
Paul, Paul, Paul

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— Keith R. Blades

It is a delight beyond description to be able to understand and appreciate what God is doing in His plan and purpose. By “rightly dividing the word of truth” in accordance with the great dispensational change that God has made we can open the Bible and have the testimony of God’s word make sense. How marvelous it is to recognize the difference between God’s program and dealings with His nation Israel, and the program that He has in effect with us today as set forth in the epistles of the Apostle Paul. Confusion is completely dispelled when once we recognize the distinctiveness of Paul’s apostleship and message, and hence the distinctiveness of this present dispensation of God’s grace to us Gentiles. There is no need to be in a state of consternation or perplexity trying to apply promises, instructions, and doctrines to ourselves today, which God gave to Israel. There is no need for us to be forced to ‘spiritualize’ prophecies and teachings that God gave to Israel, because we mistakenly think that they somehow belong to us today. “Rightly dividing the word of truth” in accordance with the great dispensational change God has made frees us from perplexity, consternation, and contradiction.

Unfortunately, however, as we talk to people about these things, (especially about Paul’s special apostleship), often times our understanding and appreciation is not readily received. It is objected to and sometimes it is even vigorously opposed. Yet if a person is honest with himself, and also with God’s word, the reality of the distinctiveness of Paul’s apostleship and message is inescapable. And this is because God Himself has made it so. Nevertheless when we first confront people with the issue of Paul having a special and different

apostleship, they often object.

Object

The particular objection I am referring to goes something like this: ‘Oh, you are just making way too much out of the Apostle Paul.’ Or, ‘Paul, Paul, Paul; that’s all you ever talk about. You exalt him above the Lord Jesus.’ Or even, ‘You can follow Paul if you want, but I’m following Jesus.’ These responses are often charged with a lot of emotion, but they are prompted by the emphasis that we lay upon the special nature of Paul’s apostleship. We, of course, do not exalt Paul above the Lord, nor follow him as a man. Yet we do magnify his office, as he himself did. And we do this because God Himself has purposely made a big deal out of the apostleship He gave to Paul. Moreover this very issue is something that God has designed to be a manifest token of the reality of the great dispensational change that He made when He raised up Paul to be His apostle of the Gentiles.

The Right to Glory

In Romans 15:8-21 the Apostle Paul underscores the issue of the great dispensational change that God has made in suspending His program with Israel and turning to us Gentiles. In the passage Paul “magnifies his office” as the “minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles” that he is. And in view of this being the case he declares,...

17 I have therefore whereof I may glory through Jesus Christ in those things which pertain to God.

(Romans 15:17)

Paul does “glory” a lot “through Jesus Christ in those things which pertain to God.” Paul talks about himself and his ministry more than any other New Testament writer. Several hundred times in the course of his epistles he draws attention to himself either by name, or by the personal pronoun “I.” And in doing so, over and over again we are confronted with the person of the Apostle Paul. But this is not done out of arrogance or egotism. Instead it is done because just as Paul says, he has “whereof I may glory through Jesus Christ in those things which pertain to God.” Paul, therefore, has a God-ordained reason not only for why he *could* glory, but also for why he *should* glory.

A Divinely Designed Marker

It is God Himself who has the Apostle Paul talk about himself as much as he does. Yet clearly not to magnify the man Paul, but to magnify the office of his apostleship and thereby draw attention to the great dispensational change that God has made in turning to the Gentiles. Paul’s apostleship, message, and ministry, is indeed new and different. It marks a great change from what was going on before. It is clearly different from what is recorded in the Gospel accounts when our Lord was here functioning as “a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises *made* unto the fathers.” And what a change it is from the continuation of Israel’s program administered by Peter and the rest of the 12 apostles as set forth in the opening chapters of the book of Acts. God has indeed ushered in a great dispensational change to the praise of the glory of His grace, and He has magnified the office of the Apostle Paul to draw attention to the change.

A perusal of the number of times that Paul specifically talks about himself and his ministry shows that he deliberately does so to draw attention to this very issue of the great dispensational change that God has made through raising him up and making known unto him “the

revelation of the mystery.” Consider the following few examples:

15 Nevertheless, brethren, I have written the more boldly unto you in some sort, as putting you in mind, because of the grace of God that is given unto me of God,

16 That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost.

(Romans 15:15-16)

11 But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man.

12 For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught *it*, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.

(Galatians 1:11-12)

25 Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of the grace of God which is given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God;

26 *Even* the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints:

(Colossians 1:25-26)

15 This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.

16 Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting.

(1 Timothy 1:15-16)

The self-consciousness of the Apostle Paul is two-fold. First, he himself clearly understood and appreciated the distinctiveness of his apostleship and message. And secondly Paul also knew that the very means by which God would draw attention to the great dispensational change that He has made, was through magnifying the office of his special apostleship.

Paul, therefore, had reason not only whereby he *could* glory through Jesus Christ, but again he had reason whereby he *should* do so. And so he did; and so *should* we. For it is a Divinely designed means of marking out the dispensation of God's grace that is now in effect. — K. R. Blades