

## **An Acts 9 Group Disputing the Acts 28:28 Position**

### **THE BEREAN SEARCHLIGHT**

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#### ***The Historical Beginning of the Church***

##### ***The Acts 28 Position***

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When we were growing up it was not uncommon to hear our parents exclaim, "You've gone too far this time." In other words, you exceeded the acceptable limits. We feel that this describes the Acts 28 position to the letter. Basically, those who hold this view believe that the Church, the Body of Christ, did not begin until after Acts 28:28. Although only a small percentage of Grace believers begin the church here, those who oppose Paul's gospel tend to identify the whole Grace Movement with this extreme teaching. Hence, the phrase "ultra-dispensationalists." There is no question in our mind, whatsoever, that our Acts 28 friends know and love the Lord. Thus, it is our heartfelt prayer that we can go to the Scriptures together to see if these things are so!

On our journey through the Book of Acts we have sought to determine when the dispensation of Grace began--Acts 2, 9, 13 or 28. Obviously, all of these positions cannot be correct. They may all be incorrect, but they cannot all be correct! Thus it will be advantageous for the reader to compare Scripture with Scripture so as to never be "tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine. . ." Our own personal study on this subject has brought us to the conclusion that the change in dispensations came with the conversion of Paul recorded in Acts 9. This historic event was the crossroad in God's dealings with mankind. Before it we witness the "fall of Israel" and immediately following it God turns to the *Gentiles*. Consequently, we believe that the Acts 9 position answers more questions than it generates, but "*let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind*" (Romans 14:5).

#### **A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE ACTS 28 POSITION**

The ramifications of this particular view are far reaching. Dr. E. W. Bullinger of London, England is normally credited as being the mastermind behind this unsound teaching. Although the later works of Dr. Bullinger reflect the Acts 28 doctrine, in his early writings he taught a mid-Acts position. So, in a sense, we are indebted to him for his insight into the Word, rightly divided. On the other hand, we are amazed how a man of his spiritual caliber could drift off into extremism. The most popular works attributed to him are: The Companion Bible, The Great Cloud of Witnesses, The Apocalypse and

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Numbers in Scripture. Most believers probably have these reference works in their library, but we admonish the reader to use a great deal of discernment in three areas of Dr. Bullinger's writings (1) Where the Church began, (2) the soul of man, and (3) the person and work of the Holy Spirit.

Upon Dr. Bullinger's death, the mantle of the Acts 28 position was passed to a man by the name of Charles H. Welch. Some believe that it was Charles Welch's influence upon Mr. Bullinger which swayed him from his mid-Acts view. This may well be the case, as a letter to Pastor Arthur C. Lambourne from Mr. Welch seems to imply:

"Dr. Bullinger endorsed the so-called 'Ultra-dispensational' teaching accredited to me (Welch), and printed them in Things to Come, under the heading 'Dispensational Expositions' without alterations, but sometime, with an added note of approval. The Companion Bible up to John Ten represents what Dr. Bullinger taught and Things to Come' up to the day of his death, presents what Dr. Bullinger actually stood for. The rest of the Companion Bible is by other teachers."

After Dr. Bullinger's homegoing a committee was formed to discuss his successor. Lord Barron, who largely financed the Companion Bible, cabled the following suggestion to the committee, "Get Welch on the Epistles." But ultra-dispensationalism had become such a bone of contention in the Christian community back at that time, Mr. Welch writes: "Sir Robert Anderson promised 100 lbs to the funds 'to keep me (Welch) out' . . . so the most unsatisfactory portion of the Companion Bible are the epistles.

Charles Welch's Dispensational Truth and other writings were instrumental in fanning the flames of this position during the 50's and 60's here in America. Sadly, many of our dear grace brethren were drawn into this insidious teaching only to find themselves ostracized due to their extreme views. While the flames of this movement have nearly died out, there are those who yet champion the cause, so a word to the wise is sufficient--  
BEWARE!

### **THE DOCTRINE OF ULTRA-DISPENSATIONALISM**

*"Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it" (Acts 28:28)*

Those of the Acts 28 persuasion mark this announcement as the historical beginning of the Church, the Body of Christ. Prior to this point in time, they believe that Paul preached the kingdom gospel to the Jew only. Any Gentiles who were saved between Paul's conversion and the close of the Acts record merely became integrated with Israel. They support this conclusion by quoting Paul's words to King Agrippa found in Acts 26:22:

*"Having therefore obtained help from God, I continue unto this day, witnessing to both small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come."*

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Before we address the above, perhaps a moment should be taken to consider the ramifications of this belief. Based on the foregoing premise, those of the Acts 28 persuasion teach: (1) Paul did not receive the revelation of the *Mystery* during his early ministry, (2) Paul's ministry among the Gentiles began *after* the close of the Acts period, (3) the *early* epistles of St. Paul are not for us today--they include: Romans, I & II Corinthians, Galatians and I & II Thessalonians, (4) a two-Body theory, (5) the Rapture taught in I Thessalonians 4 is not our hope, (6) the Lord's table is not to be observed, and (7) prayer is to be limited to spiritual things.

### **OUR ANSWER TO THE ACTS 28 POSITION**

*"The salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles. . . (Acts 28:28).* As we said earlier, this passage is cited as Scriptural proof that the Body of Christ and Paul's subsequent ministry among the Gentiles did not begin until after Acts 28:28. We take issue with this for a number of reasons. Although they interpret the verb "is sent" as Paul initially receiving a new message for the Gentiles, the construction of this phrase in the original is in the *aorist* or *past tense*. Consequently, the gospel of the grace of God *had been sent* to the Gentiles almost 30 years before the apostle made this statement. This was merely the *last* of three pronouncements Paul made to Israel that God was saving Gentiles in spite of the chosen nation's obstinacy.

Interestingly, Paul informs us in the Book of Romans, one of his *early* epistles, that Israel *had fallen* and that God was in the process of *casting* her away (Rom. 11:11, 12, 14, 32). On the divine side of the coin, God declared her *fallen* when she blasphemed the Holy Spirit at the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:51-60). With the world standing on the precipice of His righteous indignation, God did a wonderful thing. In His mercy He saved the chief of sinners, Paul, and introduced a new program that was kept hidden from ages and generations past. A new program to save Jews and Gentiles *by grace through faith*. So Paul's early ministry had a twofold purpose. First, he announced to the chosen nation she was being cast away in favor of a Gentile ministry. No longer would she hold a *national* preeminence over the nations. Hence, Paul's three pronouncements:

*"It was necessary that the Word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles" (Acts 13:46).*

*"And when they had opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from HENCEFORTH I will go unto the Gentiles" (Acts 18:6).*

*"Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is (has been) sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it" (Acts 28:28).*

Second, the apostle preached the grace of God to *individual Jews and Gentiles* that *they might be saved*. Thus, those who responded to the gospel under the new administration of Grace became members of the *Body of Christ*.

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But how do we address Paul's statement that he witnessed to "*none other things than those things which the prophets and Moses did say should come?*" It must be remembered Paul is defending himself against the *charge* that he had sought to destroy the law and the prophets (Acts 21:27, 28 cf. 24:6). Of course, just the opposite was true. Paul frequently preached from the law and the prophets to show his countrymen that they were committing the same errors as their forebearers (Acts 13:16-42). Here we do well to remember that the apostle merely used this as a springboard to proclaim the *gospel of the grace of God*. Paul closed his message at Antioch with these words: "*And by Him (Christ) all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses*" (Acts 13:39). In the apostle's defense before King Agrippa in Acts 26 this *same* pattern is observed. Thus, verses 22 and 23 of this chapter must always be read together. And what were the "*none other things than those things which the prophets and Moses did say should come?*" "*That Christ should suffer, and that He should be the first that should rise from the dead . . .*" As you can see, the significance of what Moses and the prophets predicted is explained by Paul.

In response to the claim that Paul never proclaimed the Mystery in his early ministry, we say this is simply not the case. The Book of Romans was written during the apostle's early ministry approximately *3 years prior* to the end of the Acts record. Romans closes with a direct reference to the *Mystery*: "*Now to Him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the MYSTERY, which was kept secret since the world began*" (Rom. 16:25).\*

(\*For other references to the Mystery in Paul's early writings, see I Corinthians 2:7 cf. 15:51, etc.)

The assertion that Paul did not carry on a Gentile ministry before Acts 28:28 is untrue. Once again, years before the end of the Acts period, the apostle records in Romans that as a result of the fall of Israel salvation had come to the *Gentiles* (Rom. 11:11). In addition, Paul declares his apostleship among them. He states: "*For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office*" (Rom. 11:13.)\*

(\*For other references to Paul's work among the Gentiles in his early ministry, see Romans 1:13; I Cor. 12:2, 13; Galatians 2:2; I Thessalonians 2:16, etc.)

Those who hold to the Acts 28 position believe our marching orders for today are only found in Paul's prison epistles (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, I & II Timothy, Titus, Philemon, and Hebrews). However, the sevenfold unity of the Spirit taught in Ephesians 4 is clearly *woven* throughout the apostle's early writings. For example: There is one Body (Eph. 4:4 cf. I Cor. 12:13); one Spirit (Eph. 4:4 cf. I Cor. 12:13); one hope of our calling (Eph. 4:4 cf. I Thes. 4:13-18); one Lord (Eph. 4:5 cf. I Cor. 15:47-49); one faith (Eph. 4:5 cf. I Cor. 15:1-4); one baptism (Eph. 4:5 cf. Rom 6:3,4); and one God and Father of all (Eph. 4:6 cf. Gal. 1:1-5).

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The conclusion that the Body of Christ of which Paul wrote about in his early epistles is a *different* Body from the one in his latter epistles is farfetched. But this is what those of that persuasion would have us believe. They state: "*There is only one Body of Christ with Christ as the Head.* This is found only in Ephesians and Colossians. That is not the same Church as the Body mentioned in I Corinthians 12 and can be seen by comparing the two groups." They reason that "the head is a member (in I Corinthians 12) (not Christ) no more important than the foot or eye (Verse 21)." We feel that this interpretation is forced and unnatural, to say the least. Those who hold this position seem to view the Body of Christ as a physical entity. In reality, it is a spiritual organism. The illustration of the human body is used to merely show the spiritual relationship between the *Headship* of Christ and the *members* of His Body. In other words, just as my mind controls my eyes, hearing and movement, so the *mind* of Christ controls and lives in each member of His Body.

The ultra-dispensationalist also denies that we should observe the *Lord's table* on the basis that the New Covenant was established with Israel. We do not deny for a moment that this covenant was made with the house of Israel. But what she received by promise God has been given to us by *grace*. Therefore, during Israel's period of blindness, we are partakers of her spiritual blessings (Rom. 15:27). This helps explain why Paul received a *special* revelation that the Lord's table be observed until His return in the air. The blood of the New Covenant that cleansed Israel from her sins is the *same* blood that redeems us (I Cor. 11:23-27).

The purpose of the foregoing lines is not intended to offend our Acts 28 brethren. Rather, it is our desire that this view be reconsidered under the magnifying glass of God's Word to see if it passes the Berean test. Personally, we feel that the Acts 28 position doesn't have a leg to stand on.

### **QUESTION BOX**

*"Paul and Barnabas went to the Jews first . . . (Acts 13:5 and 13:14). Note in Acts 13:16, Paul addresses "men of Israel." According to Acts 13:46, the gospel had to go to the Jew first. Doesn't sound like he was preaching to any Gentiles."*

It just so happens that this question is addressed in the Editor's foregoing article on the Acts 28 position. Perhaps we should add that there were indeed Gentiles present at Antioch in Pisidia as the record bears out. They are referred to in the apostle's introduction as, "*ye that fear God*" (Verse 16). "*And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath" (Acts 13:42). Although Israel refused to receive Paul's message, the Gentiles responded in a positive manner,.*

--Pastor Sadler