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The Conciliation of The World

By

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What is God's attitude toward His people and even the world in general today? Many believe that He is angry and in the process of judging the world, while others believe that He is indifferent to what His hands have made. This article will attempt to answer the above question, and reveal the truth concerning God's present attitude toward His creation.

In the ancient past, God assumed the character of a distant and angry God toward sinful humanity, particularly during the era of the great Flood of Noah's time, and later in the dispersal of humanity at Babel (Genesis 6-11). Consequently, the nations were left in spiritual darkness, groping for God (Acts 17:26-29; also Romans 1:18-32).

Then later, He also assumed this character toward His chosen people Israel, through the judgments of His Law. The rituals of the divine service of the Tabernacle, officiated by the Levitical priesthood, spoke loud and clear: God is Holy and can only be approached through a prescribed priesthood and blood sacrifices of animals, whereby the temporary pardon of sins can be granted as a propitiatory shelter (atonement or covering) from God's wrath. We shall also see later that He will need to assume this character again in the near future when the ripened wickedness of humanity shall have to be judged severely. Even so, Paul says in Romans 1:18-20 that,

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them...being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. (NIV)

This attitude is somewhat understandable, as He is a Holy and Righteous God, Who hates sin and injustice in every form. He often judged His people Israel, along with the surrounding nations, through the instruments of celestial messengers (or angels) and His anointed prophets and kings, using plague, famine and war, in what may seem to us to be at times a very severe manner. Yet when we compare

Yahweh's ways with the 'gods' of the nations and humanity's so-called 'justice,' we also see that He is a God Who is loving, kind, merciful, compassionate and gracious, a Father Who longs to bless His creation.

Nevertheless, sin and evil have their paradoxical place within the ages of God's eonian plan, although He does not in the least bit delight in the death of even the wicked, and eventually all wrongs will be put right, and every creature blessed, when God shall be All in All. (For further reading, see my articles *Almighty God v Almighty Self, God's Plan of the Ages* and *Is There Really a Hell?*).

Yet the greatest divine judgment of all should have been unleashed upon humanity as a whole after we crucified God's Beloved Son, Jesus the Messiah, but the very opposite occurred instead! Even His people Israel, represented by the Jewish nation, who had played their part in assassinating their Messiah, were given a gracious period of probation which lasted 40 years (30 - 70 AD, of which most is covered by the book of Acts). Yet even so, God has not completely cast off His people (Romans 11:1-2). In the near future, He will once again judge the world during the much prophesied Day of the Lord - in the return of Jesus, the Messiah and Lord, God's Beloved Son, when He will fully establish the kingdom of God.

Yet Jesus/Yeshua is the fulfillment of everything that the Law revealed and typified, as He was the ultimate Sacrifice as the Lamb of God, not only for Israel, but also for the sins of the whole world (See Matthew 5:17-18, Romans 10:4 and the book of Hebrews). Through the proclaiming of the evangel of the kingdom, Israel and the nations are called to repent and believe in the Messiah.

'...Christ Jesus (Whom God purposed for a Propitiatory shelter, through faith in His blood, for a display of His righteousness because of the passing over of the penalties of sins which occurred before in the forbearance of God)...

(Romans 3:24-25; see also Acts 2:22-40; 17:30)

Messiah Jesus is the Propitiatory shelter (often called 'mercy seat' or 'atonement' i.e. a place of shelter from God's anger) for Israel and the whole world, where forgiveness or pardon of sins can be found (See also Hebrews 2:17; 1 John 2:2; 4:10).

The Ecclesia of God

But what has God been declaring to the world since the First Century AD? Is He still judging the world or His people? The answer to the second question about God's judgments has to be 'Yes,' nevertheless, His attitude has changed somewhat since the coming of Christ and the introduction of the New Covenant.

The apostle Paul was given a unique calling to the nations, who were termed the Uncircumcision. He was given a unique message (which he calls '*my evangel*' or 'gospel') as a revelation direct from the risen Christ (See Romans 2:16; 16:25-27; Colossians 1:23; 2 Timothy 2:8).

His evangel is not exactly the same as that which Peter and the Twelve proclaimed to Israel, who were termed the Circumcision. Paul even went to Jerusalem specifically to submit it to the apostles there, giving respect to their position and calling in Israel, yet he didn't need their approval. He even says of them,

'Now from those reputed to be somewhat - what kind they once were is of no consequence to me (God is not taking up the human aspect) - for to me those of repute submitted nothing.'

(See Galatians 1:10-12, 15-17; 2:1-10)

The spiritual atmosphere of Paul's letters is so different from the letters of the others, particularly his later ones. The main difference between Paul's evangel and the evangel of the Circumcision, which will become clearer as we progress, is the increasing focus on the things of the spirit and the heavenlies (or celestials), and the grace open to all nations, not only Israel. All of this is in comparison to the fleshly and soulish things of the earthly kingdom within the confines of Israel and its rituals, that is, spirit versus flesh, Grace versus Law.

Peter was originally given the keys of the kingdom on the day of Pentecost to open the door for Israel, and also the proselytes of the nations (God-fearing gentiles who attended the synagogues), and to proclaim the evangel of the kingdom in accord with the New Covenant promised to Israel (Matthew 16:16-19; also Acts 1:6-8; 2:14-42; 10:1-11:18). This was the beginning of Christ's Ecclesia (or Church) built on the Rock of Peter's testimony that Christ Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. (Notice the play on words in this text below).

(The Greek word *ekklesia* means 'called out.' So an ecclesia is a group or assembly who are called out from the rest of humanity and are distinct, and it is commonly rendered 'church.' The New Testament refers to local ecclesias in various cities, but it primarily reveals the One Ecclesia of God composed of believers from Israel and the nations).

'Now I, also, am saying to you that you are Peter (*Gr. petros meaning 'smaller piece of rock'*), and on this rock (*Gr. Petra meaning 'big piece of rock'*) **I will be building My ecclesia**, and the gates of the unseen (*or hades*) shall not be prevailing against it. **I will be giving you the keys to the kingdom of the heavens**, and whatsoever you should be binding on the earth shall be those things having been bound in the heavens, and whatsoever you should be loosing on the earth shall be those having been loosed in the heavens.'

(Matthew 16:18-19)

(Also Matthew 18:18-20; cf. Galatians 2:7-9; Matthew 19:28)

Peter, along with James and John, were the primary leaders of Christ's new Ecclesia - the Bride, the faithful remnant of Israel. This ecclesia originally consisted of those of Israel who believed in Jesus as the Messiah, that is, His sheep who had been led out of the fold of apostate Judaism, but Jesus had already intimated to

them that there were others from among the nations, who were not of the fold of Judaism, who were also His sheep, and that they would one day all join together as One Flock with One Shepherd (John 10:1-18).

This Bride ecclesia would not be defeated by persecution and death (figured by '*the gates of Hades*'), and they would also be given unique authority as His deputies and administrators, which was a foretaste of their future role of ruling with Christ in the coming kingdom.

Yet Jesus said to them, "Verily, I am saying to you, that you who follow Me, in the renascence whenever the Son of Mankind should be seated on the throne of His glory, you also shall sit on twelve thrones, **judging the twelve tribes of Israel**. And everyone who leaves houses, or brothers, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or fields, on account of My Name, a hundred-fold shall be getting, and shall be enjoying the allotment of eonian life."

(Matthew 19:28-29)

This scripture reveals that the Twelve Apostles had been given a special place of ruling over the regenerated nation of Israel in the renascence (or regeneration or renewal) of Christ's New Covenant Kingdom. Nevertheless, all true followers of Christ, especially those who have sacrificed much in this life, shall be given a place in the kingdom with glory unimaginable, but this was primarily for faithful Israel to begin with. (See the article *The Destiny of the Israel of God*).

The foundation of Paul's evangel though is the revelation of God's awesome love and grace in all its glory to all the nations. His evangel also contains many secrets that were *only* revealed by Paul, as he unfolded them gradually through his letters. (For further reading, see *The Evangel of God and Its Secrets*).

In this study, we will be focusing on the secret of all secrets - the Conciliation of the world and its ultimate goal of Universal Reconciliation. Paul calls this '*the secret of the evangel*' (commonly rendered 'the mystery of the gospel'). It will be shown that ONLY PAUL uses the words 'conciliation' and 'reconciliation.' This can be established from any reliable concordance, but sadly, most versions of the Scriptures do not translate these words consistently or accurately. The only version that I presently know of that faithfully translates these two words accurately and concordantly is the Concordant Version of the New Testament (See *The Concordant Version* article).

It needs to be clearly emphasised though, that although Paul's calling and evangel were unique, and his teachings contain things that not even Peter and the other apostles were given to proclaim, this does *not* mean that Peter, John and the others of the Circumcision didn't *understand* Paul's teaching, or that none of it applied to them as well, only that it wasn't for them to proclaim it. They were set apart for the Circumcision believers, while Paul was set apart for the nations (Galatians 2:8-10).

Peter says that Paul had written to the dispersed Jewish believers in Asia Minor (the letter to the Galatians was probably the one) and Peter admits that Paul's

letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which *the unlearned and unstable are twisting*, as they do the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction (2 Peter 3:15-16). The Circumcision apostles were not among these unlearned ones, so they therefore understood most of what Paul was talking about, if not all of it.

Nevertheless, Paul does reveal things that are only found in his letters, and these revelations were given to him through personal appearances of Christ. These secrets and his additional details of prophecy, along with specific instructions for believers of the nations, were an extension of what Jesus and the Twelve had previously revealed, and was not something separate from them. The primary secret that Paul revealed was the Administration of Grace which also includes the secret of the Conciliation (Ephesians 3:2). This would occur during Israel's national rejection and partial blindness, in which God is calling out a people from all nations, to complement the remnant of Israel chosen by grace, to rule with Christ in the future ages (Romans 11).

This 'Joint Body of Christ' is a Firstfruit of the ultimate destiny of ALL humanity, the Ecclesia of the Firstborn (James 1:18; Romans 8:23; Hebrews 12:23; Revelation 14:4).

So let us now begin by taking a look at the Conciliation.

The Conciliation

Firstly, Paul introduces us to this word in his first letter to the Corinthians, which was written on his 3rd journey about 57 AD. (For further information, see '[Paul's Letters](#)'). The Greek word for conciliate is 'katallasso' ('katallage' is conciliation). It means a one sided peace, which automatically includes the fact that estrangement and enmity has previously occurred.

'A wife is not to be separated from her husband. Yet if she should be separated also, let her remain unmarried or be conciliated to her husband.'

(1 Corinthians 7:11)

This text helps us to understand the meaning of the word. In this verse, Paul is talking to believing couples. If there is an estrangement between a husband and wife, and the wife is separated from her husband, the wife should try to be conciliated to her husband, i.e. make peace with him. If he also makes peace with her, then there is a mutual conciliation, resulting in actual reconciliation between them.

The next time Paul uses these words is in his second letter to the Corinthians, written later on the same journey. But here, in 2 Corinthians chapter 5, he introduces something very new, a great change in the ways and plan of God (humanly speaking, that is, as God's plan and purpose never really changes, but is already planned from the beginning). He begins to reveal the full implications of the cross of Christ for all humanity, although he had briefly touched on this in his previous letter to them (see 1 Corinthians 15:20-28).

'For the love of Christ is constraining us, judging this, that, if One died for the sake of all, consequently all died.'

(2 Corinthians 5:14)

Paul begins here to defend his ministry by revealing the core of his evangel. Everything he said and did was urged on by the powerful love of Christ as evidenced in the cross, and the wonderful fact that because Christ died for the sake of ALL, consequently ALL have died! That is, Christ is the correspondent Ransom for ALL and has paid the full price for humanity's sin! (1 Timothy 2:5-7). God, through Christ, is the Saviour of ALL mankind, ESPECIALLY (not solely) of believers! (1 Timothy 4:9-11). In this, God has shown His kindness and fondness for humanity, because it is His intention to draw ALL mankind to Himself through His Son, and bring everyone into the realisation of the truth (Titus 3:4; John 12:32-33; 1 Timothy 2:3-4).

In case we may think that this is only referring to ALL believers, and not ALL humanity, Paul makes plain in the next verse,

'And He died for the sake of all that **those who are living** should by no means still be living to themselves, but to the One dying and being roused for their sakes.' (v 15)

'Those who are now living' are believers in Christ, who have received eonian life (commonly mistranslated as 'eternal life' - see [The Concordant Version](#) article), and these God sees as the living, not the dead. We should be living for our Lord, Who is laid before us as the One dying and being roused from among the dead for our sakes, and we should not still be living for ourselves in sin. We have a new Master, Who has redeemed us (Galatians 2:19-21). Nevertheless, He still died for the sake of ALL humanity, even though the chosen ones, the believers, are saved first and are given the gift of experiencing the life of the kingdom in the ages or eons to come (i.e. eonian life), and are privileged to have a special place in God's plan.

What Paul is declaring here is expounded in much more detail in his Roman letter, which was written shortly after 2 Corinthians, which we shall look at shortly. From the divine viewpoint, humanity is hopelessly lost in sin and death. It cannot be permanently improved upon in its present condition. Even though we can be regenerated (i.e. born again) into the spiritual kingdom of God, in accord with the New Covenant, this is *not* God's permanent solution for soulish humanity. The solution is a *New Creation* and a *New Humanity*.

In Adam, humanity is condemned to eonian death, but Christ, as the second and last Adam, paid the penalty for the sake of ALL by becoming sin and dying the accursed death of the cross, taking the full judgment of God against all humanity's sins and offences. (See also Galatians 3:13-14 and 1 Corinthians 15:21-22, 45-46).

The price has been paid in full, mission accomplished (John 19:30; Colossians 2:14-15).

'So that we, **from now on**, are acquainted with no one according to flesh. Yet even if we have known Christ according to flesh, nevertheless **now we know Him so no longer**. So that, if anyone is in Christ, **there is a new creation**: the primitive passed by. Lo! There has come new!' (v 16-17)

Here Paul reveals that FROM NOW ON, that is, from that particular time onwards, believers are to view the human race, by faith, from God's viewpoint. ALL have died in the death of Christ. The old, primitive creation has passed by. There is now a New Creation, of which believers in Christ are a New Humanity. All fleshly distinctions that form barriers and cause division are destroyed. Paul had touched on this in his letter to the Galatians, which had been written earlier on his 3rd journey (Galatians 2:20; 3:27-28; 5:6; 6:14-15). More on this shortly.

Although Christ has been known according to the flesh, as Jesus the Jew, Israel's Messiah, the Seed of Abraham and David, nevertheless *now* we are to view Him in *all* His glory as the Son of God, Head of a New Creation. All believers that now form the Body of Christ ecclesia, who are the Firstfruits of the New Humanity, are on equal grounds, whether Jew or Gentile, male or female, slave or free, cultured or barbarian.

Yet this is only true by faith, in spirit, in accordance with God's plan for the future. The actual physical reality within time, that is, in the ages or eons to come, has not occurred as yet. But the divine viewpoint sees the end from the beginning, He calls that which is not as though it were (Isaiah 46:9-11 and Romans 4:17).

'Yet all is of God, Who conciliates us to Himself through Christ, and is giving us the dispensation of the conciliation, how that God was in Christ, conciliating the world to Himself, **not reckoning their offences to them**, and placing in us the word of the conciliation.' (v 18-19)

Here is the most touching thing of all. The God of the universe has done everything necessary to show His love to humanity, and HE is the One who has set things straight with US, when you would think that it should be the other way around! The blood of Christ truly speaks a better word to us than the blood of Abel, the first murder victim (Hebrews 12:24).

ALL IS OF GOD! NOTHING is of us! What humility and condescension! What love and grace! All believers are now conciliated to God through Christ. There is nothing to stand in the way between our Father God and us. We can be at peace with Him because He is at peace with us! NO sin or offence can condemn us!

Also, God is giving to believers (via Paul's writings) the ministry (or service, which is the meaning of 'dispensation') of the Conciliation, which is the message that God Himself was in Christ, in His death on the cross, conciliating THE WORLD to Himself, NOT RECKONING THEIR OFFENCES TO THEM! And this message has been placed in every believer, whether we realise it or not!

This means that during this administration of pure grace, God refuses to change His attitude to humanity, no matter how much they may offend Him. He is giving us a foretaste of His love and grace by offering His hand of friendship to all. He can

only do this now because the price for sin has been fully paid for in the death and resurrection of Christ, and eventually the full reconciliation will become a reality at the end of the ages, when God shall reconcile ALL to Himself and become everything to everyone. The Conciliation of the world now is a sign of that ultimate. This doesn't mean that God's judgments aren't in the earth at all, for, in Christ, He is over all things, and He decides the rise and fall of the nations, but much grace and mercy is being shown to the world right now. And so that we can gain a better understanding of this, let us take a look at the meaning of sin and offence.

Sin and Offence

Sin literally means 'missing the mark.' It is a mistake, a missing of the ideal. In Scripture, it refers to the mistakes of humanity, and also some of the spirit beings (1 John 3:8 and 2 Peter 2:4), who as sinners, cannot hit the mark of God's absolute righteousness, and are therefore found wanting (Romans 3:23). In relation to the Law given to Israel, 'sinners' were those who openly *transgressed* the Law and were to be severely judged. A *transgression* is a 'falling aside' from a command or law (i.e. blatant disobedience). An *offence* describes that which wounds the feelings of another and is therefore more personal.

In the beginning, Adam *sinned* by making a mistake; He *transgressed* by disobeying God's command; and he caused *offence* by wounding God's heart. The penalty was the dying condition (i.e. mortality), resulting in further sin and eventual death for the whole race - '*to die shall you be dying*' (Genesis 2:17) and '*For the ration of sin is death*' (Romans 6:23).

'Therefore, even as through **one** man sin entered into the world, and through sin death, and thus death passed through into **all mankind**, on which all sinned...

Consequently, then, as it was through **one** offence for **all mankind** for condemnation...

through the disobedience of the **one** man, **the many** were constituted sinners'

(Romans 5:12,18 and 19)

So due to inherent sin and death, humanity continues to sin against, and offend, God. Furthermore, due to God's Law being revealed through Israel, the offence and transgression has increased! **Yet as sin increases, God's grace increases all the more!** (Romans 5:20-21). All of this has its effect on our fellow humans by the good or bad we put in to practice through our bodies. All lawlessness and injustice is sin (1 John 3:4 and 5:17). Each of us will have to give an account of ourselves before God for our acts, whether good or bad, and be disciplined accordingly. Even believers in Christ will have to give an account of themselves to God, and be rewarded accordingly for their walk and service (Romans 14:10-13; 1 Corinthians 3:13-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Colossians 3:23-25; Ephesians 6:7-8).

The Judgment Seat

The huge difference for believers though is that this 'Judgment Seat' of Christ is called in Greek *bema*, that is, a Dais, a raised platform. It is not necessarily a throne of condemnation, but it is more like the Adjudicator of the Greek Games rewarding each ones performance, or like a Governor settling accounts with His servants. All our 'sinful' acts toward others will need to be manifested and rectified, but our sins and offences toward God have been wiped out because of Christ's death. We have been justified from sin (Romans 5:1). Also, this event will occur after we have received our immortal bodies, which will help us to bear with the all-seeing eyes of God (2 Corinthians 5:1-11).

For all of us must be manifested in front of the Dais of Christ, that each should be requited for that which he puts into practice through the body, whether good or bad.

(2 Corinthians 5:10)

Overcomers in Christ shall receive wages (rewards or wreaths) and be saved to enjoy an allotment in the kingdom, but many Christians will suffer loss (or forfeit) their wages and will be disciplined in God's fire, though ultimately they will be saved.

Now if anyone is building on this foundation gold and silver, precious stones, wood, grass, straw, **each one's work will become apparent**, for the Day will make it evident, for **it is being revealed by fire**. And the fire, it will be testing each one's work - what kind it is. If anyone's work will be remaining which he builds on it (Christ the Foundation), he will get wages. If anyone's work shall be burned up, he will forfeit it, **yet he shall be saved**, yet thus, as through fire.

(1 Corinthians 3:12-15)

"Are you not aware that those racing in a stadium are, indeed, all racing, **yet one is obtaining the prize**? Thus be racing that you may be grasping it. Now every contender is controlling himself in all things; they, indeed, then, that they may be obtaining a corruptible wreath, yet we, an incorruptible one. Now then, thus am I racing, not as dubious, thus am I boxing, not as punching the air, but I am belaboring my body and leading it into slavery, lest somehow, when heralding to others, **I myself may become disqualified**."

(1 Corinthians 9:24-27)

Now if anyone should be **competing in the games** also, he is not given **a wreath** if ever he should not be competing lawfully.

(2 Timothy 2:5)

Even Paul said that he could be disqualified for the prize. In this particular instance, he was referring to the prize or wreath that was awarded to the winner of a race or some other competition in the Greek Games. There are other occasions when he talked about those who are *disqualified as to the faith* (2 Timothy 3:8),

referring to false brethren, but in the above text he is talking about genuine believers running the race. Salvation is not necessarily the issue here, but one of rewards. Followers of Christ should compete with each other in the evangel in the sense of serving God with all you have, making your body a slave to Christ, so that we may gain the prize as a good and faithful servant. But if we don't compete according to the rules of Christ laid down in the Scriptures, in accordance with real love, righteousness and truth, then we will be disqualified and will forfeit our prize.

Now, concerning all the unbelievers and the wicked, they shall receive severe chastening in 'the Lake of Fire.' (For further study, see *Is There Really a Hell?* and *The First and Second Resurrections and the Judgment Day*).

All of this judging shall be done through Christ Jesus, the Judge of all, as all judging has been entrusted to Him by God. (See Ecclesiastes 12:14; Proverbs 24:12; Matthew 12:36-37; John 5:21-23, 27-29; 2 Timothy 4:1; Revelation 20:11-15).

'...God, Who will be **paying each one in accord with his acts**: to those, indeed, who by endurance in good acts are seeking glory and honour and incorruption, **eonian life**; yet to those of faction, and stubborn, indeed, as to the truth, yet persuaded to injustice, **indignation and fury, affliction and distress, on every human soul which is effecting evil**, both of the Jew first and of the Greek, **yet glory and honour and peace to every worker of good**, both to the Jew first, and to the Greek...

...in the day when God will be judging the hidden things of humanity, according to **my evangel**, through Jesus Christ.'

(Romans 2:6-10 and 16)

The Scroll of Life

It may be worth digressing slightly here to consider the Book of Life. At the 'Great White Throne Judgment,' described in Revelation and Daniel, there is mention of the Scroll or Book of Life.

And I perceived a great white throne, and Him Who is sitting upon it, from Whose face earth and heaven fled, and no place was found for them. **And I perceived the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne. And the scrolls were opened.** And another scroll was opened which is **the scroll of life**. And the dead were judged by that which is written in the scrolls **in accord with their acts**.

(Revelation 20:11-12)

"...ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him. The Court was seated, and the books were opened."

(Daniel 7:10 NIV)

From the following scriptures, it is evident that this 'scroll' contains the list of all those who will be given eonian life in the ages to come due to their righteous acts as evidence of their faith. It is also called the '*Lamb's Scroll of life*' (Revelation 13:8 and 21:27). It has been in existence since the beginning, when sin and death entered creation, that is, '*From the disruption of the world*' (Revelation 17:8b), and only God, through Christ, the Lamb of God, decides who shall be listed. This Book is intimately linked to the nation of Israel as God's covenant people (Psalm 69:28; Daniel 12:1), though it clearly includes believers of the nations as well, going back to the beginnings of humanity.

Yet it is also clear that one can be erased from this scroll due to gross sin and apostasy (Exodus 32:31-33 and Revelation 3:5). This is indicating that those who claim to be a part of God's people, whether Israel in the past, or the Church of Christ at present, who do not continue in the faith, and become wicked and apostate, shall be blotted out of the Book. Now this Book is a spiritual Book, and it is concerned with righteous acts (Philippians 4:3). It belongs to the Lamb of God because apart from His Sacrifice, no one could be given eonian life at all!

Yet ultimately we are told that the chosen ones, the Bride/Body of Christ, the Overcomers, cannot be erased from this Book. They are registered in the heavens (Hebrews 12:23) and engraven in the heavens (Luke 10:20). They are engraven on the heart of God and the Good Shepherd, Who is the Ultimate Book of Life, and no one can snatch them out of His hands (John 10:28-30). Paul talks of this kind of spiritual engraving in 2 Corinthians 3:2-3,

"You are our letter, engraven in our hearts, known and read by all men, for you are manifesting a letter of Christ, dispensed by us, **and engraven, not with ink, but with the Spirit of the Living God**, not on stone tablets, but on the fleshy tablets of the heart."

He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. **I will never blot out his name from the book of life**, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels.

(Revelation 3:5 NIV)

Now let's return to the subject of the Conciliation.

All in Adam, All in Christ

EVEN NOW, God is not reckoning the offences of the world against them, because He wants us to have a foretaste of the ultimate goal for all humanity. The price for ALL sin and death has been paid for in the death and resurrection of Christ! Even though we, as believers, still sin and offend, He forgives us and deals graciously with all our offences in accord with the riches of His grace, because we are justified in Christ (Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:12-14; 2:10-15).

'For even as, in Adam, **all** are dying, thus also, in Christ, shall **all** be vivified' (or made alive, that is, immortality, life beyond the reach of death)

(1 Corinthians 15:22)

'For even as, through the disobedience of the **one** man (Adam), **the many** were constituted sinners, thus also, through the obedience of the **One** (Christ), **the many** shall be constituted just'

(Romans 5:19).

These scriptures clearly show that on the one side, Adam brought sin and death to ALL, and on the other side, Christ will bring righteousness and life to ALL. It's that simple and that clear. THIS IS THE GOOD NEWS!

Yet many Christians refuse to believe these plain statements and would rather limit the 'ALL in Christ' to just believers, but that is *not* what Paul is declaring here.

In Romans 9, especially verses 14-24, Paul clearly shows that God is absolutely Sovereign - He is the Potter, we are the clay. HE decides who are the vessels of mercy, and HE alone decides who are the vessels of indignation. God said to Pharaoh,

'For this selfsame thing I rouse you up, so that I should be displaying in you my power.'

It was God who hardened Pharaoh's heart, and this is how He showed His power and caused Pharaoh to race after the Israelites after he'd let them go!

'Consequently, then, it is not of him who is willing, nor of him who is racing, but of God, the Merciful.'

Yet if this is the case, then how can God condemn unbelievers to an 'eternal hell' or oblivion, when He is ultimately responsible?! He can't! He MUST ultimately save and reconcile ALL - although He uses His judgments to achieve that goal.

Paul is the foremost example of God's grace. According to the Law of God, He should have been condemned as an enemy of God, but instead, he was chosen to be the apostle of grace to the nations, heralding the greatest message ever given to mankind. Here is Paul's own evaluation of his days as Rabbi Saul,

'Grateful am I to Him Who invigorates me, Christ Jesus, our Lord, for He deems me faithful, assigning me a service, I, **who formerly was a blasphemer and a persecutor and an outrager**: but I was shown mercy, seeing that I do it being ignorant, in unbelief. Yet the **grace** of our Lord **overwhelms**, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Faithful is the saying, and worthy of all welcome, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, **foremost of whom am I**. But therefore was I shown mercy, that in me, the foremost, Jesus Christ should be displaying all His patience, **for a pattern of those who are about to be believing** on Him for eonian life.'

(1 Timothy 1:12-16)

Paul, the chief or foremost of sinners, was saved from his ignorance and unbelief and assigned a service in God's kingdom. He is the gracious pattern for all who are believing in this administration of Grace, particularly of those Jews who are stubborn as to the gospel, as Paul originally was, yet they will still be grafted back into their own olive tree.

The Ambassadors

Now let us continue in 2 Corinthians 5,

'For Christ, then, are we **ambassadors**, as of God entreating through us. We are beseeching for Christ's sake, "**Be conciliated to God!**" For the One not knowing sin, He makes to be a sin offering for our sakes that we may be becoming God's righteousness in Him'

(2 Corinthians 5:20-21)

Those who are now called to serve God are Christ's ambassadors. We are envoys of peace in an alien environment, offering a message of peace, that God is entreating individuals to be conciliated to Him. This is all done for the sake of Christ, because of what He has accomplished through the cross. He Who knew no sin (because He was not mortal in the same sense that we are, with inherent sin and death), became sin when He died as a sin offering to God on the cross. All the spiritual and physical agony He suffered was for our sakes. He was forsaken of God for a brief while for our sakes because He became sin. All of this was for our sakes, that in Christ, we can become God's righteousness, and therefore be justified from sin. For this joy that was set before Him, He endured the cross, despising its shame.

Yet to declare this message of peace in an evil, hostile world is impossible without the power of God's Spirit. We often fail in this regard. Even Paul, when he was later a prisoner in Rome, asked for special prayer in proclaiming this message,

'Stand, then,...your feet sandaled with the readiness of **the evangel of peace**...During every prayer and petition be praying on every occasion...that to me expression may be granted, in the opening of my mouth with boldness, to make known **the secret of the evangel**, for which I am conducting **an embassy in a chain**, that in it I should be speaking boldly, as I must speak.'

(Ephesians 6:15, 18-20)

The great apostle Paul, Christ's ambassador, was chained like a common criminal. Yet it was this very chain that illuminated the truth of the Conciliation of the world. God would not change His attitude towards the world, and neither would Paul as His servant. He would still conduct an embassy in a chain, proclaiming with boldness the '*secret of the evangel*.' (This secret, amongst others, is not a 'mystery,' which is how the Greek word *musterion* is commonly translated. This kind of secret was something that was previously kept hidden, but it is now revealed to those of

spiritual understanding. See also Colossians 1:26-27. It is only a 'mystery' to the fleshly mind of this world).

It is this secret of the Conciliation that Paul is referring to in Romans 16:25-27,

'Now to Him Who is able to establish you in accord with **my evangel**, and the heralding of Christ Jesus **in accord with the revelation of a secret hushed in times eonian, yet manifested now and through prophetic scriptures**, according to the injunction of the eonian God being made known **to all nations** for faith-obedience...'

Paul's letter to the Romans was written shortly after 2 Corinthians, towards the end of his 3rd journey. In chapter 5, he continues to expound on the Conciliation.

'For if, being enemies, we were **conciliated** to God through the death of His Son, much rather, **being conciliated**, we shall be saved in His life. Yet not only so, but we are glorying also in God, through our Lord, Jesus Christ, through Whom we now obtained the conciliation.'

(Romans 5:10-11)

We are all enemies of God from birth, and this was true of all at the time when Christ died as the Beloved Son of God (See also Ephesians 2:1-10). But if we were conciliated to God in the death of His Son, while we were still enemies, how much more so shall we be saved from God's future indignation or wrath, through the resurrection life of Christ, because we are now no longer enemies, being actually conciliated to God in our experience (See verses 6-9 of Romans 5 as well). As sinners, we are justified in Christ; as enemies, we are conciliated through His Son. But on top of all this, we have the glory of proclaiming this Conciliation to humanity, as servants who are intimately involved with God's glorious plan for ALL.

Paul mentions the Conciliation once more, in chapter 11 of his Roman letter. Speaking of Israel, he says,

'For if their casting away is **the conciliation of the world**, what will the taking back be if not life from among the dead?' (v 15)

In Romans 9, 10 and 11, Paul looks in detail at the paradox of Israel's failure as God's chosen nation, and how it affects the future of the nations as well. In the Hebrew Scriptures (the Old Testament), it is clear that the nations can only be blessed through Israel and her Messiah in the coming kingdom (Romans 15:8-12). But now that Israel as a whole has rejected that kingdom and her Messiah, what now? Are they completely cast away forever? Has the word of God failed? Paul answers these questions with an emphatic "No!" He explains that during this present era a remnant of Israel will believe, while God is primarily calling out a people from the nations, which Paul calls *the complement of the nations*, and so eventually the whole Israel of God will be saved at the return of Christ (11:25-27).

Even though Israel, as God's Old Covenant nation, has been cast aside, they are prophesied to continue as a people till the end of this age, the end of this present

creation, so that a Jewish remnant can inherit the kingdom through the New Covenant in Messiah Jesus (see Jeremiah 31:35-37; 33:19-26).

In verse 15, Paul is declaring that due to the casting aside of Israel, the message of the Conciliation is going out to the whole world, for the glory and riches of the nations. So if such a blessing for the world has occurred due to Israel's downfall, how much more so will be the blessings for the world when the remnant of Israel is restored to God as though alive from the dead! (See also Ezekiel 37).

The Olive Tree

To clarify, in Romans 11:11-32, Paul clearly shows that God has not completely finished with His people Israel. Through their transgression, the truth of God has been made available to the nations, to make Israel jealous. Paul is saying that if the casting aside of God's chosen people has brought conciliation to the rest of the world, how much more so will their restoration bring blessing for all!

Then through the figure of an olive tree, He reveals God's present purpose with Israel and the nations.

'Now if the firstfruit is holy, the kneading is also; and if the root is holy, the boughs are also. Now if some of the boughs are broken out, yet you, being a wild olive, are grafted among them, and became joint participant of the root and fatness of the olive, be not vaunting over the boughs. Yet if you are vaunting, you are not bearing the root, but the root you.

You will be declaring, then, "Boughs are broken out that I may be grafted in." Ideally! By unbelief are they broken out, yet you stand in faith. Be not haughty, but fear. For if God spares not the natural boughs, neither will He be sparing you!

Perceive, then, the kindness and severity of God! On those, indeed, who are falling, severity, yet on you, God's kindness, if you should be persisting in the kindness: else you also will be hewn out. **Now they also, if they should not be persisting in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again.**

For if you were hewn out of an olive wild by nature, and, beside nature, are grafted into a cultivated olive tree, **how much rather shall these, who are in accord with nature, be grafted into their own olive tree!**

(Romans 11:16-24)

So let us look at the meaning of this allegory of the Olive Tree, as Paul clearly interprets it.

The olive tree represents Israel as God's vessel of testimony and illumination in the world. Olive oil was used for lighting the lamps in the Tabernacle and the Temple, and for anointing God's officials with oil. It is a symbol of the Holy Spirit.

The root represents the Patriarchs - Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to whom the original covenants were given

The fatness (sap) of the tree represents the spiritual blessings of the Messiah, Who is, in His flesh, of Israel

The natural branches represent the generations of Israel, some of which have been broken off

The wild olive, which is grafted in to the cultivated olive tree, represents the generations of the nations, who are now God's primary vessel of testimony and illumination

In this passage, Paul reveals the following facts: The root, also figured as the firstfruit, is holy to God. If the firstfruit offering is acceptable to God then the rest of the harvest is as well. If the root is holy, then the whole tree is as well. The original promises and covenants given to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob have not been, and will not be, revoked. Due to God's choice, Israel is holy and beloved because of the fathers (verse 28). The nations have only been grafted in to the natural olive tree because some of the natural branches of Israel were broken off. This has resulted in the nations being joint-participants of the spiritual blessings of Israel's Messiah.

But Paul warns them that they must not brag about this position, thinking that they deserve it or that the gentiles have completely replaced Israel - because the whole Church, both Jew and Gentile, has become the Israel of God!

Yet if they do brag, they must remember that, by God's grace alone, the nations are supported by the same root and sap of the natural olive tree. Some of the natural boughs were broken off due to unbelief, so that the nations could be grafted in, but this position of the nations is based on *faith* and not works, so they too can be broken off at some point due to unbelief. Faith is a gift from God. Paul warns the nations not to become arrogant and haughty, but to fear God (v 19-21).

If the *natural* boughs were not spared, neither will the *wild* boughs be spared. God has shown severity to Israel in cutting off some boughs, and He has shown kindness to the nations by grafting them in to the olive tree. **But if the nations as a whole persist in unbelief then they too will be hewn out of the olive tree!** (v 22).

Sadly, the nations have not continued in God's kindness, and unbelief and arrogance has progressed more and more through the centuries within Christendom, with the Church even persecuting Jews, as well as true Christians! And in recent decades, the nations are generally reverting back to the idolatrous beliefs and practices of the nations through the worship of nature and spiritual forces. But the truth is, the gentile Christians are only wild olive branches that, contrary to nature, have been grafted in to the cultivated olive tree of spiritual Israel!

Paul then concludes that Israel, as the *natural* branches, will be easily grafted back in again to **their own olive tree, when they will finally no longer persist in unbelief, but will instead turn back to their God and recognise their Messiah**. This means that the nations, who have been entrusted with the Scriptures and the Gospel for almost two millennia, will inevitably become completely apostate and lawless, ultimately giving heed to the Man of Lawlessness, the Antichrist kingdom of Christendom (2 Thessalonians 2:3-5).

Yet concerning Israel, Paul says,

'As to the evangel, indeed, they are enemies because of you, yet, *as to choice*, they are beloved because of the fathers. For unregretted are the *graces and the calling of God*.' (v 28-29).

On the whole, Israel as a nation is hardened, in part, until the complement of the nations has come in, and then Christ will return to save the whole Israel of God. As Paul says,

'For I am not willing for you to be ignorant of **this secret**, brethren, lest you may be passing for prudent among yourselves, that callousness, in part, has come on Israel, **until the complement of the nations may be entering**. And thus all Israel shall be saved, according as it is written...' (11:25-26)

Sadly, many within 'the Church' have persecuted the Jewish people and many believe that Israel hasn't any further part to play in God's plan. They have become ignorant of this secret of Israel's partial callousness and they believe that the nations or the Gentile Church has completely replaced Israel! They think that they are wise and intelligent, '*passing for prudent among themselves*' but they are obviously not reading and heeding Paul's clear words here!

On the other hand, there are those who believe that Christians should support the modern State of Israel at all costs and help the kingdom come! But this is just as foolish, for the State of Israel today is in gross unbelief and riddled with wickedness and injustice, just like the rest of the nations. As we shall see, God is primarily concerned with the Body of Christ ecclesia in this administration, where believing Jews and Gentiles are completely at one, together, in Christ (Ephesians 2:11-22). This Bride/Body will indeed enter into the special allotment of the kingdom, enjoying the immortality of the New Humanity, as the saved nation of the Israel of God, and many Jews are, even now, being grafted back into their own olive tree.

The Reconciliation

We now move on to Paul's later letters, in which is revealed the fullness of God's plan and purpose of the ages. His letter to the Colossians, and the circular letter known as Ephesians, were both written while he was imprisoned in Rome in about 61-63 AD. The word *apokatallasso* meaning 'reconcile' is used three times in these two letters. As explained earlier, when two people who are estranged are conciliated to one another, there is reconciliation. Firstly, let us look at Colossians 1:18-22,

'And He is the Head of the body, the ecclesia, Who is Sovereign, Firstborn from among the dead, that in all He may be becoming first, for in Him the entire complement delights to dwell, and through Him to **reconcile all** to Him (**making peace** through the blood of His cross), through Him, **whether those on the earth or those in the heavens**.
(v 18-20)

Paul is here revealing Christ's universal Headship as Firstborn and Head of the New Humanity, based on the fact that He is the Image of the invisible God, the full Complement of God, the Deity (see also 2:9). The Body of Christ ecclesia is the Firstfruit of the New Humanity, of which Christ is the Sovereign. In verses 15-17, Paul had been revealing the universal Headship of Christ as Firstborn of every creature, because ALL was created in, through and for Him, and ALL has its cohesion in Him. Among the ALL He has created are *'that in the heavens* (i.e. celestial spirit beings) *and that on the earth* (i.e. humanity). So Christ is the Head of the Old Creation, and the Head of the New Creation *'that **in all** He may be becoming first.'*

Now in verse 20, Paul clearly reveals that God will RECONCILE ALL to Himself, making peace, through Christ's sacrifice and Christ's ministry. The ALL includes *'those on the earth'* (i.e. humanity) and *'those in the heavens'* (i.e. the spirit beings), which has to include even Satan himself! Now this is Good News! This is real Power! This is real Victory! This is love and grace reigning Supreme! This is God's ultimate Purpose for ALL - Universal Reconciliation! Let us believe it and rejoice in it!

Concerning believers in the present, Paul continues,

'And you, being once estranged and enemies in comprehension, by wicked acts, yet now He **reconciles** by His body of flesh, through His death, to present you holy and flawless and **unimpeachable** in His sight...' (v 21-22)

Believers who have received the conciliation are now already RECONCILED to God through Christ's death and resurrection, and are presented to God completely justified, seen by Him as being holy, flawless and unimpeachable! That is, a mature, sinless son of God! As incredible as all this sounds, only unbelief and pride will reject this glorious news! Faith believes God and this is HIS EVANGEL! There is no better message than this in the whole universe! Let us believe it and rejoice in it!

The New Humanity

The third and last time Paul mentions the reconciliation is in Ephesians 2:14-16. But because this is such a crucial and enlightening passage of scripture, I will quote verses 11-22,

'Wherefore, remember that once you, **the nations in flesh** - who are termed "Uncircumcision" by those termed "Circumcision," in flesh, made by hands - that you were, in that era, **apart from Christ, being alienated from the citizenship of Israel, and the guests of the**

promise covenants, having no expectation, and without God in the world.

Yet now, in Christ Jesus, you, who once are far off, are become near by the blood of Christ. **For He is our Peace**, Who makes both one, and razes the central wall of the barrier (the enmity in His flesh), nullifying the law of precepts in decrees, that He should be creating the two, in Himself, **into one new humanity, making peace**; and should be **reconciling** both in one body to God through the cross, killing the enmity in it. And, coming, He brings the **evangel of peace** to you, those afar, and peace to those near, for through Him we both have had the access, in one Spirit, to the Father.

Consequently, then, no longer are you guests and sojourners, but are fellow-citizens of the saints and belong to God's family, being built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, the capstone of the corner being Christ Jesus Himself, in Whom the entire building, being connected together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord: in Whom you, also, are being built together for **God's dwelling place, in spirit.**'

(Ephesians 2:11-22)

As the apostle and teacher of the nations (1 Timothy 2:7 & 2 Timothy 1:11), Paul is here summarising the wonderful news of the New Humanity in Christ and its effects, especially as it relates to the nations.

In the past, and even during the Acts period, the nations (i.e. the Uncircumcision in flesh) were not a part of God's chosen people, the covenant nation of Israel, the Circumcision. They had no specific promises or covenants, no expectation of their own, no Messiah of their own, and even God was not named as their God, but as Yahweh, the God of Israel. ONLY ISRAEL WERE CALLED GOD'S SONS, HIS SAINTS, HIS PEOPLE (see also Romans 9:3-5 and 15:8). The nations were only guests of Israel's promise-covenants, as the original promise to Abraham, which was reiterated to Isaac and Jacob, stated that all the families of the earth will be blessed through him (Genesis 12:1-3. See also Exodus 4:22; 19:3-6; Romans 15:9-12). Even Jesus made this clear in His earthly ministry, sending His disciples only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matthew 10:5-7 and 15:21-28).

PAUL'S LATER WRITINGS ALONE TEACH SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT CONCERNING ISRAEL AND THE NATIONS. During most of his ministry, even Paul acted as a priest to the nations, delivering the evangel to the Jew first, recognising Israel's superior place in the flesh as the covenant people (Romans 15:15-16; also 1:16; Acts 17:1-3; 18:4-6; 28:17-28).

As we have seen, even at the Judgment, those of Israel, represented by the Jew, the religious man, will be held more accountable (Romans 2:9-10). All those who claim the God of the Bible as their God will be judged more severely because of their favoured position.

But in Colossians and Ephesians, Paul reveals the secret Administration of Grace, whereby the New Humanity of the Body of Christ ecclesia, given a celestial calling, has no fleshly barriers, which is not literally the case on the earth with Israel and the nations now (Ephesians 3:1-12 & Colossians 1:25-27). This is something that is now true only in spirit, by faith.

YET NOW, because of Christ's sacrifice, the nations who once were far off from God, are now near and dear to Him. Christ is our Peace. Jesus, in His body of flesh, caused enmity to the nations because He was of Israel. In relation to the earthly kingdom, He is their King/Messiah. In the temple precincts, the nations or gentiles were only allowed to enter the outer Court of the Gentiles. If they entered into the inner courts, passing the central wall, which was a barrier between Israel and the nations, they would be killed. Even amongst Israel, only the priests could enter the temple itself, into the holy places, and only the Chief priest could enter the Holy of Holies once a year (Hebrews 9:1-8). All of these decrees were based on God's Law given through Moses, although the various sects within Judaism had altered and reinterpreted them in accordance with their own rabbinical traditions.

Nevertheless, through His death, Christ has razed to the ground the central wall of the barrier, destroying its enmity in His flesh, and has consequently nullified the decrees against the nations, which kept them alienated. (This was graphically portrayed in 70 AD when the temple in Jerusalem was totally destroyed). He has created the two, Israel and the nations, into One New Humanity in Himself, making peace between them. (See also Colossians 2:10-15). He has also reconciled both to God, in One Body, through the cross.

Now the evangel of peace comes from Christ, through Paul, to the nations and Israel, of which both previously, during the Acts period, had had access to the Father, in Spirit, due to the conciliation (Daniel 7:27; Matthew 19:28-29; 28:16-20; Revelation 21:9-14, 24-27; 22:3-5). Only in the New Humanity of the Bride/Body of Christ is this truth realised.

So now the nations are no longer just guests and sojourners, but are at one with the saints of Israel and are part of God's family! The foundation of this figurative building or temple is the Hebrew apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the capstone that completes the building. And it is in Him that the entire building, with all believers being connected together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord. This is true not only of God's plan for Israel (1 Peter 2:4-10 & Revelation 3:12), but it also includes the nations as well, who are being built together for God's dwelling place, in Spirit. This is the ultimate goal of God's plan, that one day ALL humanity, not just His chosen ones, will become His dwelling place - in fact, that every creature in the heavens and on the earth will be reconciled to Him, through Christ, and become His universal dwelling place, that God may be ALL IN ALL. That's the bigger picture!

The Transition and Spiritual Gifts

Now let us take a closer look at the change that was being introduced through Paul's ministry. During the Acts period, there was a transition occurring whereby the evangel of grace proclaimed by Paul became increasingly dominant. As you carefully read through the book of Acts, this becomes evident. The preaching of the

evangel of the kingdom to Israel in the land (and later outside it) under the authority of the Twelve apostles slowly fades into the background. This was due to the unbelief of the majority of the nation, as their era of gracious probation grew to a close. They had rejected the Son and now they were rejecting the Holy Spirit. This blasphemy of the Spirit was an unpardonable sin for the unbelieving portion of Israel, and as a result they cannot participate in the blessings of the age to come (Matthew 12:31-32; Mark 3:28-30; Luke 12:9-10).

Even many within the believing messianic part of the nation, those who claimed to belong to the Church, became apostate, which was clearly evidenced in their treatment of Paul in Jerusalem. The crowd wasn't too concerned about him talking about Jesus, but when he mentioned that the gospel was going to the nations, they erupted (Acts 21:17-22:24; see also Hebrews 6:4-8 & 10:26-31 in relation to the blasphemy of the Spirit). Even James, the half-brother of Jesus, had risen up the ranks to be more influential than Christ's original leaders, Peter and John (James, John's brother, having been killed) (Galatians 1:19; 2:7-14).

The latter half of the book of Acts is devoted almost entirely to Paul's ministry amongst the nations, and Peter, James and the Twelve fade away. The focus shifts away from Israel after the flesh and turns to the nations. This was due to the New Covenant superceding the Old Covenant, with the blessings of the original Abrahamic covenant going out to all the families of the earth.

More importantly, this also resulted in the gradual fading away of the miraculous signs and powers of the coming age of the kingdom, and of many of the various gifts of the Spirit, which Jesus and the apostles (including Paul) had evidenced among the people, as a sign of their authority. Miracles and healings are primarily to accompany the heralding of the evangel of the kingdom in power (Hebrews 2:3-5; 2 Corinthians 12:12; Acts 1:6-8). The apostles and prophets of that era were raised up to complete the revelation of God, which is now contained in the writings of the New Testament. This applies especially to Paul's ministry and his writings. The Twelve were commissioned by Jesus Himself while He was on earth, and each of them, including Matthias, who later replaced Judas Iscariot, had to have been with Jesus from the baptism of John through to His return to the heavens (Acts 1:15-26).

But Paul was uniquely chosen later by the glorified Christ for a special ministry, even though he was at that time an enemy of the truth. He became the foremost apostle, and the miracles that he enacted among the nations were probably greater than any other (Acts 19:10-12). The signs of a true apostle and prophet of God are supernatural signs, miracles and powerful deeds (including healings). Many other spiritual gifts were also given to the followers of Christ as a sign to unbelieving Israel and the world that this was truly of God and was the power of the coming kingdom (2 Corinthians 12:12; Mark 16:15-18). But *most* of what passes today as miracles and healings are in fact cheap forgeries by false apostles and fraudulent workers, to deceive the Body of Christ and keep them in immaturity. But they will be judged by their acts towards others, governed by their true motives of the heart.

Jesus revealed that, at the Judgment, many would claim spiritual gifts as their ticket into the kingdom, having shared in the anointing and blessings of the Holy Spirit, but they shall be turned away as imposters!

"Not everyone saying to Me 'Lord! Lord!' will be entering into the kingdom of the heavens, but he who is doing the will of My Father Who is in the heavens. Many will be declaring to Me in that day, 'Lord! Lord! Was it not in Your Name that we prophesy, and in Your Name cast out demons, and in Your Name do many powerful deeds?' And then shall I be saying to them that '**I never knew you! Depart from Me, workers of lawlessness!**'

(Matthew 7:21-23)

It is not enough to belong to a Christian assembly, coming under the banner of Christ's Name, and to share in the blessings of the Spirit, or even to partake in ministry and teaching! We must do the will of God - to believe in, and to follow, Christ. And Christ says 'Love one another.' Yet it is inevitable, that, in the same way as not all who are Israel are the true Israel, so it is that not all who are the Church are the true Church (Romans 9:6-7). Yet the Lord knows those who are His, and everyone who claims to follow Him must withdraw from injustice and lawlessness as defined by God (2 Timothy 2:19).

Paul also reveals that these last days shall be full of religious apostasy, when there will be false believers, false teachers and prophets, who shall be disqualified as to the Faith. These are those who wish to have their ears tickled and their flesh satisfied, while glorying in themselves, void of the power of God, full of greed and wickedness (1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Timothy 3:1-7, 13; 2 Peter 2:1-3). He reveals something very interesting to Timothy in regard to our present subject, in relation to these imposters.

"...always learning and yet not at any time able to come into a realisation of the truth. Now, by the method by which Jannes and Jambres withstand Moses, thus these also are withstanding the truth, men of a depraved mind, disqualified as to the faith. But they shall not be progressing more, for their folly shall be obvious to all, as that of those also became."

(2 Timothy 3:7-9)

Some will use false miracles and healings, trickery and deceit, to withstand the truth and lead people astray, in the same manner as did the Egyptian magicians, Jannes and Jambres, who sought to copy the signs of God being done through Moses in the court of Pharaoh. But there will always come a time when they shall not continue with their deceit any further, for, in the same way as Moses shamed Jannes and Jambres, these imposters are exposed as the tricksters that they are by the true prophets and followers of God, who perform the real stuff, like Jesus Himself (2 Timothy 3:8-9; 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12).

From my understanding of Biblical types, there shall be two outpourings of the Spirit, symbolised in the early rains and the latter rains. The first occurred in the first century AD and we are entering the second in our day. This shall fully fulfill the prophecy of Joel, which was also fulfilled at Pentecost 33 AD, when the Spirit is being poured out on all flesh before the Day of the Lord (Acts 2:1-21).

The Installments

Paul is describing the transition referred to earlier in a very illuminating passage in 1 Corinthians 13, concerning the spiritual gifts. The whole purpose for the spiritual gifts at that time was '*with a view to expedience*' (12:7), that is, due to the changes taking place at that time, and while the New Testament was being written, various spiritual gifts were necessary for the believers during that era. Paul was still proclaiming the message of the kingdom to Israel in accordance with the New Covenant wherever he went, and the power and authority of Christ needed to be very evident to those of the nations also, where Paul ministered. In effect, the new ecclesias were being established under the apostles' jurisdiction in preparation for the return of Christ to set up the kingdom.

Due to Israel's unbelief, the return of Christ was to be delayed or suspended indefinitely. God had a new administration planned with a fuller, more glorious message, which was fully revealed by Paul alone.

There is much in his first letter to the assembly at Corinth that has to be understood in the context of this transitional era. One marked example is the fact that Paul's apostolic authority and the power of the Lord were hugely evident in this ecclesia, and this resulted in many being infirm, and many having died, due to selfish, rebellious behaviour concerning the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:27-32; also 5:1-5). This kind of heavy discipline and judgment from the Lord had been exercised by Peter in the Jerusalem assembly in relation to Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11), and it is very much a part of the righteous rule of the kingdom. Yet it would appear as though this authority is no longer in force now as there wouldn't be many churches left if it was!

There are many passages like this that prove extremely difficult to understand if they are applied to the whole of this Church era. This leads to all sorts of misunderstanding and false reasoning in an attempt to make it apply to today, with many claiming apostolic authority using overbearing tactics. This is one of the reasons why Paul said that teachers should be '*correctly cutting the Word of truth*' (2 Timothy 2:15). So much religious apostasy has come in over the centuries through the Holy Empire of Christendom, Catholic and Protestant, and it still continues, that only a remnant of the Church are the true Overcomers.

The 7 letters to the churches in Revelation chapters 2 and 3 are a complete message for the Church, covering every kind of Christian assembly and individual Christian that exists during this era. Only the Overcomers or Conquerors are the true Body of Christ.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul also introduces the figure of the Body of Christ in relation to the spiritual gifts (12:12-27), although here it is not described as a *joint-body*, as it is in his later letter to the Ephesians (Ephesians 3:6-7). During the transition, there was a distinct order and ranking concerning spiritual gifts and callings, with **apostles**, **prophets** and **teachers** being the top three, in that order (12:27-31). Now that the apostles and prophets are in the foundation, contained in the Scriptures, shepherd/teachers and evangelists are to continue the job of adjusting the Body of Christ to bring it to maturity in the truth, which is based totally on faith, and not by sight (Ephesians 4:11-16; 2 Corinthians 5:7).

So Paul wanted to show them the higher, maturer way, which went beyond the gifts themselves - the way of love. He was showing them a path suited to transcendence, a path that leads to the more excellent way that is above all else - the way of faith, love and expectation. This is a path encompassed by God's glorious grace - a path that was walked to perfection by Jesus Himself (1 Corinthians 12:31).

1 Corinthians 13:8-13 is extremely revealing in this regard, but many translations obscure what is really being said. Here is a more accurate translation from the CV. It reads

'Love is never lapsing: yet, whether prophecies, they will be discarded, or languages, they will cease, or knowledge, it will be discarded. For **out of an instalment** are we knowing, and **out of an instalment** are we prophesying. Now whenever **maturity** may be coming, **that which is out of an instalment shall be discarded**. When I was a minor, I spoke as a minor, I was disposed as a minor, I took account of things as a minor. Yet when I have become a man, I have discarded that which is a minor's. **For at present we are observing by means of a mirror, in an enigma**, yet then, face to face. **At present I know out of an instalment**, yet then I shall recognise according as I am recognised also.

Yet now are remaining faith, expectation, love - these three. Yet the greatest of these is love. Be pursuing love.'

To clarify, it was Paul's intention to reveal the new truths (secrets) in installments. As the signs and miracles pertaining to the earthly manifestation of the kingdom promised to Israel were receding, along with the gradual introduction of new truth, the believers under Paul's ministry needed special divine guidance concerning these things, especially as the Greek Scriptures were only just beginning to be written. This was especially provided for in the gifts of wisdom, knowledge, faith, prophecy and discrimination (or discernment) of spirits (12:8-10).

It was necessary to bring the believers of the Body of Christ ecclesia from immaturity to maturity. For this purpose the apostles and prophets were given to complete the written Word, along with evangelists and shepherd/teachers to adjust the saints and upbuild them in the present truth of the Body of Christ and the new administration of grace (Ephesians 4:1-16). Even though the other apostles wrote most of their letters after Paul, Paul was the one who truly completed the Word of God through the secrets contained in his evangel (Colossians 1:25).

During this transitional era, spiritual gifts were given to the local ecclesias with a view to expedience, that is, it was beneficial and necessary at that time. They were infants who needed these gifts to help bring them on to adulthood in the faith. This is clearly why Paul focuses on these issues in 1 Corinthians 12-14. The young believers were boasting in that which was the equivalent of 'children's play things!' But faith, expectation and love are the signs of maturity (see also Colossians 3:12-14). This walk of faith from immaturity to maturity has to be experienced by every true believer who wishes to be a son of God.

The Examples of Paul, Timothy, Trophimus and Epaphroditus

As we have seen earlier, there was a major adjustment in Paul's ministry at the time of his writing his second letter to the Corinthians, which introduced the message of the Conciliation. A careful reading of this letter will also show that Paul's emphasis begins to change drastically in relation to suffering and affliction for believers. Instead of emphasising healing and powers, he focuses on weakness and suffering a lot more. Our bodies are viewed as vessels of clay that are outwardly decaying so that the power within is clearly of God and not of man (2 Corinthians 4:7-12; 16-18).

He even goes on to reveal that due to the revelations he was receiving from Christ, he was given a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet him, causing him great infirmity (12:7-10). During Christ's visitations, Paul entreated the Lord three times to take it away, but the answer was, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for **My power is being perfected in infirmity.**'

This can't be emphasised enough! The power of God in Christ is being perfected (completed or made mature) in us in infirmity or weakness! This is the secret to why we suffer. Even Christ learned obedience as a Son by what He suffered (Hebrews 5:7-8).

Therefore, Paul's conclusion is 'Wherefore **I delight in infirmities...**for Christ's sake, for, whenever **I may be weak, then I am powerful.**'

In a similar way, Jesus' ministry had a point of change due to the unbelief of Israel, when He began to emphasise the place of suffering and sacrifice instead of power and miracles, which ultimately led Him to the cross (Matthew 16:21-27). This was now occurring in Paul's ministry with equal force. So why didn't Paul heal himself or why couldn't any one else heal him? And why couldn't he rebuke Satan? **Because it was not God's will!** Many today would say that he lacked faith or had a secret sin! But they misunderstand the Scriptures and God's will for us today.

Infirmities and afflictions may not be appealing, compared to great powers of healing and miracles, but these 'weaknesses' can be a sign of God's gracious blessing in this administration of pure grace. And in the same way as many became disillusioned with Christ in his role as the suffering Servant, many also became disillusioned with Paul and his message. Yet having said that, even the letter to the Hebrews shows that, even in the past, servants of God had various ministries and experiences (Hebrews 11). Not all had powers and miracles, not all were materially rich, not all had positions of great authority. Many suffered greatly and were martyred, while others died peacefully at a ripe old age. Yet all is in accordance with God's will as He apportions to each his place.

So Paul had to respond to the growing negativity to his ministry by defending his divine calling and message, so that the truth could remain with us, which he does throughout this second letter to the Corinthians. He also addresses the issue of false apostles and deceitful messengers of Satan appearing as ministers of righteousness, which was evidence that the apostasy had already begun and many 'leaders' could not be trusted even then (11:13-15).

Over the succeeding centuries, the truth of Paul's evangel was virtually lost to the world, especially during the 'dark ages' of the domination of Christendom, when the Apostasy and the man of sin was in full force through the Holy Roman Empire and the rise of Islam. It wasn't until the Reformation that Paul's message began to be recovered with the foundational truth of Justification by Faith alone. The recovery process continues to this day as God raises up His servants to illuminate His truth.

Getting back to Paul's emphasis on weakness and suffering, we have the further testimony of Timothy's frequent infirmities and stomach problems (1 Timothy 5:23). Why didn't Paul heal him? It was not God's will! Instead, Timothy is told to use natural remedies instead of supernatural power. And then there is the case of Epaphroditus from Philippi, who became so sick that he nearly died (Philippians 2:25-30). This was due to the work of the Lord and his sacrificial labour, and yet why wasn't he healed? Well, we are told that God showed him mercy and did cause him to recover sufficiently enough to continue his work. God was also merciful to Paul in sparing him sorrow upon sorrow. But there isn't any evidence that this was due to the gift of healing, through Paul or anyone else. It was a direct touch of God in accordance with His purpose for Epaphroditus.

And finally we have the case of Trophimus, whom Paul had to leave in Miletus because he was infirm (2 Timothy 4:20). If Paul still had the powers that he had previously, why did he have to leave poor sick Trophimus behind? He could have healed him, but he didn't. For those who have ears to hear, this should be enough evidence to show that this administration is focused on the spiritual blessings above, and not on the earthly, soulish things of Israel's Old Covenant kingdom. Our blessings are far greater, but they are presently invisible and do not have anything to do with our present bodies or this world, only in so far as the indwelling Spirit manifests itself through our mortal flesh. We should care for our body as it is a temple of the Holy Spirit, but any divine healing or miracle is left to God's mercy as He deems fit (1 Timothy 4:7-8; 1 Corinthians 6:12-20).

Since that early outpouring of the Spirit, the powers and spiritual gifts of that era faded. God has been moving very differently. **This does not mean that God never heals or never causes miracles or never sends 'angels' - of course He does! These things cannot be ruled out altogether, although it is generally not the norm. God is still active in His people by His Holy Spirit, and He is Sovereign, overseeing all things, operating ALL in accordance with the counsel of His will** (Ephesians 1:11).

But care must be taken in these deceptive days, for most of what passes for miracles and healings today, and through the past centuries, are not the genuine spiritual gifts used by believers in the First Century and by Christ Himself. Most are deceptions of Satan and his messengers, luring people away from the truth, distracting their focus and occupying them with fleshly behaviour and vain imaginations. It was prophesied that during the last days, deception will grow through false miracles, signs and false doctrine, along with the secret power of lawlessness, culminating in a great falling away from the truth, known as the Apostasy (see Matthew 24:4-14, 23-26; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12; 1 Timothy 4:1-5; 2 Timothy 3:1-9; 2 Peter 2: 1-22). This has occurred through the lawless antichrist kingdom of the Holy Roman Empire of Christendom and some of its Protestant offshoots.

During the Acts period, while the kingdom was still being offered to Israel first, and while the nations were being prepared for the kingdom, there were great signs and miracles being displayed through the apostles as well as other believers. These were the spring rains. These powers faded as the kingdom faded, while the Administration of Grace was being introduced. The time is drawing near, and now is, when these powers will be revived as the kingdom draws near again, and the gospel of the kingdom shall be proclaimed with renewed power. These are the autumn rains. During this era the focus shall partially return to Israel again in the land, just like it was almost 2000 years ago, as we await the soon coming Day of the Lord, the Return of Christ.

Yet even before Paul died, the apostasy from the truth had already begun, as many 'believers' turned away from Paul and His teaching (2 Timothy 1:15). The aged apostle was virtually left alone in his later days, physically restricted by a Roman chain (2 Timothy 1:15; 4:9-18). One of the brothers called Onesiphorus, unlike many others, was not ashamed of Paul's chain, and Paul was so hidden that, when in Rome, he had to search for him diligently to find him! (2 Timothy 1:16-18). Why wasn't Paul released from his chain with mighty power and miraculous signs, like he and Silas had been from the jail at Philippi (Acts 16:25-34). It was not God's will!

This is the astounding truth: the greatest apostle who has ever lived, besides Christ Himself, was given the highest pinnacle of divine revelation ever given to humanity - yet he ended his career rejected and lonely, afflicted and infirm. But this forms the greatest backdrop for God's amazing grace to be manifested through him. Like His Saviour before him, in flesh, on the earth, Paul appears to be nothing - yet in spirit, in the celestials, his blessings are beyond imagination. This truth remains applicable for the whole Body of Christ. God's servants shall soon be rewarded for their affliction and toil on behalf of their Master. Now is not a time to be giving up or slacking in the race of faith.

'My grace is sufficient for you, for **My power is being perfected in infirmity.**'

Conclusion

The apostasy has increased and it still continues today within the many so-called 'orthodox' teachings of Christendom and its various sects. But the time is soon coming, in fact it is already here, when God will be grafting many Jews back into their own olive tree. **The nations in general will have shown their unbelief and will be gradually hewn out of the olive tree, and the complement of the nations will be finished to complete the Israel of God at Christ's return** (Romans 11:19-25).

This ultimate Day of the Lord will also be a time of wrath for the world when the Day of Reckoning shall finally arrive. **Christ's ambassadors of peace will not be present on the earth during the Day of the Lord's Indignation. The Conciliation will have ended for the time being. God's hand of friendship will have been withdrawn. He will declare war on sinful humanity and bring down judgment upon the world because of its wickedness and lawlessness.** But out of the ashes will dawn a truly new age!

In light of this, we must be aware of Peter's sobering words.

For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And, "If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?"

(1 Peter 4:17-18 NIV)

Now the Body of Christ ecclesia, as Christ's ambassadors, who have been given a celestial calling to rule with Christ in the ages to come, will need to be taken off the earth and into the air while the wrath of God is being poured out on the world on that Day. **We are to be saved from God's indignation. This is exactly what Paul reveals in the event commonly known as the 'Rapture' or 'Snatch', which includes the secret of the resurrection** (1 Thessalonians 4:13- 5:11 and 1 Corinthians 15:51-55). **This revealed 'secret' can only be found in Paul's writings, and nowhere else.** This awesome event will herald the end of this age, whereby Christ Jesus shall return to this earth as He promised and establish the long-awaited kingdom of the heavens in its fullness.

The First Resurrection

Now let's end on a really high note by briefly considering the First Resurrection and Transformation of the Overcomers. Paul's two letters to the Thessalonian believers contain some very important information in relation to Christ's Coming or Presence, the Day that all true believers should be yearning for. He speaks of the apostasy, the unveiling of the man of lawlessness, and the Day of the Lord itself. Now Paul reveals that the believers in the Body of Christ who shall be surviving at the time of Christ's coming shall be supernaturally snatched away (or 'raptured') and gathered into Christ's presence in the air before the Lord begins pouring out His indignation upon the world.

This snatching away shall include the living and the dead in Christ, the chosen ones who shall be gathered together by the messengers while Christ is in the air preparing to pour out His wrath (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). This supernatural gathering at Christ's return wasn't a secret though, as Jesus Himself had mentioned it (Matthew 24:30-31).

The secret element that Paul revealed was this, which was also revealed in his letters to the Corinthians: Both groups, the living and the dead in Christ, shall be changed into immortal, incorruptible humans so that they can immediately receive their celestial allotment and blessing and return with Christ as His Bride, who has made herself ready, and will be counted amongst the armies in heaven, the holy ones that will return with Him to execute judgment in the earth (1 Corinthians 15:50-53; 2 Corinthians 5:1-4; Revelation 19:6-8, 14).

This is the **First Resurrection**, the out-resurrection from among the dead of the Anointed Firstfruits, fulfilling the prior-expectancy of believers, when we shall be transformed and shall appear like Him (Revelation 20:4-5; Philippians 3:11, 20-21; 1 John 3:2-3). This is when the Sons of God shall be unveiled (or manifested) and

shall begin to rule and reign with Christ for the ages to come. This snatching away into the heavens is foreshadowed in the snatching away of Enoch and Elijah (Genesis 5:21-24; Hebrews 11:5; 2 Kings 2:11-12) as well as in the ascension of Christ Himself (Acts 1:9-12; Revelation 12:5). (For further study, see *Appendix: The Resurrection Order and The New Humanity Versus The Old Humanity*).

We shall be like the messengers in heaven, having no need to marry, as we are the Lord's Bride, His Wife. We shall be the many Sons of God that have been brought into glory, created in the image of Christ. Our sphere or realm of rule will primarily be on the new earth in the age to come, where Christ shall be, but it will also extend to the heavens as well. **Yet even now, in spirit by faith, all believers are one in Christ in the New Humanity.** We all serve the **One God and Father**, and the **One Lord**; we all partake of the **One Spirit**, and we all belong to the **One Faith**. Ultimately, we are all united in **One Body** with **One spiritual Baptism**; and we all have the **One Expectation**, that is, ruling with Christ at His return as the Anointed Firstfruits of a New Humanity.

We are all the Sons of God, who shall be unveiled to the world and all creation at the return of Christ. We are all co-rulers with Christ in His kingdom in the ages to come, no matter what the location or gifting or ranking in accordance with God's will. We must endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit with the bond of peace, and to be counted worthy before our Master as faithful servants and Overcomers (Ephesians 4:1-5; 1 Corinthians 15:22-23; Romans 8:18-23, 29).

What a destiny! What a future!

All Scripture quotations are taken from the Concordant Version unless stated otherwise.