

Two Missions
Part 1:
Debunking the Virgin Church
Idea

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Lesson 112

March 1, 2017

Credits

- This lesson is taken from St. Paul versus St. Peter, by Michael Goulder, 1994
- Michael Goulder was a professor of Biblical Studies at the University of Birmingham, England (died Jan 6, 2010)
- He performed brilliant scholarly work on the New Testament, but for the most part wrote only very scholarly books that are difficult to read for the layman
- This book, St. Paul versus St. Peter, is an exception as it is written to be easily read by the public
- Two other books by Michael Goulder: Midrash and Lections in Matthew and Paul and the Competing Mission in Corinth, but these make for more difficult reading

Our Third Mini-Series

- In Lessons 102-107, we looked at Gospel Differences
 - We saw significant differences between the canonical gospels
- In Lessons 108-111, we looked at non-proto-orthodox sects of Christianity, including the Ebionites, the Marcionites, and the Gnostics
 - We saw very different forms of Christianity, some even a bit bizarre, yet sincerely believed by many people over numerous generations, and supported by written gospels
- In this third mini-series, we will examine the two missions of the early proto-orthodox church, which we previously treated as a monolith

Jesus Left No Clear Blueprint

- The extreme diversity of Christianity (beliefs and doctrine) that existed for so long is a testimony to me that *Jesus was crucified without leaving any clear blueprint for what Christians are to believe*
 - Otherwise, I see no way to explain the extreme diversity between the proto-orthodox, the Ebionites, the Gnostics, and the Marcionites
- What we will see in this lessons series is that *even within the proto-orthodox sect, there was a great dispute as to what Christianity should be*
- We have already seen in the first mini-series that there are differences between the gospels, and in this series, we will see *why* some of those differences exist

The Virgin Church Idea

- In the 2nd century, Hegesippus wrote “They *used* to call the church a virgin for she *had not yet been* corrupted by vain teachings.”
 - The virgin church idea is that there had been a ***single united church***, proclaiming the truth about God and Jesus, from the very beginning (Pentecost)
 - This virginal church idea was promoted by the book of Acts
- Since then, virtually all Christians have assumed the idea that ***the church was born with the correct beliefs and that even though heretical sects occasionally cropped up, the orthodox church can trace it’s body of beliefs all the way back to the time of Pentecost***
 - Cardinal Newman is quoted as saying that the structure of Christian belief grew “as an oak out of an acorn”

Virgin Church History according to Acts

- The disciples learned all they needed to know from Jesus
- The disciples witnessed the resurrection, experienced the coming of the Holy Spirit, and then began evangelizing
- Prayers and hymns were written to reflect these experiences
- Then Paul came along, thought things through, and wrote his own conclusions in his epistles to the churches he founded
- Then the gospel writers wrote their gospels based on information handed down by the disciples of Jesus, modifying Paul's theology as necessary
- Later, false teachers (such as Judaizers, gnostics, and syncretists) arose and spread heretical ideas
 - Then came the “corruption” of the virgin church of which Hegesippus wrote

The Virgin Church Idea Challenged

- Question: Is the virgin church scenario correct?
 - Does Acts portray the history accurately?
- As Michael Goulder argues in St. Paul versus. St. Peter, A Tale of Two Missions, the virgin church scenario is not accurate
 - Goulder argues that as far back as anyone can trace the early church, which is to the 40's, *there never was a single united church*
- *From the 30's, there were two distinct missions*
 - (1) the Jerusalem church, initially led by Peter, James and John (sons of Zebedee), and later led by James, the brother of Jesus, and other members of the family of Jesus
 - (2) one led by Paul, based in Antioch, Ephesus, and other cities outside Palestine

One Problem with Luke's Virgin Church

- Question: What is wrong with the virgin church scenario?
- *We will see many things wrong with the virgin church scenario in the next 6-8 lessons*, but for now, here is one example:
 - In Mark 7:14-19, Jesus clearly teaches his disciples that *all food is clean*
 - But later, as described in Acts 10:9-16, Peter does not believe this until he receives a vision from God
 - Why is a vision necessary if Jesus had taught the disciples that all food was clean?
 - Still later, Peter refuses to eat meat at Antioch as described in Galatians 2:12
 - Why, after the teaching from Jesus and the vision from God, would Peter still think the meat to be unclean?

The Two Missions

- The two missions are delineated by Paul in Galatians 2:7-9
 - “... I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised (for he who worked through Peter for the mission to the circumcised worked through me also for the Gentiles), and when they perceived the grace that was given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised;”
- By itself, this could be interpreted as two cooperative branches of a united church, but as we shall see in the next 6-8 lessons, *these two missions strongly disagreed with each other on just about everything except the supreme significance of Jesus!*

The Epistles, Gospels, and Book of Acts

- Goulder points out, and we will see examples later, that Paul's epistles are *more reliable* concerning the history of early Christianity than the book of Acts. Why?
 - Paul wrote as events occurred about the real problems his mission encountered, whereas Luke wrote long after the events occurred and *Luke tried to present a picture of a church more unified than it actually had been*
 - Luke “papers over the cracks” (Goulder's phrase) in an attempt to *build a bridge between the two missions*
- As you will see in the next set of lessons, while the book of Acts may serve as a starting point for what happened, we will gain *much more insight* from analyzing Paul's epistles and the gospels about the conflicts between the two missions

Paul's Conversion According to Paul

- Paul recorded his account of his conversion experience in I Corinthians 15 and Galatians 1:
 - I Corinthians 15:7: “Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.”
 - Galatians 1:12: “... for it [the gospel] came through a revelation of Jesus Christ”
 - Galatians 1:16-18: “...[God] was pleased to reveal his Son to me that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia...Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas...”

Paul's Conversion According to Luke

- Luke's account of Paul's conversion is in Acts 9:3-19:
 - On the road, a light from heaven suddenly flashed around Paul, who falls to the ground; a voice says "Saul, why do you persecute me?"; Paul's companions hear this voice also; after he gets up, Paul cannot see and has to be led by his friends; Paul is unable to see for 3 days; God tells Ananias in a vision to go to Paul and restore his sight by laying his hands on him; Ananias argues with God, but then agrees to go; he lays his hands on Paul; scales fall from Paul's eyes, and he regains his vision; Paul is baptized and resumes eating; Paul then *immediately* starts proclaiming Jesus as the son of God
- Luke contradicts Paul by saying he starts to preach immediately
 - Paul's account is more believable given the reassessment he needed to make by such a dramatic reversal of belief

Paul's version versus Luke's

- Luke's account of Paul's conversion is clearly *much more dramatic* than Paul's own account. Why?
- Can Luke's account be considered more reliable than Paul's account? We are accustomed to thinking of Luke's account as accurate, but if so, why didn't Paul describe it similarly? According to Paul, it did not happen as Luke described it.
- I think the only scenario for believing that Luke's account would be more reliable than Paul's account would be if Paul was very modest and did not want to brag about his conversion experience

Paul's version versus Luke's

- Was Paul very modest and unwilling to brag about his conversion experience?
 - No. Paul does brag about his credentials often in his attempts to establish himself as a true apostle of Jesus. He firmly reiterates his authority to proclaim the gospel, as he is under frequent attack for not knowing Jesus personally. Since he did not know Jesus personally before the crucifixion, surely he would have made a big point of meeting him personally as Luke describes it in Acts had it actually happened that way.
- If you started from scratch (i.e. not knowing Luke's dramatic story in Acts), and read just Paul's own account, there is no reason to believe Luke's much more dramatic version

Timeline of Writings

- The next two charts show estimated dates related to the writing of NT books
 - Notice that the sequence is (1) Pauline epistles, (2) gospels, (3) deuterio-Pauline epistles and non-Pauline epistles
 - *All* the gospels are written *after* Paul writes all his epistles
 - In fact, Paul dies before any canonical gospel is written
 - Notice that the Gnostics and Marcionites come later, which is the basis of the “corruption” of the “virgin church” idea, but the virgin church idea is still inaccurate due to the deep divisions between Paul’s mission and the Jerusalem church that existed way back to the 40’s or even the 30’s
 - Also notice that the gospels are written in the order: **Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John** (with only a slight chance that Luke preceded Matthew)

Estimated Timeline of Events

- 30 AD: Jesus crucified
- 34 AD: Paul's conversion
- 37-38 AD: Paul in Damascus, Tarsus, and Antioch
- 47 AD: Paul and Barnabas in Galatia
- 48 AD: Jerusalem Conference
- 50 AD: Paul writes I Thessalonians (the first NT book)
- 51 AD: Paul writes II Thessalonians
- 54 AD: Paul writes I Corinthians and Galatians
- 56 AD: Paul writes II Corinthians and Romans
- 60 AD: Paul writes Philemon and Colossians
- 61 AD: Paul writes Ephesians
- 62 AD: Paul writes Philippians and is martyred

Estimated Timeline of Events

- 65 AD: an unknown author (not Paul) writes Hebrews
- 69 or 70 AD: an unknown author writes the Gospel of Mark
- 70 AD: the Romans sack Jerusalem and destroy the Temple
- 75-80 AD: an unknown author writes the Gospel of Matthew
- 81 AD: John (not the disciple John) writes Revelation
- 90 AD: an unknown author writes the Gospel of Luke
- 94 AD: the author of Luke writes Acts
- 100 AD: an unknown author writes the Gospel of John