

THE WORD OF TRUTH

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"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free"—Jno. 8:32.

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"Of His own will begat He us with the Word of Truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures" (James 1:18).

SET FOR THE DEFENSE OF THE GOSPEL

THE FORM OF KNOWLEDGE AND OF THE TRUTH

". . . which hast a form of knowledge and of the truth in the law" - Romans 2:20

True religion is not merely philosophical; it is not the embracement of new ideas or the restructure of our thinking due to rational analysis or preference. *The people of God have been projected by faith into a very real sphere, where mere human rationality has no place.* In a time when religious competition is very keen, it is difficult to speak with people about the truth without regard to organization; about reality apart from institutionalism. There is an innate compulsion in man to identify with groups, and therefore various religious sects spend endless efforts in spreading their denominational propoganda, literally *selling people on their way of thinking.* Thus do we hear people speaking after this manner; *"That is not the way we believe". "How does your church believe?" "We are not of that faith".* I never heard of that before; here is what we teach at *our church*", etc. In Christ Jesus, however, such language is obviated, as we become participators in Christ Jesus, experiencing "eternal life" itself, as well as "the mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:16). *When once the heart has "tasted" of the Lord, there is an abrupt end brought to religious philosophizing.* Our Lord Jesus introduced this Himself to the woman of Samaria when He said; *"Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship; for salvation is of the Jews (Jno. 4:22).* Having been "grafted" into that wonderful stock of Abraham, "contrary to nature," we now may make the same spiritual boast in Christ Jesus (Romans 11:17-24). *The knowledge of salvation" verily comes with the "remission of sin",* as is witnessed by the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:77), and in such knowledge we find the thorough inadequacy of empty profession and "vain philosophy (Col. 2:8).

In our text, we find the word "form" used, and it is a most interesting text. It might be well to first develop the concept of "form" that is introduced in the Scriptures. Form of itself is not a derogatory term; *it is upbraided only when it is not accompanied with reality.* The various uses of the word indicate to us the nature of its meaning. For instance, we are apprised that the world "in the beginning" was *without form and void" (Gen. 1:2) - note, "without form";* i.e., without substance, without appearance; without boundaries to contain it. After that our Lord had arisen from the dead, it is said that He "appeared in another form" to two men (Mark 16:12); i.e., He appeared in a manner that was not recognizable by them. To the Romans, Paul said; *"But God be thanked that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you" (Rom. 6:17).* By this, Paul meant that they had submitted to the reality of Christ's death and resurrection in their behalf by being baptized. Baptism was the "form of the doctrine"; it was the restric-

In This Issue . . .

In Defense of the Apostle Paul - pg. 4

The Word of Truth

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Author and Editor: Given O. Blakely

Contributing Author: Richard Ebler

Circulation Managers: Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Powers

Publication Office: 26th and Colfax St., Gary, Indiana. (Send no correspondence to this address.)

Business Offices: 7903 Hendricks Place,
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Address all correspondence to 7903 Hendricks Place,
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tive embodiment of it. That **“form of the doctrine” is demonstrable and observable, and carries with it all of the significance of the reality.** It is important to observe that the apostles did not separate form from content; and woe to those who attempt to do it in their stead.

Our Lord Jesus Christ, prior to His incarnation, was **“in the form of God”** (Phil. 2:6); i.e., He was the spiritual expression of the Father. John put it this way; **“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”** **There is no closer unity than that of a thought and the word that expresses it; for the thought is in the word, and the word in the thought.** It was something like this with our Lord and His Lord. The Savior was the actual expression of the Father, for **“all things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made”** (John 1:3). Whatever the Father did, He did through the Word, for that was His expression. Praise the Lord, it is still that way! When our Lord, however, was **“made of a woman”**, He **“took upon Himself the form of a servant”** (Phil. 2:7); i.e., He came with all of the attributes and appearances of a servant; yea, He was, indeed, Jehovah’s **“Servant”** (Isa. 42:1). Here was Deity in an observable **“form”** - something unheard and unconceived of before. The **“flesh, or “form”** of servanthood, became an enstraightenment to Him (Luke 12:50). Do you see something of the significance of the word **“form”** here; it speaks of restriction, of a boundary, **of that which contains the reality.**

Another use of the word **“form”** is found in II Timothy 1:13; **“Hold fast the form of sound words.”** **This refers to the maintenance of a proper nomenclature in the relating of spiritual truths.** The **“form of sound words”** are those words **“which the Holy Ghost teacheth”** (I Cor. 2:13), which words are, by design, the containers of God’s thoughts toward man. **Apart from these words, true spiritual concepts cannot be conveyed, and therefore we are plainly admonished to hold fast their “form.”** Again, the Apostle refers to **the “form of godli-**

ness” which was possessed by many without regard to the **“power”** which is to be within the form (II Tim. 3:5).

Form is to reality what a cup is to water; it is the container of it. You cannot get the water without some sort of container, and neither can the reality come to us apart from the various forms which the Lord has ordained. They are essential, though not the whole of the matter. Those who object to all form must know that the repulsion that is brought into their hearts at the sight of form is not because of the form itself, it is because of the absence of life and vitality in it. That is what is needed. Now, let us turn to our text.

The Jews were being upbraided by Paul because of their spiritual inconsistency. They had a wonderful **identification**—**“Jew”**, and in this they rested. They did not consider the reason for the uniqueness of that term; namely the faith of Abraham, they merely rested in the identity not availing themselves of the privileges and responsibilities that pertained to it. Having the Law, they rested complacently in it. They did not seem to realize that the mere external possession of the law was not the real issue. They treated it somewhat like a creed, boasting of the superiority of their foundation, while all the while failing to build a superstructure upon it. How much it is like many of today that have only a set of words in which to glory.

They also delighted in boasting in God. He had declared Himself to be their God, and in this they found a source of pride rather than a source of opportunity and grace. Rather than availing themselves of the strength, grace, and mercy of the Lord, they merely made their boast in Him being identified with them. **They had no experiential knowledge of Him, no real cognizance of His greatness in their souls.** He was more of a philosophy to them than a Being, more of a thought than a Savior. However, He had revealed His mind to them, and thus they proudly declared that they knew His will. **How rich was their heritage, and how miserable their handling of it. To know the will of God and to live apart from it is no advantage; it is a curse;** for **“to him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin”** (Js. 4:17).

Knowing the will of God was a matter of rote to these Jews. They found no personal delight in it; there was no basic aspiration to be found involved **joyously** in it - they just took pride in their external knowledge of it. They could, no doubt, argue the case of God’s mind and thoughts very well, and give you some chapter and verse on what He had declared to be right or wrong. But when you went to their lives to see whether or not they had been conformed to His mind, and will, you were sadly disappointed, for there was a deep void in them; they actually continued in incessant disobedience to the Lord, thus evincing that they had never really apprehended the **“truth as it is in Christ Jesus”** (Eph. 4:20-24). They also **“approved the things that were excellent”**; they acknowledged the superiority of the unseen world; they knew what was right and what was wrong - but they did not prefer them. Their heart was far

from these things, though they were all taken very easily into the mouth (Romans 2:17-20).

All of this, the Apostle declares, was but the possession of **"the form of the knowledge and of the truth in the law"** (Rom. 2:20). **The Law was not the reality itself, it was but the expression of it; it was the container in which the mind of God was conveyed.** To stand and hold the Law without partaking of its vitality and life is something like holding a cup of water in your hand, all the while complaining because of thirst, yet never bringing the cup to your lips to drink its thirst-quenching contents. Oh, there are so many like that - perhaps even you are one. You have the form, the creed, the doctrine, the orthodoxy; you know what the Bible says. And yet, in your heart, you are not in agreement with it. You are basically at variance with God. You know what to say, and how to say it - but living, that is the problem with you. You are not able to obey the Lord, to walk orderly, to keep the commandments. Now, **no matter how you may delight in your knowledge, you have only "form" unless the very life of Christ is in and exhibited in your life.** There must be content, Divine content - yea, that "Eternal Life which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us" (I John 1:2).

The danger of possessing form without power, of having a mere form of the knowledge and the truth, may be averted by involvement in the Kingdom of God and God Himself. The "Kingdom of God is not in word, but in power" (I Cor. 4:20); i.e., **it is not a matter of verbal identification alone, or of verbal espousal of certain tenets.** It is exhibited in the renovation of the whole man, in the advance from glory to glory (II Cor. 3:18), and faith to faith (Rom. 1:16-18). If my life is unchanged, my profession is empty, and my form is nothing more than form. I am no better, in such a case, than the Israelites of old who were a "stiff-necked" people (Ex. 32:9; 33:5). Is it not said that the Kingdom of God is "righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Rom. 14:17)? And if I do not possess those qualities, am I to assume that I am in the Kingdom at all? **Are these not the content which is to be placed into the form?** If form is thought to be adequate, then we must take into account the Israelites who, at one time possessed all of the form. Here is the Word of the Lord; ". . . Israelites; to whom pertain the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises, whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came . . ." (Rom. 9:4-5). Their adoption was confirmed by the sign of circumcision in the flesh; the glory was the revelation of God to them; the covenants were all of the agreements of blessing that the Lord made. The Law was given to them amidst fire and smoke at Sinai; the tabernacle service with all of its significant ritual and beauty was theirs to the exclusion of all other peoples; every one of the promises were theirs, as well as the rich heritage of the fathers - Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, with whom the Lord had identified Himself (Exodus 3:6). The supreme evidence of

their **formal** acceptance with Jehovah was the coming of the Messianic Seed through their lineage. All of this was form, and had it been received rightfully, there would have been a great source of blessing to the heart. But instead, the Israelites contented themselves with the mere forms of adoption, glory, covenants, the Law, the service of God, the promises, the fathers, and the promised Messiah. But all of these were not sufficient to bring grace to their hearts, because they were not attended with faith. It is the tendency of man to cling to **apparent** advantages without seeking the only true advantage - the Lord Himself. **All of the forms that the Lord gives are not meant to be substitutes for Himself; they are rather to be the means of conveyance for the realities that may be received alone by the heart.**

In Christ Jesus there are no real physical advantages; no high positions of form. One may have the most apparently advantageous forms, and yet be without life or God's approval. The Spirit witnesses; "For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything, not uncircumcision; but **faith** which worketh by love" (Gal. 5:6); "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything nor uncircumcision, but a **new creature**" (Gal. 6:15); "Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the **keeping (retaining) of the commandments of God**" (I Cor. 7:19). Religious enthusiasts today do not glory in circumcision (the mark of the Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 17:11), or in uncircumcision (the mark of divorce from the Jewish people). However, there are forms which they do glory in, such as the rich heritage of orthodoxy, or of fundamentalism, or of evangelicalism. But these things are as lifeless as circumcision, as unable to communicate life as uncircumcision. **It makes little difference how far back you can trace your church, or how the Lord blessed your denomination in its early days; or what great men of God may have been involved in the founding of your particular institution. It is the possession of faith that matters; the new creation wrought by the Holy Spirit within, and the inclination toward and keeping of the precious commandments of God.** If these are not found within the life, it matters not what profession is made, or what form is embraced. The cathedrals of the land may well be marked by the sort of splendor that dazzles the eye; there may be ordinances that are commanded in the Word, pomp and ceremony that are quite unworthy of condemnation, and anthems that set forth words of a glorious heritage - but if there is alienation in the heart toward God, the form is not only empty and void, but it is an offence to the Lord (Amos 4:10; Isa. 1:13).

All of the truth may be held externally, and mouthed with great piety. This was the case with the Pharisees of old. The Lord said of them: "The Scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: all therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not after their works, for **they say and do not**" (Matt. 23:2-3). This is why He said: "Except your righteousness exceed that of the Pharisees, you can in no wise enter into the Kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:20). **The punctilious**

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observance of externals is good when it is performed from the heart out of love the Lord whom we serve; but when the heart is not in it, they are a source of cursing, not blessing. The Jews to whom the Apostle wrote in our text were guilty of boasting in what they possessed with their natural powers. Their human intellect, their fleshly affection, their actions - all had been graphically brought into involvement with religious things. But their heart was not in them. Their lives were unchanged, unaffected, unaltered. They taught that men should not steal, but they themselves stole; they taught that men should not commit adultery, and yet were guilty of it in their hearts; they decried idolatry, but were guilty of sacrilege (Rom. 2:21-22). **The Law was the form of the knowledge and the truth, but having access to the Law did by no means indicate that knowledge and truth were held in possession.** O, that men would learn this truth!

Godliness, on the other hand, is the reception of the power of Divinity into the life. It lifts us beyond the sphere of nature, above the realm of mere form, mere philosophy. As we read the "record God hath given of His Son" (I Jno. 5:16), there is a hearkening to reality; a challenge to our hearts to be discontent with mere form, and to seek rather the truth that invests the form with meaning for the heart. Hear the word of the Lord; ". . . I yet would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil" (Rom. 16:19); "Awake to righteousness, and sin not" (I Cor. 15:34); "But ye have not so learned Christ; if so be that ye have heard Him, and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus; that ye **put off** concerning the former conversation the old man which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind: and that ye **put on** the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and **true holiness**" (Eph. 4:20-24); "Be ye followers of God as **dear children**" (Eph. 5:1); "Being filled with

(Please turn to page 8)

During the beloved Apostle Paul's ministry upon earth, he was subjected to malicious attacks by his opponents. There was an occasion, for instance, when forty men and more made a conspiracy against him, vowing that they would "eat nothing" until they had "slain Paul" (Acts 23:13, 21). Again, the heathen at Ephesus had conspired against Paul because of the deliverance from Satan's hold that was wrought by him on their means of living (Acts 16:19ff). The deprivations of life that accompany the hatred of the world for the saints was his in a special measure. Writing of it he said: "Even to this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling place; and labour, working with our own hands; being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it; being defamed, we intreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the off-scouring of all things until this day" (I Cor. 4:9-13). Were it not for total rejection of the world - both the religious segment of it and the unreligious part of it - this would never have been the case with the Apostle. **The experience of these very things is demonstration of the total rejection of the world of the things which had been given to the "Apostle of the Gentiles"** (II Tim. 1:11). He spoke of being "pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life" (II Cor. 1:8). Again, he testified: "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed" (II Cor. 4:8-9). He "suffered trouble as an evil doer" (II Tim. 2:9), in giving the answer for his hope, found that "no man stood with" him (II Tim. 4:16); was slanderously reported to have said: "Let us do evil that good may come" Rom. 3:8), and had his very apostleship held in question (I Cor. 9). All of this is demonstrable of the truth that **acceptance with God involves the rejection of man**; that friendship with the Spirit brings the real enmity of flesh. As soon as a man begins to speak the "truth as it is in Christ Jesus" he incurs the indignation of the world, confronting lifeless tradition and exposing the unspirituality of flesh-religion. **There is such a wide gulf fixed between the earth and heaven that one cannot espouse the proclamations of one without at once being set at variance with the other.** This is graphically portrayed in the Apostle Paul, who, perhaps, expounded in writing more truths of the Kingdom from an enlightened viewpoint than most men.

The tragedy of this whole subject is that objections to Paul, his actions, and his teaching, have not ceased. One would think that when an individual had passed from the vail of tears his opponents would let him rest - but that is not the case in the Gospel. Still Satan raises up opponents for the express purpose of minimizing and qualifying the writings of our brother - to mitigate his teachign so as to rob it of its power and significance. But amazingly, there is no more opposition to this departed brother, now "made perfect"

(Heb. 12:23), that from among the circles of legalists and lawbinders. The ministry of Paul was especially marked by his expounding of the truth of grace and the abolition of the law as a means to righteousness (Rom. 10:4). When his actions or his teachings, therefore, do not comport with the traditionalists and the law-binding Hagarenes, Paul is at once arraigned and maligned as an evildoer. Any that have been subjected to the circles of fundamentalism for any length of time have confronted such attacks. It is generally a charge of compromise, of self will, or of a spiritually unintelligent act that is imputed to him. Well I know that language like this is distasteful, and yet I have a burning desire in my soul to defend the actions of my brother Paul and to expose the heterogenous doctrines of his opponents. **I had far rather hear Paul speak on the mistakes of his opponents than hear his opponents speak upon what they believe to be his mistakes.** Men impugn the motives of Paul in such matters as having Timothy circumcised, going to Jerusalem, and taking a temple vow, to mention a few.

This sort of questioning of holy motives is evidenced in a recent article which was published by one for whom I entertain some degree of respect and honor in Christ Jesus. Yet, in spite of that respect, I could not pass by the words that he said, for they were most certainly offensive to my spirit, evidencing his unbecoming coloring by the tincture of denominationalism. The comments that were offered were made in connection with the twenty-first chapter of Acts - "Paul at Jerusalem." At this point, I quote from his observations; "In 1-16 we have the record of Paul's final visit to Jerusalem. . . . You will note that in each city the Spirit told him that he would face arrest and suffering. . . . Bible students do not agree on the interpretation of these warnings. Was Paul in the will of God, or out of the will of God when he went up to Jerusalem? No one can say for sure. We know that Paul's motive was right. . . . While Paul may have made some human mistake in his Jerusalem ministry, certainly God overruled for His own purpose and glory. . . . The leaders did rejoice over God's ministry through Paul; but then they asked Paul to go along with a plan they had for pacifying the legalistic Jews in the church. Campbell Morgan calls Paul's cooperation with the scheme 'the greatest mistake of his ministry.' We agree. . . . Did their plan work? No! Like every other man-made scheme to accomplish a spiritual purpose, it back-fired; and instead of Paul bringing peace, he created a riot! Read James 3:13-18 for the explanation."

Before exposing this bit of contemptible sophistry, there are some important observations to make; observations which must be considered by all those that espouse such dogma as is presented here.

1. There is a clear doubting concerning the will of God that Paul go to Jerusalem.
2. Although Paul's motive was right, yet he may have made some human-mistakes in his Jerusalem ministry.

3. God's work through Paul in Jerusalem is expressly referred to as the overruling of Paul's designs and actions for His own glory and purpose, meaning that the will of God was accomplished in spite of Paul, not through and by him consciously.
4. The request of "James and the elders" (Acts 21:18) that Paul affect his actions among them was called by the above writer an attempt to "pacify legalistic Jews."
5. It is declared, in conjunction with another former writer, that this was indeed, the greatest mistake of Paul's ministry.
6. The whole project is referred to as a "man-made scheme" - an action suggested and carried out by no less than the foundation of the church - the Apostles.
7. The reason for what is called a "back-fire" is said to be because the wisdom that fostered it did not come from above (Js. 3:13-18).

Let it be made quite clear that these objections are infinitely more serious than the writer, together with others that espouse this theory, may imagine. **If those that laid the foundation and themselves formed the foundation stones of the church of the living God were subject to human-errors in their judgement, then it certainly appears that we might well call into question the whole superstructure of their work.** At what point did their human judgement cease to fail? You that would impugn the work of the Apostle who came not one whit behind the chiefest of them all - answer that question! I press it upon you. Who is to make these purely arbitrary distinctions concerning the "mistakes" of an Apostle? The Holy Ghost does not call it a mistake - why do you? Was it a mistake when Paul attacked the law-binders at Galatia? Did he make an error in judgement in speaking of election and justification by faith? Was he right or wrong in proclaiming that Christ was "the end of the law of righteousness to everyone that believeth" (Rom. 10:4). "O no," you say; "This is the truth." Very well, but if I chose to say it was not the truth, but only a matter of human judgement, what would you say? How is it that you can make humanistic and arbitrary distinctions in the Scripture, but I cannot? What determines your choice of these things? How is it that you set yourselves to judge an Apostle - one of those who God hath set "**first in the church**" (I Cor. 12:28)? If the decision of the Apostles and elders in Acts 21:20ff was really a man-made scheme, how many more man-made schemes did the Apostles and elders initiate? How can we trust the Word at all, the record at all? But enough of these questions - there are reasons **why** the logic that I am opposing here is false, and the reasons expose once again, for the honest in heart, the subtlety and insufficiency of a merely traditional faith.

To The Pure All Things Are Pure

Although all men cannot receive this saying, the postulation that a believer (and more especially an Apostle) can, out of good consciousness toward God and purity of heart, perform that which is inherently wrong, is fallacious. The word of the Lord is: "To the pure ALL things are pure" (Titus 1:15). It is the attitude of the heart that sanctifies or curses the thing done or partaken of. "Well," says the sophist, "what of the man that does that which is condemned by God out of a sincere heart to please the Lord - Like Paul persecuting the church while in a state of "ignorance and unbelief."? Now, that this appears on the surface to be a valid argument, I cannot deny. But it is only the surface-view that constrains this observation. The truth is that **no heart is pure that is not motivated by faith, or spiritual vision** (Rom. 14:23). It is faith that "purifies the heart" (Acts 15:8). **The heart that is truly affected by spiritual vision** (Eph. 1:20ff) **is the pure heart, and as long as it operates within the confines of that vision, it can actually do no wrong.** Whatsoever is born of God sinneth not (I John 5:18), and we rest fully in that glorious truth. The only way Paul could have made an error in judgement concerning his trip to Jerusalem, is to have forgotten the truth of God to have obviated from his mind the revelations that God had given unto him, and to have spurned the anointing which he had received in an extraordinary manner. If our friends seek to affirm such things as this, then may the Lord have mercy upon them - it is a most dangerous thing to assume. Furthermore, **there is a vast difference in the purity of heart and conscience that is produced by the Gospel and that which is fostered by a mistaken apprehension of the Law, or worse yet, of human tradition.** A man that is in Christ Jesus is a "new creature" (II Cor. 5:16), and as such has been elevated above the course of nature, given to see things that are transcendent to nature, and granted by grace a new heart that is in the likeness of Christ Jesus (Eph. 4:23-25). Now, I affirm gladly that this is the condition that Paul was in. He was seeking to serve the Lord, not out of a conscience that had been salved with mistaken notions of the Law as when he persecuted the church, but out of a heart that had been purified by faith, instructed of the Lord, and made a partaker of the Divine nature (Heb. 3:13). His aspirations were not for self, but for the glory of God, knowing the Gospel to be "the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth, to THE JEW FIRST . . ." (Rom. 1:16) - and therefore he went to Jerusalem.

Not Ashamed To Suffer

Secondly, the objection to Paul's Jerusalem trip to face certain arrest and suffering is generally fostered because of the repugnance that suffering carries to carnal minds. The truth is that suffering for Christ is not a popular thing today, the offence of the cross having become a disdainful thing (Gal. 5:11). The "church" has gained a position of popularity in the world, and having received its approbation considers it a disgrace to suffer reproach from it. It depends upon the world for support, commendation, approval, and success - and were it not for the world, the con-

temporary church would surely fall to the ground. All of this, of course, has a great bearing upon the traditionalist's attitude toward suffering. It is beyond the most versatile imagination to think that the contemporary clergyman would go to a city to minister, knowing that he would not only be rejected, but that he would face certain arrest and prolonged governmental confinement. No - that is not conducive to the institutionalism that surrounds us today. But, that is no matter to us. **If we were to adopt the rules and propensities of the modern church, and were they to have been in force from the beginning, the prophets would not have prophesied, Moses would not have led the people of God, Christ would not have died, and the Apostles would not have given their lives for the brethren.** We reject, therefore, this bit of carnal objection to Paul's Jerusalem journey as unworthy of further comment.

Impugning Paul's Motive

But let us turn our attention to the matter of Paul's consent to "go along with a plan they had for pacifying the legalistic Jews in the church." Our spiritually unlearned friend states that Paul was in error on this matter, asserting that the whole "plan" was nothing more than a "man-made scheme." Now that this is common reasoning among fundamentalists is obvious to anyone that has long been in the Kingdom. But let us expose it for what it is. We do not hesitate at all to declare that this is heresy, and are set to defend our beloved brother Paul as a foundation-stone of the church. To credit him with the sort of wishy-washy traits that characterize the church of our day is ignorance gone to seed. The argument, apart from being faulty, is built upon a false premise, and accompanied by false reasoning.

Observe the statement made by James and the elders (men whose judgement is, so far as I am concerned, of a much higher caliber than those who oppose them in this matter). "Thou seest, brother," they declared to Paul, "how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous for the law: and they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither walk after the customs. . . ." (Acts 21:20ff). It is vital to note that the Jews brought into the conversation were those that did "BELIEVE" - they were no pretenders, not a band of religious bigots: they were believers! Secondly, they were "zealous for the law", not "legalistic." I am persuaded that there is a difference. David, too, was zealous for the Law (Psa. 119:97), loving it with great might of heart. **To be zealous for the Law is not necessarily synonymous with being legalistic.** That there were errors in their judgement concerning the applicability of the Law is beyond question but that was due to their infant; faith more than to a rebellious heart. The Lord knows that we need to have more believers "zealous for the Law", thereby comporting with our Lord Himself who "magnified" it and "made it honorable" (Isa. 42:21). **The Law is not to be used as a means of approach to God, nor is it the means to the appropriation of righteous-**

ness (Romans 10:4). God forbid that any should insist upon the use of the law in this respect. However, **the Law is "good, if a man use it lawfully"** (I Tim. 1:8).

The "four men" that we have in question (Acts 21:23ff) were involved in a vow unto the Lord. That this vow may not have been the greatest mark of a believer is not questionable; but that it was contemptible before God is an equally disdainful thought. We must never forget that the early church was not as well informed on the "Apostle's doctrine" as some might suppose. Many of its members had been reared in the strictest way after the manner of the Law, and they were conscientious about it, serving the Lord with their imperfect knowledge. There is no injunction in Scripture against any man observing the Law (apart from the sacrificial ceremonies) unto the Lord. The indictment is against those that "judge" others in this respect (Col. 2:16ff), binding the Law upon men as a means to justification, or as a criterion of brotherly fellowship. If there was anything wrong with keeping certain observances of the Law, then we should certainly have to indict the Apostles themselves, who frequently were known to observe the Sabbath day (Acts 13:42 16:13; 18:4, etc.)

Though not altogether explainable, there is a certain refreshment, to my soul to read of men that were conscientious enough toward God to make a vow of some sort. Somehow, I sense that this sort of resolution is virtually altogether missing in contemporary Christendom, and thus I had rather speak in defense of those four believers in Acts 21, than in defense of the sterile theological systems that have left the church so lifeless today.

The Reasoning Behind The Decision

Further, as if this reasoning were not enough to justify our beloved brother Paul in his action, **the report that was registered against him was not true**, thus giving occasion for some devout diligence in eradicating it in the minds of those early believers. Observe what he was purported to be teaching: 1. "Thou teachest all the Jews **which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses,**" 2. "They ought not to circumcise their children." 3. "Neither to walk after the customs." While there was an element of truth in these reports, they are not altogether true; particularly in view of the definitive statement, "the Jews which are among the Gentiles." **I cannot help but believe that these reports were raised by factionists that were not truly interested in the welfare and advancement of the sheep.** Paul, on the other hand, was of such a spirit that he was constrained to "become all things to all men that by all means he might save some" (I Cor. 9:22). To be sure, he would not forfeit any degree of spiritual liberty, or permit one man to bind upon him restrictive laws and ordinances. To such as that, he gave subjection for not so much as an "hour" (Gal. 2:5). But this was not the case here. These men were not asking Paul to forfeit his liberty in Christ (Gal. 5:2). they were rather requesting that he be mindful of the believers that were before him; of those that had embraced Christ by

faith, and yet were not altogether informed of the liberty that was theirs.

The truth was of course, that Paul was not going about teaching that men should "forsake Moses." One cannot read the writings of Paul and get the notion that we are to have a disrespect for Moses - God forbid. Not one of the Apostles ever fostered anything but thanksgiving and honor for those departed servants of the Lord that lived prior to the revealing of "the mystery of godliness" (I Tim. 3:16). Rather, Paul mentioned elsewhere that the "righteousness of the law" is fulfilled in us who believe (Rom. 8:4). Rather than forsaking Moses, we are to let him bring us to Christ, for that is his great ministry to men's hearts today, even as it was his ministry of old to bring men to the promised land that Joshua might deliver them (Gal. 3:24). **To be sure, we are not to be Moses' disciples, but neither are we to be haters of Moses.** He is honored and revered by the Holy Ghost, and even afforded the privilege of speaking with our Lord in the holy mount of transfiguration (Matt. 17:1-4). Far be it from any of the Apostles to speak of Moses derogatorily, or to leave in people's minds the falsity that he was to hold in disrepute. Our Lord Jesus is afforded greater honor than that of Moses, to be sure (Heb. 3:3), but even He gives Moses his rightful place, and so ought we to do the same.

But there is a deeper matter here than that; **the Apostle Paul, together with the other Apostles was not developing a new sect of religion.** His function was not to create something that was divers from Moses, or in competition with Moses. Moses had spoken of the coming of the Lord; he had given to the people strong reason to expect that an end would be brought to works as a basis for approach unto God, teaching them that God would raise up another prophet like unto him, and the People would follow that prophet (Deut. 18:15). **The spiritually logical end of Moses is found at the beginning of Christ;** the purpose of his ministry was to bring men to an awareness of their inherent and intolerable sin, and this prepared them for the Redeemer. To say, therefore, that he was to be forsaken is quite an incorrect conception. Even as a tributary flows eventually into a fuller and grander body of water, so Moses flowed into Christ. It was not a matter of forsaking him, or of leaving him. When Israel came under the leadership of Joshua, they did not "forsake Moses." Moses was no more; he had served his purpose and was "gathered unto his people", God burying him in the mount. They did not leave Moses in the middle of his ministry, they left him at the conclusion of his ministry. So it is with those that come into Christ; they, strictly speaking, do not forsake Moses, they rather come to the natural conclusion of Moses' ministry, which is to bring us to Christ. But, this had been obscured from the early Jewish believers of which our text is written, and thus could Paul concur with the judgement of James and the elders.

Charity And Wisdom Seen

James had requested that Paul join with the Jewish believers in their vow in order to prove to

them that he "walked orderly and kept the law" (Acts 21:24). His action displayed his charity, his wisdom, his love for peace, and his humility. And yet, the bigots of our day that object to his action, impugn his motives, and call his charitable agreement a mistake. I had rather believe that their assumption is the mistake, and therefore come to the defense of Paul. In Christ Jesus, Paul was free to observe the law or not to observe the law, as expediency might dictate. As it is written, "All things are lawful, but all things are not expedient" (I Cor. 6:12). Had anyone made it incumbent upon Paul to "purify himself with them and be at charges with them" (Acts 21:24), stating that this was a matter of necessity, and joining it to the matter of justification, I have no doubts but that the suggestion would have been met with the stern and forthright rebuke of the Apostle. It seems ill-advised to me to assume that the Apostle was not spiritually minded, and, quite frankly, I find the thought most distasteful to my spirit.

Babylon's Effect Seen

I found in my perusal of commentaries upon the Scriptures, that most writers concur that the decision of James, the elders, and Paul, was an error of judgement. This only establishes to my heart the perversion of reasoning that Babylon has brought to bear upon men's hearts. **It is not proper to place upon trial the leaders and foundation stones of the church of the living God, especially when no indication is given in Scripture of improper judgement in a particular case.** I had rather see men trying the decrepit and insipid church of our day by the words of the Apostles. It seems to me that this would be far more profitable to the sons of men. In short, it appears plain to my spirit that the motives of James, the elders, and Paul, were much higher in the decision at which they arrived, then are the intentions of their opponents. **Let us not be guilty of assuming, therefore, that these holy men of old, were walking in the flesh simply because their judgement does not meet with contemporary standards and interpretations of the Scriptures.** I had rather believe they were right, unless otherwise indicated (as with the case of Peter in Galatians 2:14ff). There has been far too much criticism of the great men of the faith like Abraham, Lot, Moses, Elijah, James, and Paul. Let us give honor to whom honor is due, and turn our attention toward the church of our day. If we have criticisms to make, we shall find more than abundant material there to keep us busy; but let the founda-

tion-stones of the church rest, please! Some of us love them too much, and we love their God too much to do anything but come to their defense; and we are weary of your prattling against them. They have done more for us than you, and our brethren - brethren that have done no less than founded us upon the rock.

The Form of Knowledge

(From page 4)

the fruits of righteousness, which are by Christ Jesus Christ unto the glory and praise of God" (Phil 1:11); "That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto His Kingdom and glory" (I Thess. 2:12); "Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless" (II Pet. 3:11-14).

To appropriate the truth; to have it in my heart - that is the fundamental thing! It is not enough for me to know in my head the various truths of Scripture - though I must certainly know them. **I must be able to bring these truths to bear upon my own situation; to see the association, between my circumstances and the revelation of God. The comportment of my responses to the variety of circumstances that surround my life with the nature of God indicates the degree of reality which I possess.** If, for instance, I subscribe to the high and lofty truth of God's Sovereignty over all; of His creation of all things, His Headship over all, His absolute control and manipulation of all things - that is well. But if, on the other hand, I cannot maintain my spiritual composure in the face of trial; if I am given over to murmuring and complaining at my lot in life; if I react to adversity like any other godless man - what avail is all of my profession? It is merely form without substance! And yet, this is precisely the situation that confronts us in virtually every segment of professed Christendom. Men speak of faith, yet do not believe under stress; they speak of power, yet are known for their weakness; they speak of a Savior, and yet are in bondage to sin. This is form - form without power! It is the same snare that the Israelites fell into.

Let each believer evaluate his own case, examining himself to see if he be in the faith (II Cor. 3:5). Is there evidence of real life within? Am I responding to the situations of life as a child of God, or as a natural man? What do I have? mere form, or real life? These are the sort of questions that you must face and answer if you are to make any significant advancement in the Kingdom of God. I bid you to faithfully aspire to the sort of life that is teeming with spiritual vitality; the sort of life that will permit you to joyfully and meaningfully enter into the ordained forms of "pure religion."