

THE UPWARD CALL

*Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet;
but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,
I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God
IN CHRIST JESUS.*

(Philippians 3.13-14 NASB)

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The Omissions

According to the testimony of both Jesus and Paul, Paul was Jesus' chosen instrument to bear His name before the Gentiles, kings, and the sons of Israel (Acts 9.15). Within a few days of meeting the risen and glorified Christ on his way to Damascus, Paul began to proclaim Jesus as the Son of God in the synagogues, meaning he went to the sons of Israel first. At various stages of his ministry, Paul also proclaimed the name of Jesus to kings. Although he never lost hope or passion for his fellow countrymen, a day came when he turned to the so-called *Gentiles*, a word that is best translated *nations*. As the historical book of Acts ends, Paul, staying in rented quarters, told the Jews who could not accept the things spoken by him that they were blind and deaf to the truth, just as Isaiah the prophet had said. He announced: **Therefore, let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the nations (Gentiles); they will also listen** (see Acts 28.23-31). This was in perfect alignment with the Psalmist: **That Your way may be known on the earth, Your salvation among all nations. Let the peoples praise You, O God; let all the peoples praise You. Let the nations be glad and sing for joy; for You will judge the peoples with uprightness and guide the nations on the earth** (Psalms 67.2-4).

Early in his ministry, Paul was caught up in the controversy of circumcision, a holdover of Judaism and the custom of Moses that some were trying to impose on those converted from among the nations. This led Paul and Barnabas to appear before the Jewish-Christian council at Jerusalem. The question at hand was what to impose on these new so-called *non-Jewish converts*. By their own testimony, the Holy Spirit directed that they tell them **to abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication**. That was it; no more, no less. With this agreement, Paul, Barnabas, and Silas were sent off to Antioch, where the news was received with great rejoicing and encouragement (Acts 15). Finally, James, Peter, and John, reputed pillars of the church, gave Paul and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship so that they might go to the nations (Gentiles) and they (James, Peter, John) to the circumcised. All they asked was that Paul remember the poor, the very thing Paul was also eager to do (Galatians 2.9-10).

This introduction is necessary to make the point that **Paul was the apostle of the nations** (uncircumcision) and the original twelve apostles that knew Jesus in the flesh were the apostles of the sons of Israel (circumcision). Another way of stating this is that Paul proclaimed the name of Jesus as the Son of God to a people that had little to no background about the law and customs of Moses. In fact, they had been **excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and were strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world** (Ephesians 2.12). Paul's job was to give them hope, which is in Christ alone, and he did just this to his very end. He is our apostle, and as such, what he wrote in his epistles, which comprise nearly 60% of what we call the *New Testament*, excluding the historical books (Matthew through Acts) and not including Hebrews, must stand as the message he sought to instill in the nations. Stated emphatically, Paul was and still is the messenger to the nations.

Now, it seems right that Paul would emphasize teachings (i.e., doctrines) that were vital to opening the eyes of the nations to the truth about Christ, including what is vital to salvation and to growth in Christ. It also seems right that he would emphasize the most important teachings of Jesus as they pertain to the nations. However, keep in mind that Paul never sat at the feet of Jesus in the flesh and it is not known how much of His teachings Paul had access to. What we do know is that Paul received revelation directly from Christ in glory. This puts his writings in a category above and beyond all other writings.

You might be wondering where all this is leading. Well, it is leading to what Paul omitted from his writings that many believers today are taught as part of our gospel.

The first omission was that one must be *born again* in order to be saved. Evangelicals, probably without exception, hold that one must be born again. In preaching the gospel, people are told over and over again that they must be born again. If so, then why did Paul not mention this anywhere in his writings? The answer lies in what Jesus actually meant when He told Nicodemus he had to be born again to see the Kingdom of God. Like all Jews of that day, Nicodemus believed his birth as a Jew (or son of Israel) gave him a God-given right to the Kingdom. In other words, he was granted special privilege simply because of his bloodline. To this, Jesus said that his natural birth as a Jew would no longer count; Nicodemus needed a new birth by the Spirit. This was Jesus' way of telling the Jews that their bloodline or genealogy would not lead them into the Kingdom. However, keep in mind that the Jews' view of the Kingdom was temporal and earthly. They had no expectation of being among the celestials, as Paul later wrote. To them, being born again, even by the Spirit, was on an earthly plane. As such, a message like this had no meaning to a non-Jew (Gentile; nations), for they never did and still do not have any expectation of seeing and entering the Kingdom of God based on their genetic line. Consequently, being born again was never in Paul's written messages. Instead, Paul taught that **there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all** (Colossians 3.11). And, most importantly, all in Christ are **a new creation and a one new man, with every spiritual blessing among the celestials (heavenlies), seated with Christ in the heavenlies** (2 Corinthians 5.17; Ephesians 1.3; 2.15). Paul's revelation from Christ took the message to an entirely new level, a heavenly one, far above the earth. It is not simply casting aside all distinctions and privileges of the natural; it is taking up something entirely new and never seen before in all of creation. Paul tells us: **The first man is from the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven. As is the earthy, so also are those who are earthy; and as is the heavenly, so also are those who are heavenly. Just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we will also bear the image of the heavenly. Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.** (1 Corinthians 15.47-50). This is more than being born again; this is an entirely new constitution.

The second omission is that if you do not believe, you will go to *hell*. Most evangelicals make this a vital part of the gospel, but Paul never once mentions hell or any derivation of it. He wrote of not inheriting the Kingdom and loss or gain of rewards in relation to works being judged by fire but never about being cast into an eternal inferno called *hell*. How could Paul overlook such a *seemingly* essential teaching, especially to the nations? After all, didn't Jesus teach on hell? Not really! Jesus spoke of *gehenna of fire* in relation to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, thus casting Judaism and the Temple out of the economy of God. Paul wrote that **God wills all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth, each in his own order** (1 Timothy 2.4; 1 Corinthians 15.23).

The third omission is that Paul never mentioned the priesthood of every believer. I was taught that this was the truth early on in my life in Christ. I must confess that I often had a hard time understanding this. How could a non-Jew (Gentile; nations) understand this if they were never exposed to such a thing? If it were true, wouldn't we expect Paul to expend some print explaining this to the nations? Now, Peter mentioned it, but he wrote to the Israelites in dispersion, not to the nations at large (1 Peter 1.1; 2.9). Again, Paul presented a much higher teaching. Believers are to grow into being sons of God. His message was all about Sonship, not priesthood, nor, for that matter, about being slaves or servants, as the Jews were taught. There is a big gap between being priests and servants, and a son who inherits and rules over the affairs of his father. This does not mean a son does not serve; it simply places the believer in a much more intimate and personal, familial relationship with God (Galatians 4.6-7).

The fourth omission is that Paul never referred to believers as *Christians*. Peter did once and some outside of Christ did, but that is it. Why? Paul did not see our identity in a label but in Christ Jesus. **For me, to live is Christ.** The world looks for labels and titles, but we are to manifest a life, **Christ who is our life.**

The fifth omission is that Paul never told anyone that they had to **ask Jesus into their heart**. His testimony was that God through grace **"revealed His Son in me"** (Galatians 1.15-16). For Paul, everything begins and ends with God and His Son, even our faith; saved by grace through *the* faith of the Son of God. No longer I, but Christ lives in me!

Dear people of God, you are challenged to search Paul's epistles and see if what you have been taught and now hold to as truth matches Paul's truth. Undoubtedly, there are other omissions. I have simply chosen the ones that came to me as I was challenged to consider the many things I was taught in my early years in Christ.