

Two Missions: Part 6: Peter, James, and John in the Gospels

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Lesson 117

September 6, 2017

Two Missions: Petrine and Pauline

- The feud in early Christianity between the Jerusalem Church and the mission led by Paul can be observed in four places:
 - (1) in the *epistles of Paul*: explicitly in Galatians, and by implicit references in his other epistles
 - (2) in the *Synoptic gospels*, by observing what Mark writes, then seeing how Matthew and Luke change what Mark wrote
 - (3) in the book of *Acts*, where Luke plays down the bitterness of the feud compared to Paul's earlier writings
 - (4) the *Gospel of John*
- Last week we saw some examples of (1) and (2)
- Today we will see more examples of (2) regarding PJ&J
- Note: The material in this lesson comes from St. Paul vs St. Peter: A Tale of Two Missions by Michael Goulder

The Exorcism Story

- In Mark 9:33-50 Mark has Jesus forbid John from stopping a man casting out demons in Jesus' name (exorcism) and say that "he who is not against us is for us"
- What does Matthew do with this? He omits it entirely!
 - Omitting a story about Jesus *stopping* John from doing something *removes the negativity toward John*
 - Matthew's omitting this unfavorable story that Mark wrote about John indicates that *Matthew does not share Mark's hostility toward John and his successors who currently lead the Jerusalem church*
 - Recall that Mark is attacking the current leadership by undermining their predecessors
- Luke reduces it to two verses (Luke 9:49-50), but keeps essentially what Mark had written

The Request, per Matthew

- Mark portrays James and John unfavorably in Mark 10:35 by having James and John request to be seated at either side of Jesus in heaven and Mark has Jesus rebuff *their* request
 - This denial of authority to James and John was written by Mark as *a continuation of the battle Paul had fought earlier against PJ&J, when they were trying to exercise authority over Paul's churches*
 - They wanted Gentile Christians to obey Jewish laws
- How does Matthew alter Mark's story?
 - Matthew changes the story to have *the mother* of James and John make the request for them
 - *This completely removes any negativity toward James and John* since they are not responsible for their mother's actions

The Request, per Luke

- How does Luke alter Mark's story?
 - Luke omits the story
 - Luke transfers some of the sayings about authority from this story to his Last Supper story (Luke 22:24), but omits any mention of James and John in connection with what Jesus says about authority
 - By omitting James and John, but keeping the comments on authority, ***Luke is backing up Mark, and thus Paul, but is doing so in a way that does not come at the expense of James and John***
 - ***This is Luke's position: side with Paul, but try to build a bridge toward the Jerusalem church***
 - Whereas Mark sided with Paul and attacked the Jerusalem church

Peter

- Applying the loyalty test to Peter is more difficult
- Peter is a very human figure: impulsive, loyal, fallible
- Peter vacillates a bit between the two camps, although he is of course in the camp of the Jerusalem church leadership
 - Peter softens up when he is in the Gentile's presence, eating non-kosher meat when visiting the Gentile church at Antioch, then reversing himself when friends of James arrived (Galatians 2:11-12)
- Given Peter's contradictory combination of passion and denials of Jesus, and the fact that so many Christians can identify with Peter, Goulder asks if Mark is portraying Peter as the typical Christian, one who fails on his own but is forgiven

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- Recall that Mark did include favorable things about Peter, James, and John
- But Mark has some not so favorable things to say about Peter
- We will look at Peter's confession and his denial of Jesus, and see how Matthew and Luke changed what Mark wrote

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 - “And he asked them, But who do you say that I am? Peter answered him, You are the Christ. And he charged them to tell no one about him. And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things.... And he said this plainly. And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him. But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, Get behind me Satan! For you are not on the side of God, but of men.”

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 - “... Christ, *the son of the living God. And Jesus answered him, Blessed are you...for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but my Father who is in heaven. .. You are Peter and on this Rock I will build my church... I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven ... Then he commanded them to tell no one that he was the Christ. From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things...And Peter took, and began to rebuke him, saying, God forbid, Lord! This shall never happen to you. But he turned and said to Peter, Get behind me Satan. You are a stumbling block to me, for you are not on the side of God, but of men.*”

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 - Matthew's account has a number of positive terms applied to Peter, such as "Blessed, revealed, this rock, keys of the kingdom", all lacking in Mark

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 - *Mark has Jesus rebuke Peter publicly*, in front of the disciples, whereas *Matthew omits this aspect of it*

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 - Who might this apply to? Who denied Jesus, tried to save his life, refused to come after Jesus and take up his cross?
 - Peter! Peter is the one known for denying Jesus.
 - Mark has deliberately placed this negative passage, suggestive of Peter, immediately after Peter's confession, *which works to downgrade the benefit Peter received from being the first to acknowledge Jesus as the Christ.*

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- Mark portrays a human Peter who boasts and fails:
 - ‘Peter said to him “Even though they all fall away, I will not” And Jesus said to him “Truly ... before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times. But he said vehemently, “If I must die with you, I will not deny you.”’ (Mark 14:30-31)

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 - “Simon, Simon, behold. Satan demanded to have you all that he might sift you all as wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren.” And he said to him, “Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death.” He said, “I tell you, Peter, the cock will not crow this day, until you three times deny that you know me.” (Luke 22:31-34)

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- In Mark, Peter is a human boasting about his own personal commitment to Jesus; Luke changes it to be a battle Peter has against Satan
 - Luke changes Peter from a man bragging about something he cannot do, to a heroic figure standing up against supernatural evil! How can anyone expect Peter to not succumb?

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- Luke throws in a positive: that Peter should strengthen his brethren, which makes him look better than the other disciples, and later Luke follows up on this in the book of Acts by saying that Peter did strengthen the others

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- To summarize, *both Mark and Luke sided with Paul*; however, Mark attacked PJ&J, whereas Luke sought to diminish Mark's negatives about PJ&J and build bridges to the Petrine camp

The Feud

- In Galatians, Paul *explicitly* talks about men from the Jerusalem church coming to spy on his church at Antioch, his confrontation with Peter in which he accuses him of hypocrisy, and his trip to Jerusalem to settle things, where he refuses to be coerced by PJ&J
- But in his other epistles, there are only implicit references to this feud
- In these lessons, we see that the feud actually continued in full force for decades, as it influenced the gospel writers and was still a major problem in 117 CE when Ignatius wrote about it
- Yet Paul, in his epistles, ceases to mention it explicitly. Why?
 - This is important to us because without mentioning the confrontation directly, the vast majority of modern readers know nothing about it, and thus continue with the naïve belief that all was harmonious in early Christianity

Question

- This question is important to answer, for if unanswered, people will be inclined to dismiss the feud as a temporary and minor issue because Paul only mentions it in Galatians 2
- People will be tempted to think that the agreement reached in Jerusalem (that Paul would preach to the Gentiles while PJ&J preach to the Jews) ended the matter, and would thus fail to recognize what Paul really means when he keeps referring to things such as a false gospel, people who should mutilate themselves, etc
- Once readers fail to realize that so much of what Paul writes is about the feud, the door is wide open for wrong interpretations
- So, since the feud continued and was so divisive in early Christianity, why doesn't Paul write about it explicitly in his other epistles?

My Answer

- As far as I know, Goulder does not raise this question, nor does he answer it, but it seems important to me so I will give you my answer
- I think once Paul realized that this problem was troubling his Galatian church, he dealt with it in all his subsequent churches while he was still there
 - Paul discussed this problem with his newer churches in person
 - Once Paul left, all that was needed was further encouragement
- Thus there was no need to write about the history of the feud (as he had done in Galatians) once Paul had moved on
- For Paul, the feud never waned; we modern readers need to recognize this, and understand that it was a much larger problem that it appears to be to the casual NT reader