

## THE FUNDAMENTAL CLAIM AND THE EVIDENCE

As a bit of a review, let's be reminded of the fundamental claim of this study, and the evidence we've seen so far. Our claim, outlandish for most of Christendom, is that *the gospel of grace under which we live has not always been offered but is new with the Apostle Paul*.

This study looked only at the New Testament. But in doing so, we discovered that it would be *impossible to develop the grace Gospel out of the synoptic Gospels alone*. It itself, this should testify to our claim. If the written "gospels" of Matthew, Mark, and Luke do not contain the Gospel which we proclaim, then any claim that our Gospel is contained therein would require the burden of proof upon those making such claim. I would suspect that the "evangelical industrial complex" will never take up the challenge of showing the grace Gospel in the synoptics but would rather be dismissive of our challenge.

The fourth Gospel does have verses which speak of salvation by faith alone. While some may contend that these references are *similar but not the same*, my position is that the writer of the fourth Gospel wrote well-after the grace Gospel had been revealed, and that he inserts commentary within the narrative of Jesus' ministry which would be a natural post-Pauline analysis.

In the book of Acts, we saw that the first 12 chapters *contain nothing of grace*. Despite being constantly referred to as the birth of the church and the history of its earliest days, all the evidence from the text itself is that the believing and baptized congregation of Acts 2-12 was a *sect of the Jews*, holding to the teachings of the Law, and believing Jesus to be their Messiah. Beginning in Acts 13, however, Saul the Jew is introduced as Paul, and he becomes the preeminent figure in the work of God from that point onward. He begins to share things that are so different that a major contention was birthed among the Jews, resulting in a heated debate in Jerusalem. In the end, the Apostles under Peter conclude that Paul did, indeed, receive a new revelation. It is that revelation under which we live, the Gospel of grace. Acts 13-28 contain both the *grace Gospel* and the *kingdom Gospel*, since the Kingdom was still being offered to the then-intact nation of Israel.

We now turn our attention to the Pauline epistles.

## THE UNBELIEVABLE CLAIMS OF PAUL

In 1 Timothy 1:15-16, Paul makes a statement so unbelievable that he must give not one but two testimonies of its validity before even saying what he is going to say. First, he says that **this is a faithful saying**, then immediately follows it with the admonition that it is **worthy of all acceptance** (v. 15). He then says that **Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners** (v. 15). But that is so well-accepted that Paul had no need to introduce it with testimonies of validity. The truth that the Messiah would come to **save sinners** was well attested in the Hebrew Scriptures, announced at the birth of Jesus, proclaimed by John the Baptist, and even testified of by Jesus Himself. Either Paul has gone to hyperbole, or his testimonies of validity *are not about the fact that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners*. The latter is my position.

But of what then does Paul give the testimonies? What is so startling that he must give this dual testimony? I believe it is the next phrase in verse 16, when he announces that of these sinners Jesus came to save, **I am chief**. What does it mean to be **chief**? The Oxford English Dictionary (the definitive guide on the English language)

says that when the adjective is used of *persons* it means, “standing at the head; taking the first place.” When used of *things*, it means “highest in rank.”<sup>1</sup> Yet most Christians use the definition that pertains to *things* while Paul is certainly *a person*. Therefore, both the Greek, which uses the word *πρῶτος* [*protos*] and the English with its adjective of **chief** make clear that Paul claims to be “standing at the head; taking the first place” in the salvation of sinners.

Could this verse *really* say that Paul is *the first sinner Jesus saved*? Such an idea is preposterous, outlandish, unbelievable! And maybe this is why Paul introduces it by saying that **This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance** (v. 15).

But wait, there’s more! Verse 16 confirms what we have set forth as the meaning of verse 15. Paul uses three words that *only make sense if Paul is first in line*. He uses the word **first**, saying that **in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all longsuffering**. Here he uses the same Greek adjective, *πρῶτος* [*protos*]. Second, he claims to be **a pattern**. And when does one use a *pattern*? Only *at the beginning of a project*. Why would Paul claim to be **a pattern** if thousands upon thousands had *come before him in the same manner as he*? Finally, Paul uses the word **hereafter**. That word, of course, would only be used if Paul was **chief, first, and a pattern**.

This claim of Paul all but “seals the deal” on our claim that *the Gospel under which we are saved was a revelation of God given to Paul and not found prior to Paul*.

But is there more confirmation that Paul received such a revelation?

In Ephesians 3:2, Paul asks the Ephesians **if ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me**. Isn’t that plain and simple enough? Either Paul is delusional *or the dispensation of the grace of God* was given to Paul, and thus was not given to Peter, the apostles, or anyone prior to that time. In fact, Paul makes this explicit in the next verse, where he says that this dispensation began when **by revelation he made known unto me the mystery** (Eph. 3:3). What is the need for a **revelation** if *the truth was already known and being proclaimed around the world*?

Sadly, *run-of-the-mill* dispensationalism rejects this clear teaching of Scripture. The website *GotQuestions* gives the standard threadbare answer about the timing of the dispensation of grace, saying, “It began at Pentecost (Acts 2) and will end when all who are born again by the baptism of the Holy Spirit are raptured out of this world to be with Jesus Himself (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).”<sup>2</sup> If this be true, then why did Paul claim that the dispensation was given to him, by revelation? Should we question Paul’s sanity, or his truthfulness? Or should we question the *standard dispensational answer*?

If we need to give one more piece of evidence that Paul is accurate and that the dispensation of grace began with him, we could hear his testimony in Colossians 1:26, which speaks of **the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints**. Could this **mystery** be anything other than that of which Paul spoke in Ephesians 3:3, saying **by revelation he made known unto me the mystery**?

It seems to me that *the dispensation of the grace of God under which pattern we are saved began with Paul, and this explains why the grace Gospel is not found in Scripture before Paul*.

---

<sup>1</sup> "chief, adj. and adv.". OED Online. December 2022. Oxford University Press.

<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/31581?rskey=L5XZYt&result=2> (accessed February 26, 2023).

<sup>2</sup> *What Is The Dispensation Of Grace?* <https://www.gotquestions.org/dispensation-of-Grace.html>. (accessed February 26, 2023).