

[R549 : page 3]

## **FULL PROOF OF HIS MINISTRY.**

After our Lord's resurrection and ascension, the little company of a hundred and twenty disciples, according to the Master's command, were together awaiting the descent of power from on high – the Holy Spirit. While waiting they very properly spent the time in prayer and in searching of the Scriptures, and while thus engaged (Acts 1:13-26) Peter found that passage in David's prophecy which mentions the appointment of another to the office of Judas the betrayer of our Lord; and calling the attention of the company to it he said: "Men and brethren, this Scripture must needs have been fulfilled ...which David spoke concerning Judas who was guide to them that took Jesus, for he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry.... It is written in the book of Psalms, "Let his habitation be desolate and let no man dwell therein, and his bishopric let another take." [R550 : page 3]

Commenting on this, Peter urged that it was their duty to select one of their number to be a successor to Judas, saying, "Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection. Peter's counsel seemed good to all the disciples, and accordingly they appointed two whom they esteemed the most proper persons, and asked the Lord to make a choice between them, agreeing to cast lots, and to accept the one on whom the lot should fall as the Lord's choice of an apostle to fill the place of Judas.

Now, though Peter and the rest of the disciples were very zealous and anxious to do the Lord's will, they evidently made a great mistake. In the first place, all that they were told to do was to tarry,

to wait at Jerusalem until they should be endued with power from on high. In the second place, their human judgment was unwittingly attempting to direct the Lord, even before they were baptized with the Spirit; and not only so, but to limit his choice to one of two disciples. It was just like impetuous though zealous Peter to make such a proposition, and the erring human judgment of the balance of the disciples to approve and accept it. But the Lord, knowing their hearts, simply ignored their error, and let time prove to them that he was abundantly able, without their assistance, to make his own choice and to direct his own work.

Of Matthias, on whom the lot fell to be an Apostle, we never hear afterward. He was with them at Pentecost, and was one of the hundred and twenty who received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, but his record ends there. The special mission of the Apostles is clearly defined in Acts 1:8 – our Lord's last words before his ascension: "Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem and in Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."

While this, in a general sense, applied to the whole company of those early disciples, and while in fact by their faith and example, as a company who had actually seen the Lord both before and after his resurrection, they have been witnesses to all the world; yet in the strictest sense, it applied to those specially chosen as public teachers and witnesses; and those same twelve Apostles still speak through their writings, and shall continue to do so until the knowledge of the Lord shall fill the whole earth.

Since to be an Apostle was to be a witness of the Lord's resurrection, none could be Apostles except those who had seen Jesus after his resurrection, hence the eleven felt confident that the one for Judas' place should be chosen from the company present, but Jehovah had another plan and was preparing an instrument of his own

choosing in the person of Saul of Tarsus. Saul of Tarsus? The disciples would never have thought of him. He was the most noted and dreaded persecutor of the church known to them, not only in Jerusalem, but pursuing them even unto strange cities; neither had he seen the Lord after his resurrection. Nevertheless Saul of Tarsus was a chosen vessel of the Lord, to bear his name before the Gentiles, and kings and the children of Israel; (Acts 9:15) and his after course gave full proof of his Apostleship. Though Saul was not among those who saw our Lord as he appeared – in the flesh – after his resurrection, this was no barrier to God's plan under which he was "chosen from his mother's womb" to be an Apostle. Hence we read, "Last of all he was seen of (by) me also." (1 Cor. 15:8.) While the other Apostles saw Jesus as he appeared after his resurrection, in various human bodies, Saul saw him as he is – a glorious spiritual body shining above the brightness of the noon-day sun. The effect of the personal glory of the Lord as seen by Paul, was to strike him blind, and only by a miracle was his sight restored.

As Paul saw Jesus – a glorious spiritual being – so all the little flock shall see him when born of the Spirit – in the resurrection. As at their conversion and consecration, they are begotten of the Spirit, in the resurrection they are born of the Spirit. When we see him "as he is," it will not have the effect on us that it had on Paul, for he saw him "as one born out of due time" (more properly before the time); but we (and Paul also at that time) shall see him as he IS, for we shall be changed and be spiritual and glorious beings like him, being fashioned like unto his glorious body.

In view of the benefit to be derived from such an example as Paul, it would be well to note in what a marked way the Lord gave proof of his calling. Some at the present day, in looking back to the early church, appear to think that they, unlike the church of to-day, moved along very smoothly, and that because they had actually seen

the Lord and heard from his own lips, there was little or no trial of faith, and no differences of opinion among them; that having the Apostles directly appointed of the Lord and present with them, their teachings were all received without doubt or questioning; and, in short, that all was harmony, save the trials that came from the outside world, from those who did not profess to love or follow the Lord Jesus.

But this we find is far from the facts in the case. Immediately after the baptism of the Spirit at Pentecost, all were of one mind and full of hope and joy – "And the word of God increased, and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly, and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith." (Acts 6:7.) And many gladly received the word and were baptized – as many as three thousand in one day. These were genuine conversions too, and not the result of excitement and impulse, for they continued steadfastly in the Apostle's doctrine and fellowship, and gave evidence of a spirit of sacrifice. Such were added to the Church daily. (Acts 2:41-47.)

While rejoicing in the truth, the fierce persecutions from without, only served to more firmly unite them in love and sympathy, and in defense of the truth against a common foe. But soon difficulties arose among themselves. Some began to "depart from the faith once delivered to the saints," to be "corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ," and their evil influence was great.

It was in the very beginning of the outcroppings of error, that Paul's clear teachings and manifest leadings of the Spirit marked him as the very chief of the Apostles, a teacher of teachers, the special mouth-piece of the Lord.

Immediately after his conversion, Paul began to preach the Gospel, traveling from city to city, principally among the Gentiles, preaching the remission of sins through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, to all that believe on him both Jew and Gentile. As a

result of his labors, little companies of believers were gathered in almost every place he visited. For a time he was encouraged by their faith and zeal, but the time of trial came to every one of them, testing every saint's fidelity to his consecration. The trial came not only to the Church in general, but to the Apostles also, and here we see Paul's clear faith and bold self-sacrificing zeal defending the entire Church against the assaults of error.

In his preaching, as was characteristic of him, without fear, neither soliciting the favor of men, he presented the truth in clear and unmistakable terms. It was clean cut and pointed so that all understood just what he meant. He taught that all, both Jew and Gentile, might be justified simply and only by faith in Christ; that the sacrifice of Christ as a substitute for us, fully met all the claims of the law of God against us, and that therefore we have life through him; that since Christ had thus made a full end of the claims of the law against us, there is now to believers no condemnation and no necessity for observing the ceremonies of the law heretofore enjoined upon Israel, and that in fact to longer observe those typical ceremonies by which Israelites had vainly thought to justify themselves, would now be wrong, and would indicate a lack of full faith in the ransom through Christ Jesus.

The other Apostles at Jerusalem as yet did not seem to see this matter so clearly, for they and the church at Jerusalem still adhered to some of the law ceremonies – circumcision, etc. – and when the Gospel went to the Gentiles they at first thought that they should be circumcised. Neither did they for some time seem to realize the force of their commission that the Gospel should go "to the uttermost part of the earth" – to the Gentiles. They had grown in grace and knowledge less rapidly than had Paul, being more or less retarded by the force of their surroundings and of old ideas.

After a time certain persons went out from Jerusalem to the various Gentile churches, teaching contrary to Paul, that they should be circumcised and obey the law of Moses, while Paul had taught them that they were justified by faith in Christ "without the works of the Law." To counteract Paul's teachings, these Judaizing teachers evidently sought to cast discredit on his authority as an Apostle, claiming that he was not really an Apostle, that the real Apostles who were appointed by the Lord were all up at Jerusalem.

On account of this difference of opinion the churches were more or less unsettled in their faith. Some evidently began to say, We don't know after all whether this Paul is any authority; it seems that he was not one of the twelve of the Lord's appointment, and we don't know that he has any right to teach differently from all the other Apostles at Jerusalem, that we ought not to obey the Law of Moses.

As this error began to spread among the churches, Paul began to find it necessary for the truth's sake to not only **[R551 : page 3]** oppose the error and re-affirm and prove the truth, but also to prove to the Church that he was as much an Apostle, chosen of the Lord, as were the others.

To the church of Galatia he wrote: "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him (Paul) that called you into the grace of Christ, unto another Gospel: which is not another; but there be some that trouble you and would pervert the Gospel of Christ." But now let me tell you; "Though we (Paul and his associates) or an angel from heaven preach any other Gospel unto you than that we have preached,...and ye have received, let him be accursed." (Gal. 1:6-9.)

And let me say further, 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. (vs. 11,12.) I Paul am an Apostle, not of men, neither by man's appointment, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father who raised him

from the dead. (vs. 1.) You heard of me in times past how I persecuted the Church of God and how I wasted it and how zealous I was for the tradition of my fathers. (vs. 13,14.) [And he verily thought he did God's service. Acts 26:9.] But when it pleased God who from my birth called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood, but went forth at once to preach the faith which once I persecuted. (vs. 15,16,23).

To prove to you that I received my commission and authority direct from the Lord and not from them which were Apostles before me, let me tell you that I did not go up to Jerusalem until three years after my conversion; and then I went to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days; but other of the Apostles saw I none save James, the Lord's brother. (vs. 17-19.) Then fourteen years after, I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and took Titus with me also. And I went up by revelation – the Lord sent me – not to learn of them, but to communicate unto them that Gospel which I preach among the Gentiles. (Gal. 2:1-2.) The other Apostles, fettered in a measure by the Judaizing influences around them, and not making sufficient progress in the knowledge of the truth, Paul was sent by the Lord to strengthen and assist them. But to show that he did not go about it boastfully he says, I communicated "privately to them which were of reputation, lest by any means I should run in vain (v. 2), lest I should fail to have them see the depth and fulness of the Gospel revealed to me."

When Paul went to Jerusalem he was cordially received of the Apostles and elders and the church at Jerusalem. Though they had one of their own choosing to fill the place of Judas, and though they did not seem to understand his selection and peculiar course in preaching to the Gentiles, yet recognizing in him the spirit of the Master, and hearing how he had been owned and blessed, and of his devotion, zeal, and self-sacrifice, they had enough of the spirit of

Christ in them to accept and receive him gladly, and they soon began to realize that he was the Lord's choice. They saw that the Gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto Paul, as the Gospel of the circumcision was committed unto Peter, (for he that wrought effectually in Peter to the Apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in Paul toward the Gentiles) and when James, Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto Paul, [R551 : page 4] they gave to him and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship. (vs. 7-9.)

After his private interview with the various Apostles referred to in ver. 2, we read of the public conference of the Apostles and elders and the church at Jerusalem. (Acts 15.) Peter's speech (vs. 7-11) shows how he was convinced that not only should the Gospel continue to be preached to the Gentiles, but also that faith in Christ the Redeemer, without the works of the Law, was all that was necessary for justification either for Jew or Gentile, reminding them of the fact that God had given the Holy Spirit to the uncircumcision as to the circumcision, making no difference.

James' speech (vs. 13-21) was to the same effect. And the result of the conference was expressed by letter to the various churches (vs. 22-29) commending to them their beloved brother Paul and the truth he had been preaching.

But to return to Paul's experience in withstanding error and proving his apostleship, he shows that he was soon met with a new difficulty. Doubtless his visit to Jerusalem and the harmony of spirit and of faith greatly comforted and cheered him, but it seems that notwithstanding the decision of the Jerusalem church as a whole in this matter, there were a few who were determined to hold on to the error and to exert their influence in advancing it; and their influence was felt in retarding the progress of truth even among the Apostles at Jerusalem. After a time Peter came to Antioch, and at first he very



properly treated the Gentile Christians there as brethren, on equal footing with Jews; but afterwards when some of these came down from Jerusalem, not wishing to offend them, he separated himself from the Gentiles and ate with those who still adhered to their Jewish customs, for under the law a Jew might not eat with Gentiles. Very soon Peter's example had its effect on Barnabas and other Jews in the church at Antioch, who before that, had been led to see that there is no difference between Jew and Gentile, but that all are one in Christ Jesus.

This aroused Paul's righteous indignation, and he withstood Peter to the face, because he was to be blamed for thus acting deceitfully, and he says – right before them all, I exposed his deception and let them know that he had eaten with the Gentiles before they came, and that though he now wanted to appear to be in harmony with their ideas, he had been acting to the contrary by living as do the Gentiles – eating with them, etc. (Gal. 2:11-21.)

Thus, he says, I had to contend for the faith in Antioch, and now (chap. 3) "O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you that ye should not obey the truth? This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? having begun in the spirit are ye now made perfect by the flesh? (vs. 1-3.) As many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, cursed is every one that continueth not in ALL THINGS which are written in the book of the law to do them." But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident. Our only hope then, is in that Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us – our substitute. (vs. 10-13.)

Thus with much reasoning did Paul seek to re-establish the faith of the Galatian church, in the breadth and efficacy of the ransom, and in the reliability of his teaching as an Apostle truly called of God to minister unto them. He then exhorted them to stand

fast in the liberty wherewith Christ had made them free, and not be again entangled with a yoke of bondage.

But these difficulties did not end with the Galatian church. Paul also found that the Corinthian church had been beset by these false teachers, and that as a consequence their faith in his Apostleship and teaching was somewhat shaken. He therefore found it necessary to write to them; for, said he, I fear lest by any means your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. (2 Cor. 11:3.) Now if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit which ye have not received, or, in short, if they present another entirely different Gospel, better than that you have received, ye might do well to hear them (v. 4); but these do not pretend to bring you a different and a better Gospel, but rather to pervert the Gospel ye had received of us. "Such are false Apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the Apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light (as a messenger of truth). Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness, whose end shall be according to their works." (vs. 13,15.)

Now as to my Apostleship, I reckon that I was not a whit behind the very chiefest Apostle. But though I be unpolished in speech, yet not in knowledge, as you have had opportunity to know. (vs. 5,6.) Truly the signs of an Apostle were wrought among you. (chap. 12:12.)

In further proof of his Apostleship, Paul speaks of the special revelations he received which the other Apostles had not received. One very notable one is referred to in chapter 12:2-4. He was caught away to the third heaven – Paradise – the new Millennial epoch – and saw things so vividly, that he could not tell whether physically, or merely mentally, absent from surroundings. This vision showed him

more of the length and depth of God's loving plans for his creatures than he had ever before known; in fact more than was then DUE to be known, and for this cause said to be "unlawful to utter;" i.e., the vision was for his own personal instruction and not to be made known to the Church in general, because not yet due time.

It seems evident that Paul saw clearly the very same things shown to John in symbolic visions – called Revelations – the present unfolding of which (because now due time) is shedding such an effulgence of light upon the entire word and plan of our Father.

But though not permitted to tell or utter the deep things seen, it yet proved a blessing to the Church, for Paul's mind being thereby clearly and strongly guided into truth, he was enabled to write so powerfully and so clearly on every point of Christian doctrine, that his letters are the tribunals before which all error is uncovered and reproved. The glories of that great revelation or vision doubtless tinged and guided the **[R552 : page 4]** expressions of every letter and every discourse, and are now helpful in the understanding of the opening symbols of the "Revelation" by John.

Truly, as Paul said, he was "not a whit behind the very chiefest of the Apostles," for he had more abundant revelations of God's plan than they all. But of these he did not boast, though he referred to them as special proofs of his calling, and for the strengthening of their faith. Neither did he boast of the greater work he had accomplished over and above the others in making converts, and in establishing churches. But, he says, "Most gladly rather will I glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake." (Chap. 12:9,10.)

But, he says, you Corinthians have thought me a fool for glorying in these things, but you ought to have commended me, for in nothing am I behind the very chiefest Apostles, though I be

nothing; (it is Christ in me.) (v. 11.) You doubtless, thought I sacrificed the dignity of the office of an Apostle by the things which I suffered for your sake. "Have I committed an offence in humbling myself that ye might be exalted, because I have preached to you the Gospel of Christ freely?" I have taken wages of other churches to do you service. (Chap. 10:7,8. [should be 11:7,8 - site Editor]) (He also labored with his own hands rather than be chargeable to those who had not yet come to appreciate the value of the Gospel and its ambassador. (1 Cor. 4:12.)

"Seeing that many glory after the flesh, I will glory also," but I will glory in the things I have suffered. "In labors I have been more abundant, (than the other Apostles) in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one; thrice was I beaten with rods; once was I stoned; thrice I suffered shipwreck; a night and a day I have been in the deep. In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches. Who is weak and I am not weak? who is offended and I burn not? The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ which is blessed forevermore knoweth that I lie not. (10:18-31 [should be 11:18-31 - site Editor].)

Surely Paul gave full proof of his ministry and Apostleship, which consisted not only in proclaiming the glad tidings, but also in defending the truth against the assaults of the adversary to overturn it. We find him also exhorting Timothy to preach the word without fear of men, to be instant in season and out of season, (when it suited his convenience and when it did not,) to reprove, rebuke and exhort

with all long-suffering and doctrine," telling him also that in his own first endeavor to withstand false doctrine, no man stood with him, but all forsook him. "Notwithstanding," he says, "The Lord stood with me and strengthened me, that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear." He also warns Timothy against Alexander the coppersmith, saying, "He did me much harm, of whom be thou aware also, for he hath greatly withstood our words." (2 Tim. 4:2;14-17.) As we thus view his record, from his conversion to the end of his life, we must say that Paul was not only the greatest Apostle, but, next to our Lord, he is the most perfect model of a self-sacrificing spirit that shines on the sacred records. Without doubt his great usefulness, as well as his knowledge of God's plan, was due to the fact that with such persevering effort, he carried out the consecration he had made.

While, as we have seen, the other Apostles did not grow so rapidly in grace and in knowledge, because more or less fettered by former ideas, and because at first they did not have an eye so entirely single to the glory of God as did Paul, yet we would not be understood as underrating in the least, the authority of their writings, which beyond all doubt were divinely inspired, and probably frequently beyond their own understanding. Neither would we desire to under-value the piety and zeal of any of the Apostles. Impulsive Peter seemed to gain more self-control, and later we find him boldly and freely endorsing the teaching and course of his "beloved brother Paul." (2 Pet. 3:15.) We find him also afterward warning the Church against false teachers who would privately endeavor to subvert the fundamentals of the Gospel, even denying that the Lord bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction, saying that many would follow their pernicious ways, by reason of whom, the way of truth would be evil spoken of. (2 Pet. 2:1,2.)

We also find John writing to one of the churches and to the "beloved Gaius," warning them against the evil influence of Diotrephes, who, "loving to have the pre-eminence among them,"

received not the Apostles, speaking against them with malicious words; and having gained influence over the church in that place, cast out those who received the Apostles. (3 John 9:10.)

We also find Jude writing to the churches warning them against certain men who had crept in unawares, turning the grace of God into self-exaltation, taking advantage of the spread of truth to add to their own influence and apparent wisdom, and introduce their own false teaching. He wrote to put them in remembrance of things which they already knew, but from which they were in danger of being turned aside by these false teachers, exhorting them to "contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints;" and while he would have them shun the evil influence of these he exhorts the Church to make a difference between these wilful enemies of the truth, and those weak saints who had been partially overcome by them – "pulling them out of the fire" (destruction) to which their course was tending.

Though all the Apostles were not so prompt in self-sacrifice as was Paul, time and discipline proved and polished them, and enduring hardness as good soldiers, they are ensamples as well as Apostles to the flock. May all the dear flock consider well the examples and divinely inspired teaching left us, that we also may war a good warfare, and so run as to obtain that to which we also have been called. Let us learn from these examples, that those who most thoroughly lose sight of self and become lost in Christ, and in the seeking and doing of his will, will be most clearly taught and most abundantly used of the Master. Paul was the chief of the Apostles because he sacrificed more, and with greater promptness than the others: "Whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all."

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