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**"Preaching grace in the Dispensation of grace"  
A Bible Study**

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### **A PAGE FROM PAUL'S PRAYER DIARY**

**BY RICHARD JORDAN**

The success of the gospel at Thessalonica had so stirred up the unbelieving Jews that Paul and those traveling with him were forced to leave, being sent by the brethren to Berea. So great was the wrath of those unbelievers that St. Luke tells us:

"But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the Word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, THEY CAME THITHER ALSO, AND STIRRED UP THE PEOPLE" (Acts 17:13).

From Berea Paul found his way safely to Athens, where, with the Thessalonian believers under great pressures and afflictions, his concern for their stability and spiritual welfare had risen to a high point.

Although Paul was personally hindered from returning to Thessalonica for the moment, he could still engage in the struggle on their behalf. First he sent Timothy to "establish" and "comfort" them concerning their faith (I Thess. 3:1-5).

Paul knew it would only be by faithful adherence to sound doctrine that these believers would be able to stand in the midst of turmoil. Doubtless, this is why he says to them:

"For now we live, IF YE STAND FAST IN THE LORD" (V.8).

Throughout his epistles Paul has much to say about standing fast, but surely it all begins with standing fast in the Lord. As believers we have been given a position "in Christ," "accepted in the Beloved" (Eph. 1:6), made "complete in Him" (Col. 2:10) and blessed with "all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 1:3). All we have is in Him, and thus the path to victory and stability is to take our stand there. "Stand fast in the Lord," for God says this is your position, and you have a right to occupy it! This is where everything begins in the Christian life.

Moreover, Paul frequently and fervently prays for the Thessalonian believers, as he tells them in Verse 9 and 10:

"For what thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before God;

"Night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith?"

Paul was well aware that our warfare is "not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Eph. 6:12). He knew that the offensive against this "behind the scenes" opposition is borne upon the shoulders of prayer. Hence, he is very specific in his request:

"Now God Himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, DIRECT OUR WAY UNTO YOU" (v. 11).

In this request Paul was engaging the adversary in direct conflict, for he knew that it was Satan himself who had time and again "hindered" his efforts to return to Thessalonica:

"Wherefore, we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again; BUT SATAN HINDERED US" (1Thess. 2:18).

It seems, in fact, that Satan was ultimately successful in hindering Paul's ministry at this point, for, as far as the record goes, he never returned.

In the face of this seeming success of the adversary and the apparent reluctance on God's part to answer Paul's prayer, just what was it that caused him to continue "night and day praying exceedingly"? We could easily understand prayer not being answered when prayed in bitterness, faithlessness or sin, but such was not the case here--this was a good prayer! And what is the point of praying if God is not going to answer a good prayer?

What did Paul know about prayer that caused him, in the face of unanswered prayer, to exhort the brethren not to quit praying but rather to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:19)?

The answer can surely be found in the fact that Paul knew how prayer works today. He knew that the kingdom program given by our Lord while on earth had been superseded, and that its "Whatsoever ye ask in prayer" promises were no longer in order. Rather, in the dispensation of grace Paul tells us:

"...the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for WE KNOW NOT WHAT WE SHOULD PRAY FOR AS WE OUGHT: BUT THE SPIRIT ITSELF MAKETH INTERCESSION FOR US with groanings which cannot be uttered" (Rom. 8:26).

Although the Holy Spirit is not directly mention in I Thess. 3, He is clearly working behind the scenes. Think for a moment: Paul greatly desired to personally return to Thessalonica in order to strengthen the believers there, and he prayed earnestly to that end. Since the way was not open, as yet, to do so, he took pen in hand and wrote a letter to them. Clearly, however, he thought that a personal visit was the better course; a letter was only "second best."

Just ask yourself now, however, which was best-which gave Paul the greater and more lasting ministry? The letter, of course! for we have it even today, a part of the Word of God.

If Paul had had his own way, he would have prayed away the letter, feeling they needed a personal visit instead. God, however, knew that they--and we--needed the letter; thus He overruled and Paul's ministry has touched more lives than he could ever have dreamed possible!

We, like Paul, should pray as best we know how with our limited knowledge. However, we too must always recognize that at best ours are but "ignorant prayers." Thus we are to depend on the "helping" ministry of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:26,27), knowing that "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose" (Rom.8:28).

Is this not the very reason Paul did not quit when the answer to his prayer failed to materialize? Knowing that he prayed with limited knowledge, he simply rested in the Holy Spirit's care and took advantage of the opportunities available to him.

In the face of this seemingly unanswered prayer for himself, it is touching indeed to read his prayer for them:

"And the Lord make you to INCREASE AND ABOUND IN LOVE ONE TOWARD ANOTHER AND TOWARD ALL MEN, even as we do toward you:

"To the end He may stablish your hearts unblamable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints" (v.12, 13).

Paul was keenly aware of their spiritual needs and he focuses his request here. He does not pray merely that they would be delivered from suffering or that the pressures and problems they were experiencing would be lessened, or even that they might live peaceable so that the work of the ministry could go ahead. Rather, he focuses on the spiritual side of all this--no doubt recognizing that such circumstances could not always be avoided, especially where a clear testimony for Christ is involved.

In the midst of persecution and testing it is all too easy to become embittered and hardened. Paul prayed that the Lord would work in their hearts and cause them to "increase and abound in love one toward another"--and thus "toward all men " Only then would they have the rewards he desired for them when Christ shall present them to the Father.

And what was the result of Paul's prayer for them? 2 Thess. 1:3 makes it clear that God did work in them, and that their "faith grew exceedingly" and their "charity toward each other abounded." Thus God abundantly answered this prayer!

All this should be an example to us. First, to be careful to "stand fast in the Lord," taking our rightful place in Him, and then focusing on the blessings that are our there, praying that God will make them real to us.

It is right to cast our every care upon Him, for He bids us with open arms to do so. But there is more: We, like Paul, must focus our attention on our blessings in Christ, earnestly praying that our God would make them living realities in our lives. Only then can we truly live day by day as members of the Body of Christ, as those in whom Christ lives and is magnified.

## FOLLOW WHO?

By: Dick Stater, Pastor  
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The normal course a person takes after trusting that Christ died for their sins is to serve Him out of gratitude for what he has done for them. The problem is not so much in the desire to follow Christ, as in how to accomplish this.

Do we obey the words of our Lord's earthly ministry where He clearly command the following of the law of Moses (See Matt. 23:1-3, Mark 1:43,44 & 10:2,3 etc.)? If this is the case, why do we find Paul later preaching that the law was fulfilled in Christ and that it is therefore unnecessary, yet inappropriate to follow its rites and ceremonies. (Rom. 6:14; 7:4-6, Gal. 2:19; 3:24-25; 4:9-11; 5:1-2; 6:11-13)? I'm sure that Paul was well aware of God's wrath being poured out against those that questioned the authority of Moses in Num. 12 and 16. A reading of those two accounts will burn into your memory the swift and severe reaction of God upon those who refuse to recognize "God given positions of authority"!

The answer, of course, is that God had given Paul the "office" under the Dispensation of Grace that Moses held under the Law economy (See Rom. 11:13, Eph.3:1- 10). The apostle Paul is the writer of our "marching orders." It has been well said that if God was operating today the same way as in Numbers, the Body of Christ would be a colony of lepers for it's refusal to recognize Pauline authority.

In I Cor. 14:37 Paul declares "...the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord." But let's not forget that when Paul came on the scene, God had been operating under the Law economy with Moses as the authority for well over one thousand years! It's no wonder that Paul first had to establish his authority and then to constantly remind them of that fact.

No where is this more evident than in the book of Galatians. This book is one of the first, if not the first, epistle that Paul wrote. Notice that from the beginning of the first chapter he brings this issue out on the table and deals with it at length. In fact, the greater part of chapter one is taken up just dealing with his distinctive apostleship and how it was given to him.

In the opening verse of Galatians he states, "Paul, and apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead;)"(V.1 )

Paul clearly sets forth 3 things here: 1) He is an apostle, he has the authority; 2) His apostleship is not of men, i.e., men were not its source, it did not originate with men; 3) Neither was it by man, there was no human agent involved as in the case of Matthias.

Paul amplifies this even more in vss. 11,12: "But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ."

It was the risen, glorified Christ who has called Paul and he had received his instructions directly from Him. You can read Paul's account of his conversion in Acts 26:16,17 and see that he was given the first installment of his special revelation at that time. You can also see by that account that there was to be a progressive revelation through future visits directly from the risen, glorified Lord Jesus Christ!

Galatians 1 also contains a warning to those who would leave or change that blessed gospel of Grace committed to his trust. Vss. 8,9 contain a stern rebuke to those who would pervert his gospel:

"But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.

"As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed."

The idea of being "accursed" is to suffer the loss of available blessings. A reading of Deut. 28 will show that the "curse" is the absence of blessings. With Israel this dealt primarily with the physical blessings promised the nation. In the dispensation of grace, perverting "our gospel" and mixing it with the law, as the Galatians had done, results in a loss of the "blessedness" so richly enjoyed when rejoicing in the unadulterated gospel of grace (4:8-20) and being built up by the Word of His grace. Perverting the gospel of

grace results in the believer being unable to really appreciate his "all spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ" and seeing them take root and bear fruit in his life.

It is evident from Gal. 5:7 that they started well and thus Paul marveled at the short time it took them to leave his gospel. I'm sure that many of our readers have been asked, as this writer has, when sharing the mystery "Do you mean that my church has been teaching the wrong thing for the past 500 years?" Well it's apparent that some churches even back in Paul's time had already left the truth! But notice how clever Satan works! In v. 7 we see that they didn't leave all faith behind, as the heathen do. Rather they perverted the truth and embraced a program laced with rituals from an economy set aside by God Himself and thus no longer in force. The word "pervert" means "to change into something of an opposite character." It is for this very reason that Paul has recorded so much about his apostleship. The battle in Galatians is for the "truth of the gospel" (2:5,14) and Paul must establish his authority before dealing with the unsound doctrine later in this epistle.

Do you realize that over 10 times Paul uses terminology such as "my gospel" "gospel committed unto me", "the gospel which I preach." Why so many times? Was it pride or self-centeredness? NO! The answer lies in the fact that a new economy began with Paul one that was "hid in God" (Eph.3:9) until revealed through the apostle Paul. Pauline authority must be recognized as the "commandments of the Lord" and the church today is sadly lacking in the preaching of these truths.

In Gal. 1:10 we see the "bottom line" spelled out, as it were: "For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ."

This verse makes it clear that to compromise or sell out the Mystery is to SERVE ANOTHER MASTER! ! Just as in our salvation, where we must choose to trust in the completed work of Christ at Calvary, we also have the freedom to make a choice to follow Paul. THE CHOICE IS YOURS!

### **OUR "FAR OUT" FOREFATHERS**

Is it really such a "far out" teaching to maintain that God has not only verbally inspired but has also providentially preserved His Word until our day? We certainly do not feel so and, it seems, neither did many of our Protestant forefathers, if their Confessions of Faith are to be taken seriously.

Probably the most famous Protestant Confession of Faith ever written is The Westminster Confession of 1646. It affirms that the Scriptures were "immediately inspired by God, and, by His singular care and providence, kept pure in all ages" (our emphasis). The Swiss declaration, The Helvetic Consensus Formula of 1675, developed this same doctrine more fully by stating, "Almighty God saw to it that His Word, which is with power unto salvation to everyone who believes, was entrusted to

writing not only with Moses, the prophets and apostles, but also He has stood guard and watched over it with a fatherly concern to the present time that it not be destroyed by the cunning of Satan or by any human deceit" (our emphasis).

How could anyone say such things if they felt that their Greek and Hebrew texts were not pure and they had no pure translations? We recently checked some fourteen confessions from the 17th through 19th century and found that none of them gave any indication that they felt either the Greek and Hebrew texts they possessed or the King James Version contained any errors. None of them we have seen makes any criticism of the KJV nor do they suggest that another version is needed. Quite the contrary.

In 1678 the General Baptist of England published the Oxford Creed, in which they say, "And by the holy Scriptures we understand the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments as they are now translated into our English mother tongue, of which there hath never been any doubt of their verity, and authority, in the Protestant churches of Christ to this day." They go on to list the books of the Old and New Testaments and then say, "All which are given by inspiration of God, to be the rule of faith and life."

Our Protestant forefathers recognized that the doctrines of the inspiration and preservation of Scripture go hand-in-hand and they said so in their doctrinal statements. They believed that the Church in all ages could appeal to the pure Scriptures, the very words of God having been providentially preserved for them and thus actually in their possession.

This is, of course, quite different from some modern fundamentalists brethren who talk loftily about "inspiration" and "the originals" and yet insist that we do not actually possess the Word of God today, appealing rather to the "pure Word of God preserved in heaven." No doubt God's Word is pure in heaven; however, we cannot appeal to something that we cannot see! No doubt but that the "originals" were pure and uncorrupted, but how can we appeal to the "originals" when they are not available to give their testimony?

Our forefathers understood this well and were not weighed down with 20th Century theories which would rob them of their confidence in an infallible Bible which they could hold in their hands, study, believe and preach. The writer is convinced from the teachings of Scripture that they were right.

If this position is "far out," "ignorant," "nuts," "heresy," "insanity," or whatever, make the most of it, for this is where we stand. We take our position squarely where our forefathers have stood for centuries: We believe that the KJV is an accurate, reliable, authoritative translation of the providentially preserved Word of God and as such is the Word of God for the English speaking people.

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