlet, and adorned with gold, and precious stone, and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup that was full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication,
5. and on her forehead was written a name: "Mystery: Babylon the Great, the Mother of harlots and the abominations of the earth."
6. And I saw the woman drunk on the blood of the saints, on the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. And when I saw her, I marveled with great wonder.

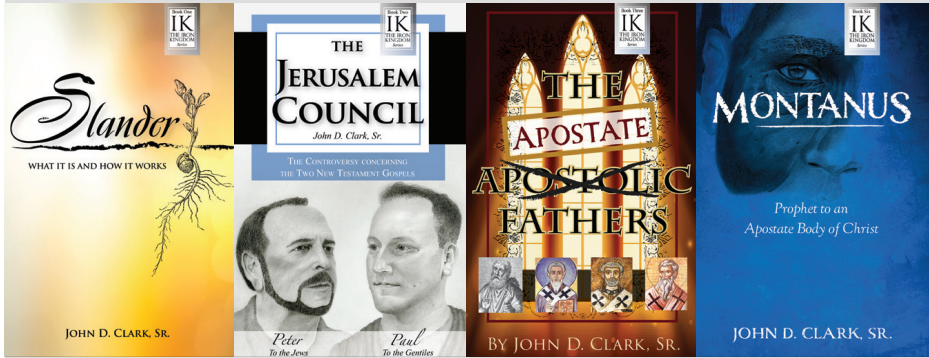
So it is to this day. The pressure to stay within Christianity's whitewashed walls is enormous, and the reproaches for leaving them behind are many, but the rewards are more than worth the persecution it brings. To date, Christianity has been the greatest enemy of the righteousness of God that has ever existed, but it cannot conquer the soul which puts all its hope in Jesus and rests in the Spirit of God.

In Christ Jesus, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision
is worth anything, but being a new creature is.
And as many as will conform to this rule, peace be upon
them, and mercy, even upon the Israel of God.

Galatians 6:15–16



The Iron Kingdom Series



Book 1: Slander: What It Is and How It Works

Book 2: The Jerusalem Council: The Controversy
concerning the Two New Testament Gospels

Book 3: The Apostate Fathers

Book 4: The Synthesis: The Blending of Apostate Rome
with the Apostate Body of Christ

Book 5: Arius

Book 6: Montanus: Prophet to an Apostate Body of Christ

Jesus revealed a gospel to Paul which held that worship in the Spirit is the only acceptable worship in this New Covenant. That was the gospel Paul preached among the Gentiles, and he was brokenhearted when his Gentile converts were persuaded to abandon worship “in spirit and in truth” and add ceremonies to their faith. That is the condition of the body of Christ at the close of the New Testament books. In the fourth century, believers went even farther on that dark road, blending their religion with Rome’s gods and rituals, producing a religion that is completely foreign to Christ. They called it Christianity. This series is the story of how that tragedy unfolded.

More books by John D. Clark, Sr.

- After Jesus Died: the spiritual condition of the disciples after Jesus died until the day of Pentecost
- The Sound of the Spirit at Spirit Baptism
- Is the Bible the Word of God?
- Marriage and Divorce: What Does the Bible Really Say?
- Malachi: prophet to an apostate nation
- Revelation: Jesus' Messages to Seven Pastors and John's Vision of the Last Days
- Solomon's Wisdom: The Secret Pathway to Happiness
- The Seven Pillars of the Gospel: The Unifying Bond of Peace
- God Had a Son Before Mary Did: The Significance of God's Revelation of His Son
- Suffering and the Saints
- Tithes and Offerings: The right relationship between a pastor and his congregation
- What the Bible Really Says about Hell
- Spiritual Light

For free downloads, visit us at

GoingtoJesus.com

