

Apostolic Fathers or Paul?

Alan R. Naas

January 2021

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When I was presented with the idea that Paul is my Apostle and that Paul had two ministries and that that the dispensation of the mystery of the Body of Christ was revealed to Paul for my benefit, I felt like it would be foolish to reject such good news. I had no hesitation in rejecting the traditional kingdom teaching in the churches. I am still amazed that traditional Christianity has not and does not see the dispensation of the mystery of the Body of Christ; other than they simply have not heard it. I wonder how this works out in God's overall plan. This study is to determine for myself, if I can, how early Christianity started off on the path they are still on. What I am discovering are several factors that have influenced Christian theology.

The contents of this study may be considered esoteric (intended for or likely to be understood by only a small number of people with a specialized knowledge or interest) and not popular among many others; but so were the teachings of Jesus Christ through His earthly ministry and His teachings through the apostle Paul in His heavenly ministry.

Traditional Christianity is said to be founded on the teachings of Jesus Christ and His Twelve Apostles.

Recently we looked at the discovery of the Didache and how excited Christianity was to find a "missing link" back to the Twelve Apostles. Didache simply means "Teachings", but has been expanded to mean "The Teachings of Jesus Christ Through his Apostles to the Gentiles". We believe that Jesus Christ's earthly ministry as continued by His Apostles was to the lost sheep of the house of Israel and not to the Gentiles. We determined that the Didache was probably an expansion of the Jewish teachings to proselytes and was adapted for first century Christians who were mostly Jews. It laid out the doctrines of Baptism by water, the Lord's Prayer, the Eucharist, Christian assembly on the Lord's Day, the office of bishops and deacons, and the return of Christ.

In this study we are going to dig a little deeper into the writings of the post New Testament Apostolic Fathers and look for evidence of the sources of doctrine that influenced the early development of Christianity.

This early Christian era is called the Patristic Era and the study of such is called patristics. These writings include the Didache (of unknown origin), Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, and Polycarp of Smyrna. These are considered the chief ones. Others include the Epistle of Barnabas (70-132), Shepherd of Hermas, Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus (130-190), Papias Bishop of Hieropolis (60-130), Justin Martyr of Judea (100-165), and the lost writings of Hegesippus the Nazarene (110-180). These were all one time considered for canonicity, but eventually rejected. Although many of these mention Paul or quote some of his verses, they admit that they did not understand Paul. It is obvious that they did not understand right division or dispensational

truth as taught by Paul in his latter epistles. They certainly did not display an understanding of the mystery of the dispensation of the Body of Christ. Therefore, these early texts are crucial to an understanding of the shaping of Christian thought and Christian doctrine. These all established the foundation on which Irenaeus of Lyon (130-202), Tertullian of Carthage (155-240), Origen of Alexandria (184-253) and Eusebius of Caesarea (260-340) expanded early Christian theology.

Unfortunately, historical preservation of documents suffered during these first few centuries. That is why it is so difficult to prove certain theories with collaborating evidence. All we have in some cases are surviving fragments or statements from historians or oral tradition.

I have studied to some degree the writings of the "Apostolic Fathers" with the understanding that I am reading a translator's interpretation of their originals. I also labored through most of Eusebius' History of Christianity (Ecclesiastical History). (Eusebius of Caesarea 260/265-339/340 AD) There are a few things to note.

There seems to be a disconnection between the teachings of Paul's Prison Epistles and the teachings of the "Early Church Fathers". Here are some things to consider. In their day they did not have a complete Bible as we have today. They had parchments, scrolls, and various epistles (letters) circulating about. They did not have chapter and verse as we know it today. They didn't know what was canonical and what was not canonical. They probably didn't have a complete set of all the writings. Those who were concerned with the past truth of the Old Testament, (i.e. Moses and the Law), were likely Jewish followers of the Apostles' ministry. They displayed a strong devotion to Jewish oral tradition.

After Paul was apprehended in Jerusalem, the Apostles continued their ministries to the Jews while Paul five years in confinement and perhaps freed for a few years before being apprehended again until his death. In spite of what happened to Paul, the Apostles continued separately.

Ignatius (?-140) was assumed to be the Bishop of Antioch. He wrote letters to the Ephesians, the Philippians, the Smyrnaeans, the Magnesians, the Trallians, the Philadelphians and the Romans. Polycarp (69-155) was the Bishop of Smyrna and wrote an epistle to the Philippians. Clement (35-99) was the Bishop of Rome and wrote an Epistle to the Corinthians. These theologians were not in line with Paul's previous teachings to these same assemblies.

Clement's Epistle to the Corinthians was much like Paul's Epistles to the same people. This is the third correctional letter to the Corinthians. This letter in most part directly addresses the sedition concerning the ousting of the presbyters by some of the members. This letter must have been written to Jewish believers as evidenced by the recount of a multitude of Old Testament names and stories, which would be foreign to Gentiles. This is a lengthy Epistle.

Clement is assumed to be the bishop at Rome. If Paul met with anyone of the church at Rome in Acts 28:30-31, this letter is void of any knowledge by Clement of the dispensational change that happened at the end of the Acts. This letter is void of any evidence of Clement's knowledge of Paul's post-Acts gospel of the Body of Christ.

In Chapter 1 Clement encouraged obedience to those (bishops) who rule over you.

In Chapter 4 Clement gives us a translation of Gen 4:7; *And God said to Cain, Why art thou grieved, and why is thy countenance fallen? "If thou offerest rightly, but dost not divide rightly, hast thou not sinned?"* This is interesting because Clement himself did not see "rightly dividing" the New Testament as we do. (Oftentimes Scriptures would be more effective if they were quoted to the one a mirror.)

Clement comments on Peter and Paul. "Let us set before our eyes the illustrious apostles. **Peter**, through unrighteous envy, endured not one or two, but numerous labours and when he had at length suffered martyrdom, departed to the place of glory due to him. Owing to envy, **Paul** also obtained the reward of patient endurance, after being seven times thrown into captivity, compelled to flee, and stoned. After preaching both in the east and west, he gained the illustrious reputation due to his faith, having taught righteousness to the whole world, and come to the extreme limit of the west, and suffered martyrdom under the prefects. (5:23-27)

In Chapter 25 Clement gives a strange illustration of resurrection using the Phoenix. **CHAP. XXV. — THE PHOENIX AN EMBLEM OF OUR RESURRECTION.**

In Chapter 36 Clement seems to paraphrase parts of Ephesians: "By Him are the eyes of our hearts opened. By Him our foolish and darkened understanding blossoms up anew towards His marvellous light."

In Chapter 37 Clement does comment of the body example of 1 Cor 12 but not the Body of Christ.

Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, is an unknown person except for his seven epistles written on the way to Rome for execution. He writes much about himself obsessed by being eaten by lions to obtain discipleship. He repeats calls for obedience to the bishop who represents God and to the presbyters who represent the Apostles and to the deacons. You can see the beginnings of "church hierarchy" and the bondage of religion.

In his writings you see that the Eucharist, which simply means to "give thanks" in the Greek, has been expanded to mean the entire Lord's Supper, the Lord's Passover feast, which, according to Exodus 12:43-48 was only to be observed by those who were circumcised.

In Smyrnaeans 8:2 Wheresoever the bishop shall appear, there let the people be; even as where Jesus may be, there is the "universal Church" (*katholikos ekklesia*).

As translated into English the Greek form *euaggelion* has come to mean "the gospel" as if there is only one gospel, instead of "good message" or "good tidings" of which there are several in the Scriptures.

Ignatius says “the gospel is the completion of immortality” and that “there is the universal church”.

Ignatius refers to the “church” as “her”.

In his Epistle to the Romans Ignatius wrote, “I do not enjoin you, as Peter and Paul did” suggesting that both Peter and Paul were in Rome at one time.

Polycarp in his letter to the Philippians said “These things, brethren, I write to you concerning righteousness, not because I take anything upon myself, but because you have invited me to do so. For neither I, nor any other such one, can come up to the wisdom of the blessed and glorified Paul.”

Quips from Polycarp: “We shall also reign together with Him,... shall inherit the kingdom of God,... being subject to the presbyters and deacons, as unto God and Christ. ...as the apostles who preached the Gospel unto us, and the prophets who proclaimed beforehand the coming of the Lord...I exhort you all, therefore, to yield obedience to the word of righteousness...in Paul himself, and the rest of the apostles... **For I trust that you are well versed in the Sacred Scriptures, and that nothing is hid from you; but to me this privilege is not yet granted...** The Epistles of Ignatius written by him to us, and all the rest [of his Epistles] which we have by us, we have sent to you, as you requested. They are subjoined to this Epistle, and by them you may be greatly profited;...”

What we see here is that Ignatius and Polycarp wrote and distributed epistles to those who Paul had already addressed perhaps to the undoing of Paul’s post-Acts doctrine of the mystery of the Body of Christ. We also see the origins of the kingdom theocracy, the universal church, the Eucharist, water baptisms, covenant theology, and the Lord’s Prayer two centuries before the Roman Emperor Constantine embraced and influenced Christianity. We also see great emphasis on the offices of the bishop as the Lord, presbyter as the Apostles, and deacons; and submission to these offices, and to do nothing apart from the bishop. This seems to be the embryo of bondage to clerical hierarchy and theocracy. Assembly was to be more frequent and on the “Lord’s Day” with congregation attendance required “according to the commandment” (what commandment?). The Eucharist is the medicine of immortality and the gospel is the completion of immortality. These ideas can supposedly be traced back to the teachings of Jesus and His Apostles. There was a consistent warning to denounce any other doctrines as heresy.

Much of traditional Christian doctrine is founded, not solely on the New Testament, but on the writings produced by the early “church” and in particular the writings of the post New Testament “Apostolic Fathers”, whose writings were considered not canonical nor as inspired by God.

Someone wrote that the Didache and the Apostolic Fathers were Matthean rather than Pauline. This got the wheels turning in my head so I started to study more with this observation in mind. Could it be possible that there was even an anti-Pauline thread running through these early believers?

Traditional Christianity is said to be founded on the teachings of Jesus Christ and His Twelve Apostles. That would leave out the two most voluminous writers of the New Testament, Paul and Luke. I wonder how many people think that Paul and Luke are of the Twelve Apostles. The earthly teachings of Jesus are recorded in the four Gospels. Many of the Twelve Apostles are only mentioned by name in the scriptures and of whom we know nothing of their teaching. Peter, John and Matthew seem to represent the teachings of the Apostles.

Who are the Twelve Apostles? (See App 141 in the CB, pg. 168) There are four listings in the Scriptures. Notice how they are consistently grouped in all four listings the same three under Peter, Philip, and James. By the way, notice that there are two James, two Judas, and two Simons. There were three sets of brothers. In Matt 17: Peter, James and John were taken to the transfiguration on the mountain. From Acts Chapters 2-10 Peter and John were the main Apostles mentioned in ministry. Stephen and Philip (not the apostle Philip) of the seven chosen disciples by the Twelve also preached in Acts 7 and 8.

In Acts 12:2 James the brother of John was killed. Peter was jailed in Chapter 12 and after his release met John Mark. Peter said “go show these things to James and the brethren”. What James is first mentioned in 12:17? Was it James the other Apostle or James the Brother of Jesus? Barnabas and Saul took John Mark with them to Antioch in 12:25

In Acts 15 we hear the last of Peter and more of James. (James 2385 *Iakobos* is the Greek name for Jacob 2384 *Iakob*). Although there are two James that were of the Twelve Apostles, which James is this? This James is believed to be the brother of the Lord (Matt 13:55, 27:56, Mark 6:3, 15:40, 16:1, Luke 24:10)(CB App 182) In 1 Cor 15:7 Paul named James as one of those who saw the resurrected Lord. Mary the mother of Jesus and His brethren were in the upper room in Acts 1:14 after having become believers. James became the head of the assembly at Jerusalem In Acts 15:13 James speaks at the council in Jerusalem. James is again in charge in Acts 21:18 and confronts Paul. Although nobody is 100 percent sure, this James is thought to be the Lord’s brother James. In Galatians 1:19 Paul saw James, the Lord’s brother in Jerusalem. In Gal 2:9 James, Cephas, and John seemed to be pillars (in Jerusalem). This is the same James in Acts 15 and Acts 21. Now you have a brief lesson about James.

How many of the Twelve Apostles wrote a Gospel during the Acts period? The only gospel written by one of the Twelve Apostles during the Acts was that of Matthew. Would it make sense that the Apostles would favor Matthew’s Gospel if they were all in close fellowship? Matthew Chapter 10 lays out the Apostles’ commission from Jesus. According to the CB notes on Matthew, Matthew has no less than thirty sections which are peculiar to his gospel; and all more or less bearing on the King and on the Kingdom, which are special subjects of this gospel. Matthew’s Gospel sets forth the Lord as Jehovah’s King which was the essence of the ministry of the Twelve Apostles. Matthew has sixty references to the Old Testament, for the Law and the prophets were fulfilled in the coming of the Messiah.

The only gospel written by one of the Twelve Apostles during the Acts was that of Matthew. Although the Gospels of Mark and Luke were written during the Acts period, how many realize they were not of the Twelve? John was one of the Twelve, but John's Gospel was written after the Acts period. John Mark and Luke were companions of Paul during the Acts period (Acts 12:25, 13:5,13, 15: 37-39) and both are mentioned by Paul in 2 Timothy Chapter 4 during Paul's final imprisonment. According to Col 4:10, John Mark was the nephew of Barnabas. In Philemon 24 Marcus and Lucas Paul identified as fellow labourers. Mark was also close to Peter (1 Peter 5:13). If the Apostle John wrote his gospel after Acts, and Mark and Luke were in step with Paul at the time of Paul's final ministry, then it is possible they were all aware of Paul's post-Acts doctrine and their gospels were not as important to the Twelve Apostles.

Did the teaching of Jesus to the Twelve come mostly from Matthew's Gospel? Is this the one gospel often referred to as "the gospel"?

Matthew's Gospel starts with the lineage of Jesus from Abraham and the birth of Jesus the Savior and King of Israel. He was baptized by John and began to preach the kingdom of Heaven is at hand. In Chapters 5, 6, 7 is the Sermon on Mount. Matthew contains the parables of the kingdom and the Apostles were given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. In 16:13-19 Peter is chosen by Jesus to begin His "church" and is given the keys to the kingdom. In Chapter 17 Peter, James, and John witness the transfiguration on the mountain. In 24 are the signs of thy coming. We get the Eucharist from 26:27 "He gave thanks (eucharisteo)" and the New Covenant Theology from 26:28. In 26:20 we have the Shepherd and His sheep. In 27:37 "This is Jesus the King of the Jews". Finally there is the great commission in 28:19-20.

Would you agree that at the end of Acts the teaching of Jesus and the Twelve from Matthew Gospel was set aside for the purpose of a new dispensation, as were also the Gospels of Mark and Luke?

Another thing to remember is that the Jewish revolt occurred from A.D. 66-74 and Israel was demolished. The Apostles had left Jerusalem for other cities.

Would it be fair to say, that most of the early Christians were converted Jews? The believing Jews and the unbelieving Jews still lived in close proximity to each other for a couple of centuries. At first the Christian assemblies were much the same as Jewish assemblies (synagogues). Without the Temple in Jerusalem, they consorted to small local gatherings for prayer and study of the Scriptures. The big push to convert the pagan population started in the fourth century with the Roman church.

"The salvation of God sent to the Gentiles" didn't happen immediately. Perhaps that was due to the Matthean doctrine was so prominent in the early Christian Patristic period instead of Paul's doctrine.

Through the Didache and the earliest writings of the Apostolic Fathers have come such doctrines as the **“universal church”** (2526 *katholikos ekklesia*), **the Eucharistic communion** (2168 *eucharisteo=give thanks*) meaning the Lord’s Passover feast, the concept of **hell and eternal punishment, the immortal soul of men, covenant theology, the one gospel, kingdom theology, clerical hierarchy, the bride of Christ, the Lord’s Day**, etc. As we will see, these doctrines had taken root long before the Roman Council of Nicaea in AD 325. These doctrines were never taught by Paul as pertaining to the Body of Christ.

Unbeknown to most traditional Christians, their doctrines are branches of the same tree that is rooted in the “apostolic traditions” of the post-New Testament believers. Many of these early converts were former Jews and a few were Gentiles. Paul always went to the synagogue of the Jew first and then secondly to the Gentile, whereas, Peter, James and other Apostles concentrated their ministries to the diaspora and Jews.

Traditional Western Christianity today is comprised of Protestant sects that are offshoots of Roman Catholicism. Most Protestant sects hold many of the tenants of the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) which was produced at the request of the English Parliament. Most tenants of the Westminster Confession come from the Church of England, which is an alteration of, but rooted in, Roman Catholicism. Augustine, a Roman Catholic, is the founder of the Canterbury Cathedral, the mother of the Anglican Church. Both the Church of England and the Church of Rome are state sponsored religions with different heads.

Therefore most traditional Western Christians can trace their foundations to the Roman Church and to the Roman Church’s sources of doctrine. The Roman Church’s sources of doctrine include the Scriptures, the tradition of the Apostolic Fathers, expanded by other Ante-Nicaean Fathers, pagan mythology, and Greek philosophy. Although the cry of the Reformers in the sixteenth century was *sola scriptura* (*by scriptures alone*), (as we studied last time) how much of these early interventions and doctrines of man had already infected the *scriptura*?

I believe that the “Apostolic Fathers” were an extension of the teaching of the Twelve Apostles to the Jews, which is in opposition to Paul’s teachings to the Gentiles and specifically his teaching to the Body of Christ. The Twelve Apostles taught a belief in Jesus as Messiah and King but in adherence with Moses and the Law. That is why the Roman Catholic Churches resemble the Temple with an altar and a tabernacle to perform a sacrificial mass. (For I desired mercy and not sacrifice. Hosea 6:6, Matt 9:13, 12:7). That is why we see churches display the Ten Commandments. That is why the two ordinances of water baptism and the Lord’s Supper are common. That is why churches are named after Apostles.

The Reformers, however, began to lean towards Paul’s teaching and “the just shall live by faith”, but still continued in the kingdom hope of a universal “church”. Their motto was “by faith alone, by grace alone, by scriptures alone”. At least there was a departure from some of the idolatry and paganism that crept into Christianity through Roman Catholicism. But there are still remnants of paganism, mythology, covenant theologies and kingdom theologies even in the Protestant religions.

Now the completion of that work would be to go from “reformation” to “restoration”: by that I mean for those to break away from the Apostolic Tradition and turn to Paul’s teaching from the Risen Lord given to us who are the Gentiles.

An obvious question is “Why did Christ choose and convert Saul (Paul)”? Didn’t Jesus already have Twelve Apostles? Why weren’t the Twelve Apostles used to carry out the work that Paul was given? Have you ever thought about that? Is this a clue that there might be a reason for separate ministries at some point? Does this indicate that there might be two separate roads or even separate dispensations in God’s plan?

That is why the Word admonishes us at the end of Paul’s post-Acts ministry and in the final chapters of the Bible to **discern the things that bear apart** and to **rightly divide the word of truth**. We are to rightly divide the teaching of the Apostles and the teaching of Paul. Furthermore we are to rightly divide the Acts ministry of Paul and the post-Acts ministry of Paul. This is the only way for one who is chosen by God to see the dispensation of the mystery of the Body of Christ.

Instead of looking to the teachings of Jesus Christ and the Twelve Apostles which were directed to Israel of the past and the restored Israel of the future, Christians today should look to the dispensational teachings of the Apostle Paul; especially his post-acts Prison Epistles, which have to do with the Body of Christ and nothing to do with the Twelve Apostles or Israel or their kingdom hope. The teachings of Paul are of far greater value to us today than the teachings of the Twelve Apostles to Israel.

I have an interesting observation if one is concerned with the spiritual significance of numbers. I am very grateful that we have a bound volume of all the word of God which we can easily study. Eusebius, the great historian of Christianity states that the original OT contained twenty-two scrolls. Man has separated the twenty-two original OT scrolls into thirty-nine writings or “books”. When the thirty-six are added to the twenty-seven writings of the NT, it makes the total sixty-six (66); which contains a double number of man. The twenty-two original scrolls of the Old Testament and the twenty writings of the Acts period of the New Testament add up to forty-two writings which are 6×7 . These complete the Scriptures pertaining to the past and future of Israel. Paul’s seven post-Acts writings in order to complete, or fill full, the word of God (Col 1:25) makes the total writings of Scripture forty-nine (7×7), which is true perfection. Nonetheless, without Paul’s seven post-Acts Epistles concerning the Body of Christ, Israel’s Bible is still complete with 42 (6×7) books.

This realization should also alert Christians (saved believers) to focus on the seven post-Acts epistles of Paul in the forefront with the teachings of Jesus Christ and the Twelve Apostles to Israel in the background. The seven post-Acts epistles of Paul **ARE** the teachings of the risen Lord Christ Jesus to all men equally without distinction through His chosen vessel Paul. The unsaved are converted by hearing the Gospel of John, “*the salvation of God sent to the Gentiles*” (Acts 28:28) means to all men without distinction. The next step is found in Paul’s post-Acts

epistle (1 Tim 2:3-4): *“For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth”*. The full knowledge of the truth is found in the full completion of the word of God in Paul’s prison epistles. This is the “all truth” spoken of in John 16:13. The good news of the mystery of the dispensation of the Body of Christ is *“the fullness of Him that filleth all in all”* (Eph 1:23). Once a person is saved by faith in Christ, it is God’s desire that he come unto the full knowledge of the truth concerning the high calling of the Body of Christ. The Prison Epistles of Paul are the teaching (good tidings) of the risen Lord Jesus Christ to all men of distinction; those chosen before the overthrow of the world.

It was Paul who wrote the last seven books of the Bible as necessitated by the revelation of the mystery of the Body of Christ. These seven books are believed to have been written after Acts 28:28.

Jesus Christ and the Twelve Apostles had an earthly ministry to the children of Israel, whereas, the risen Christ Jesus through Paul revealed a heavenly doctrine for all men. Ephesians 4:4 states that presently there can be only one faith, which means one doctrine. That one doctrine can only be the Pauline post-Acts doctrine. Nonetheless, the Apostolic Fathers insisted on accepting no other doctrine than the Matthean doctrine they understood and preached. Therefore if anyone would try to expound Paul’s doctrine of the Body of Christ, they would have been considered a heretic and an evildoer. Hence the Apostolic Fathers continued down the Matthean, anti-Paulinism path.

Eph 4:14 That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; ¹⁵ But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ:

Eph 4:17 This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, ¹⁸ Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart:

Col 1:12 Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: ¹³ Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son:

Col 2:18 Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, ¹⁹ And not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God.

²⁰ Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, ²² after the commandments and doctrines of men?

Col 3:1 If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. ²Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. ³For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.

All that we have been studying: the Didache, The Apostolic Fathers, the Ante-Nicene Fathers, the manipulation of the Word of God, the Roman Church, the Anglican Church, the Westminster Confession, are all part of the power of darkness. It is the ultimate "Deep State". It led to the binding of "truth" by the chains of religion and orthodoxy instead of the free teaching of the Word of Truth by the Holy Spirit to each individual. I believe that is why most believers have not heard of the dispensation of the mystery of the Body of Christ. The Holy Spirit must turn their hearts from the "church" to the word of God; then from the power of darkness to the light of the truth.

Just like us; if anyone has been or will be quietly translated from the power of darkness, the world will never know.