

RECONCILING THE FOUR GOSPELS

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A reconciliation of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John was a must for Christianity. John was dramatically different than Matthew, Mark and Luke and therefore was considered suspect by many. The three “synoptic” Gospels relied on similar materials, and on a superficial level appeared to tell a similar story. But study of those Gospels revealed puzzling differences. Catholicism was largely unconcerned with the difficulty because it had claimed since the Reformation that tradition was the most important foundation of Christianity. Fundamentalists were unconcerned because they refused to acknowledge any problems and developed numerous rationalizations to gloss over troubling questions. Other Christians simply abandoned the Bible and subordinated their belief to secular ideology. Catholics, Fundamentalists and secular ideological clones all contributed to the weakening of Christianity as a force in history. That was a real problem because even as Christians undermined their own beliefs, the world’s need for Christ grew more desperate. What was the way to reconciliation and empowerment?

The Apostle Paul pointed us in the right direction:

“ . . . according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.”
(Romans 2:16 Revised Standard Version)

Paul referred to his understanding of Christianity as “*my gospel*.” He made no effort at all to describe the earthly ministry of Jesus, and, except for some limited contact described in Acts of the Apostles, exhibited little interest in or knowledge of the other Apostles.

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John was the “good news” of those disciples, and there was no claim within any of them that their version was definitive and/or absolute. Indeed, John stated at the end of his Gospel:

“But there are also many other things which Jesus did; were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.” John 21:25.

So if John made it clear he did not include everything done by Jesus, what was included resulted from decisions based upon John’s objective. He said himself, “. . . *these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ . . . and . . . have life in his name.*”20:31 It was entirely acceptable

to acknowledge that John was divinely inspired and still ask, “Did the Gospel of John reflect the unique perspective of John? . . . and on what basis might his effort be accepted as authentic?”

In John, the first of the signs attributed to Jesus, was the marriage at Cana in Galilee:

“On the third day there was a marriage at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there; Jesus also was invited to the marriage, with his disciples. When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, ‘They have no wine.’ And Jesus said to her, ‘O woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come.’ His mother said to the servants, ‘Do whatever he tells you.’ Now six stone jars were standing there, for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them, ‘fill the jars with water.’ And they filled them up to the brim. ‘Now take some out, and take it to the steward of the feast.’ So they took it. When the steward of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward of the feast called the bridegroom and said to him, ‘Every man serves the good wine first; and when men have drunk freely, then the poor wine; but you have kept the good wine until now.’ This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory; and his disciples believed in him.” John 2:1-11

The elements of the story were:

1. A son who knew his identity and his call, but was neither vain, over eager, domineering, or insensitive.
2. A very wise Mother who knew her son’s identity and call, and also knew the time had come for him to move out in public ministry. She set up a perfect opportunity for Jesus’ first “sign,” by calling attention to the impending embarrassment of the host, told the servant to do whatever he told them to do, and then exited the scene. That allowed Jesus to take charge of the situation and respond as only he knew how to respond.
3. A very sensitive and attentive disciple who observed, understood and remembered all of the subtle interaction between mother and son.

The story of the first sign at Cana in Galilee was not a “manufactured story.” A writer intent on dramatizing the divine stature of the main character, would not have portrayed the mother as so wise and powerful, nor a main character who resisted public confirmation of the very identity the writer sought to establish. A contrived story would have been betrayed by lack of detail, lack of real human emotion, and with the presence of exaggeration. In truth, Cana in Galilee provided a deep and intimate look into the character of Jesus, and into the depth of the relationship between mother and son.

Furthermore, John attached no special significance to Jesus’ first response, “*O woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come.*” It seemed only to indicate a momentary resistance to a mother, but in fact, it introduced an important theme that was repeated in 7:1-9.

“After this Jesus went about in Galilee; he would not go about in Judea, because the Jews sought to kill him. Now the Jews’ feast of Tabernacles was a hand. So his brothers said to him, ‘Leave here and go to Judea, that your disciples may see the works you are doing. For no man works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world.’ For even his brothers did not believe in him. Jesus said to them, ‘My time has not yet come, but your time is always here. The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify of it that its works are evil. Go to the feast yourselves;

I am not going up to this feast, for my time has not fully come.’ So saying, he remained in Galilee.” 7:1-9

Jesus’ brothers were intent on demeaning Jesus, and John captured their attitude with clarity. Jesus’ response, “*Go to the feast yourselves . . .*” made the whole interaction sound like a case of sibling rivalry. Like the wedding at Cana in Galilee, the focus was on the relationships. Again Jesus’, “*My time has not yet come . . .*” seemed nothing more than an impromptu comment.

The theme “My time has not come” ended in 12:20-23.

“Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, ‘Sir, we wish to see Jesus. Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew went with Philip and they told Jesus. And Jesus answered them, ‘The hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified.’”

The importance of the Greeks was accentuated by the two prior assertions that “my time has not come.” Prior to their arrival Jesus often appeared tentative, as in his hesitation to go to Lazarus when he was sick unto death, “*So when he heard that he (Lazarus) was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.*” 11:6 He appeared defensive and frustrated, as in his response to the Jews who accused him of illegally healing on the Sabbath:

“His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen; and you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe him whom he has sent. You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me; yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life. I do not receive glory from men. But I know that you have not the love of God within you. I have come in my Father’s name, and you do not receive me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive. How can you believe, who receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God? Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; it is Moses who accuses you, on whom you set your hope. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote of me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words.” 5:37-47

And he often avoided the Jews, “*Jesus therefore no longer went about openly among the Jews, but went from there to the country near the wilderness . . .*” 11:54.

Jesus knew his message was destined to expand out into the world from Jerusalem and his ministry could not be concluded until the foundation was in place for that expansion. Though he knew he would die on the cross, he could not die prematurely at the hands of a Jewish mob. That would have constituted failure. So Jesus avoided those kind of mobs, when possible. John also portrayed him as sometimes tentative, and sometimes defensive and frustrated. But after the arrival of the Greeks he moved boldly into the Passover and crucifixion.

Were John’s stories intentionally manipulated to create that thread of meaning in his Gospel? No. The arrival of the Greeks did not merit comment by any other disciple, and without the subtle shift in Jesus’ behavior that event would have had little significance. The arrival of the Greeks was important solely because it highlighted John’s attentive observation of Jesus. A Gospel writer intent on fabrication would always exaggerate the heroic. That John did not engage in fabrication, but instead noted human qualities in Jesus, authenticated his Gospel.

The question of when John’s Gospel was written must also be addressed. Biblical scholars tended to agree it was around 100 AD. The late date carried with it the implicit judgement that John lacked authenticity. The problem with that judgement, and with the Biblical scholars, was that

it derived from people accustomed to structured learning in structured environments isolated from the fluidity of an unstructured, and therefore unpredictable, experience of life. The values, self identity, and world view of such people was neither challenged nor in question. But that kind of experience of life was not even close to that of the disciples. There are and were events that completely eclipsed one's values, identity, and world view. The disciples were born and raised in a prosaic culture with minimal opportunity, and then suddenly found themselves in the presence of the Christ, who was calling them to serve in his effort to transform the world. And then the Son of God was almost as quickly crucified, risen from the dead . . . and then gone? The experience of transcendence alone would have been extremely difficult to integrate. To say nothing of the psychological impact of a personal call to serve a transcendent God, and transform the world. "Was it real?" . . . was I crazy?" . . . "I was just an ordinary Jew" . . . "did he really call me?" . . . "to change the world?" . . . "and who would listen to me anyway?" It was all wildly beyond comprehension. Any person who experienced what the disciples experienced would struggle to make sense of it . . . struggle to articulate it . . . struggle with the inadequacies of words and language. The first draft, in hind sight, would have appeared far too limited and foolishly inadequate. And so would the second . . . and the third. The writers of the New Testament struggled to such a depth with the yearning to "get the story right," they invented new words. And the invention of new words never occurred at the beginning of the task, but at the end when all previous efforts to get the story right fell short of the mark.

Such a task could only have been carried through to fruition by a sensitive, observant person who withdrew from public distractions during the period of composition, and . . . wrote . . . rewrote . . . reflected . . . prayed . . . rewrote . . . contemplated . . . let go . . . prayed . . . rewrote. Tradition held that John, after a limited period in Israel, took Mary, the mother of Jesus, to Ephesus to comply with Jesus' direction:

"When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother, 'Woman, behold, your son!' Then he said to the disciple, 'Behold, your mother!' And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home." 19:26-27

It was at Ephesus that he completed his Gospel. All of the information reported about John, all of the evidence gleaned from his Gospel, and especially the extended period of composition, authenticated his effort. He provided the most intimate, most personally revealing, and most accurate portrayal of Jesus. Even though John recalled events and words from Jesus that carried intriguing theological possibilities, they were left undeveloped. The fact was, John's temperament and approach was not the best for the more structured knowledge which was clearly an part of Jesus' teaching. Structured knowledge, however, was the focus of the three synoptic gospels.

MARK

The content of Matthew, Mark and Luke was not derived from the author's direct observation or interaction with Jesus. Each had an objective that required a structured presentation developed from an existing pool of parables, teachings, miracles, and reports of public events, which circulated informally and independently. Each developed the structured presentation of an important theme of Jesus' teaching intertwined with the story of his earthly ministry to establish the authority of their presentation, and to ensure that what they wrote was received as Jesus' teaching and not their own.

The following was postulated about Mark's Gospel:

- ◆ Mark was the first Gospel to be written.

- ◆ Mark was written before the Jewish rebellion of 66 AD.
- ◆ Mark either had no knowledge of Paul, or limited knowledge of Paul.

Mark's principal objective in writing his Gospel was a clear summary of the structured process of education and character development the disciples received from Jesus, with the intent of establishing that process as a model for the Christian community.¹

Mark achieved his purpose by devoting the first section of his Gospel (1:1 thru 8:26) to miracle stories which served to establish Jesus' identity and authority. Once Peter recognized Jesus was the Christ (8:29), Jesus immediately introduced the "Messianic Secret," by saying, "And he charged them to tell no one about him." (8:30) Jesus then withdrew from public ministry with the disciples and began the formation of their character. The introduction of the Messianic Secret and the withdrawal from public ministry was intended to be a clear statement that the process of intense character formation that the disciples were to receive must be experienced in the exact sequence set forth by Mark, and it must be experienced in its entirety. Once the disciples fully understood and accepted their call to be suffering servants, the period of secrecy ended and public ministry resumed with a grand entry into Jerusalem (11:1-11). There Jesus modeled for them his expectations of discipleship, which was, in essence, the proclamation of Jesus' authority over all things (11:11-12:44). He then issued a prophesy of the destruction of the temple (13:1-2) followed by a period of turmoil characterized by the disciples' witness to governors and kings (13:9-10), and the subsequent emergence of a new order, "*And they will see the Son of man coming in clouds with great power and glory.*" (13:26)

MATTHEW

Mark claimed no where that his Gospel was the complete story of Jesus. The manner in which he set forth his presentation on discipleship left other aspects of Jesus' teaching undeveloped, and that, in turn, created a need for another Gospel. That other Gospel was Matthew.

- ◆ Matthew was written after Mark, indeed, in reaction to Mark.
- ◆ Matthew was written before the Roman suppression of the Jewish rebellion of 66 AD.
- ◆ Matthew had some knowledge of Paul, possibly knowledge of Paul's Letter to the Galatians, probably no knowledge of Paul's letter to the Romans, and certainly no concept of the enormous success of Paul's missionary journeys.

Matthew purposed to address the following areas of Jesus' teaching that were not adequately developed by Mark:

- I. The relationship between Christianity and Israel .

¹ Refer to [The Gospel According To Mark](#) on this website for a thorough study of Mark.

II. The Kingdom of heaven, and the prescriptive behavior necessary in that new order of being.

In Mark's Gospel, Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem (11:15 thru 12:44) was short, characterized by confrontation with various Jewish religious authority figures, and ended with Jesus' prediction of the destruction of the temple (13:1-2). Since the temple was the quintessential expression of the divine authority of Israel, its destruction meant the end of that authority. That was followed by a description of the spread and ultimate triumph of the authority of Christ Jesus. Therefore, Mark portrayed an abrupt discontinuity between the end of Israel's divine authority, and the emergence of Jesus' authority.

Matthew, on the other hand, began his Gospel with the genealogy of Jesus (Matthew 1:1). The genealogy served to reveal Jesus' deep roots in Jewish history, and, in turn, set a foundation for continuity between Israel and Jesus. Matthew developed that continuity by including:

- the story of Jesus, Mary and Joseph's sojourn in Egypt (Matthew 2:12 ff), which mirrored Israel's sojourn in Egypt (Genesis 37:2 thru 50:26);
- a more complete picture of Jesus' 40 days in the wilderness after his baptism by John (Matthew 3:13ff), which mirrored Israel's 40 years in the wilderness after the covenant at Mount Sinai (Exodus 16:35 & Deuteronomy 2:7);
- and the organization of Jesus's teaching into a framework modeled after the covenant between God and Israel (Exodus).

Matthew adapted his framework for the presentation of the *Kingdom of heaven* from covenant between God and Israel as follows:

COVENANT

The Father called and empowered Moses to confront Pharaoh, lead Israel out of slavery, and constitute them as the people of God in covenant relationship with their creator. (Exodus 3:1 thru 4:17)

God made known his power and glory through Moses with the ten plagues (Exodus 7:8 thru 10:23 & 12:29-34), the Passover (Exodus 11:1 thru 12:28), the parting of the waters at the Red Sea. (Exodus 14:15-31)

The Father made miraculous provision for his people with bread from heaven (Exodus 16:4ff), quails that flew in and covered all of the Hebrew's camp (Exodus 16:13), and with water flowing out of rock (Exodus 17:6-7).

KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

The Father used the public baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist to declare Jesus' identity, "*This is my Son, the Beloved, my favor rests on him.*" (Matthew 3:17)

Jesus made known his power and glory through miraculous healing and the casting out of evil spirits.

Jesus made miraculous provision for his people with the feeding of 5000 people with five loaves of bread and two fish (Matthew 14:13-21), and the feeding of 4000 people with seven loaves of bread and a few small fish. (Matthew 15:32-39)

The Father made clear the behavior he required from his people with the *Ten Commandments* (Exodus 20:1-17).

Jesus made clear the behavior he required in the Kingdom of heaven beginning with the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:1-12), and extending through, “*So whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them . . .*” (Matthew 7:12).

The covenant included an admonition, “. . . *the Lord called to him out of the mountain, saying, ‘Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel; You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’*” (Exodus 19:3-6)

Jesus ended his teaching on the behavior he expected with the admonition, “*Everyone one then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock; and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And every one who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand; and the rains fell, and the floods came, and winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell; and great was the fall of it.*” (Matthew 7:24-27)

Though Matthew relied on the framework of the covenant to present the teaching of Jesus on the Kingdom of heaven, the content of that teaching was entirely unique. Whereas the covenant stressed obedience to laws that regulated social behavior at an external and superficial level of being, the Kingdom of heaven stressed behavior that arose from deep within, like a *mustard seed*, and gradually grew in strength and expansiveness until capable of providing protection and provision for many.

“*The Kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.*” (Matthew 13:31-32)

Matthew began the teaching on the Kingdom of heaven with the words of John the Baptist:

“*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*” Matthew 3:2

John the Baptist’s call for repentance was the Greek word *meta-noia*², which meant a complete change in the direction of one’s life, begun from within and so radical in scope as to only be possible by a visitation of Holy Spirit such as occurred in baptism. Matthew followed John’s call for radical change with the *Sermon on the Mount*, Kingdom behavior must originate within.

“*Blessed are the poor in spirit . . .*”

“*Blessed are those who mourn . . .*”

“*Blessed are the meek . . .*”

“*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness . . .*”

²Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Volume IV, Gerhard Kittel, Ed., WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, pages 975 thru 1006.

“Blessed are the merciful . . .”

“Blessed are the pure in heart . . .”

“Blessed are the peacemakers . . .”

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake . . .”

“Blessed are you when men revile you . . .”

“You are the salt of the earth . . .” Matthew 5:3ff

The inner qualities of character set forth in the *Sermon on the Mount*, began invisibly like salt in the bread dough, yet were essential for the transformation of life. The *kingdom of heaven* began when the first follower bonded to Jesus and appropriated one or more of those qualities into themselves. Matthew, however, did not jump directly from invisible inner qualities to grand provision. Rather he made it very clear there was a period of growth sustained by constant nurture of that invisible inner being.

“Beware of practicing your piety before men in order to be seen by them . . . when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” Matthew 6:1-2

“. . . when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” Matthew 6:6

“. . . when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by men but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” Matthew 6:17-18

The continued growth of the *mustard seed* required a continued influx of *daily bread*, or more accurately, a daily provision of the Holy Spirit necessary for the nurture of inner qualities of character. The growth of the *tree*, and the growth of the kingdom, likewise required an outward reach to the sun . . . an outward expression of an inner root of being. That outward expression was communicated through a call for radical obedience.

“For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” Matthew 5:18-20

“You have heard that it was said to the men of old, ‘You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgement; whoever insults his brother shall be liable to council, and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be liable to the hell of fire.” Matthew 5:21-22

“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, Do not resist one who is evil. But if any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also; and if any one would sue you and take you coat, let him have your cloak as well; and if any one forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to him who begs from you, and do not refuse

him who would borrow from you.” Matthew 5:38-42

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven . . .” Matthew 5:43-45.

Growth in the Kingdom, and growth of the Kingdom, depended upon a synthesis of inner nurture and outward behavior.

“Either make the tree good, and its fruit good; or make the tree bad, and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit . . . For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings forth evil.” (Matthew 12:33-35)

Matthew also sought to establish that the teaching on the Kingdom of heaven must not be allowed to fragment into separate events and teachings, but must be embraced in its entirety. He accomplished that goal by including the incident where the disciples of John the Baptist visited Jesus:

“Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, ‘Why do we and the Pharisees fast,’ but your disciples do not fast?’ And Jesus said to them, “Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come, when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.” (Matthew 9:14-15)

Jesus, of course, had already admonished his followers to “*fast in secret*,” as noted above. When queried by John’s disciples he did not explain that requirement, but rebuffed them. Jesus said in effect, “to understand the Kingdom and understand the behavior I expect from you, you must follow me and receive all of my teaching.”

Matthew organized Jesus’ teaching around the framework of the covenant to affirm the continuity between Israel and Jesus, and to capitalize on the understanding of the covenant extant in the Jewish culture. New believers and nay sayers alike understood clearly that following Jesus meant the embrace of a new covenant. Indeed, both Isaiah and Jeremiah proclaimed the end of the Covenant of Sinai and the coming of a new covenant. The words of Jeremiah perfectly anticipated the Kingdom of heaven as set forth in Matthew

“Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord; I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each man teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.” (Jeremiah 31:31-34)

That the teaching of Jesus on the Kingdom of heaven established a set a values intended to generate a Christian culture was not diminished by the statement by Jesus which appeared to indicate the Kingdom was only a “heavenly” reality.

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and

he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left. Then the King will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.' (Matthew 25:31:34)

The concept that the Kingdom of heaven would only achieve full expression in “another world,” was fully consistent the structure of all value systems which generated a culture significant enough to be remembered by history. Each such culture, including all cultures of the modern period, were founded on core beliefs and ideals embraced as absolute truth by that culture. Absolute core values inevitably dictated behavior essential for the consistent and effective implementation of those values, and each system promised an idyllic, heavenly result for the perfect implementation of the prescribed behavior.³ Even the modern American secular culture promised an idyllic world if all individuals were solely responsible for their own well-being, and its definition of the values of individual right, equality, democracy, capitalism, and competition were embraced by all.

LUKE

Mark, Matthew, and John were critically important contributions to the Christian community, and may well have remained the essential core of Christian understanding except for three very significant developments.

4. The Roman suppression of the Jewish Rebellion begun in 66 AD, which resulted in the complete destruction of the temple in 70 AD by the Romans.
5. Awareness of the stunning success of Paul's missionary journeys had permeated Christianity.
6. Knowledge of Paul's letter to the Romans spread throughout much of Christendom.

Jesus had said the temple would be destroyed (Mark 13:1ff, Matthew 24:1ff, John 2:18ff), but John made it very clear that Jesus spoke of his own body.

“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” The Jews then said, ‘It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?’ But he spoke of the temple of his body.”

Jesus' statement that the *temple* of his body would be raised up in three days went beyond a mere prediction of the resurrection. The Jewish *temple* had been the place where God was resident, and therefore the quintessential symbol of Israel's divine authority. By referring to his body as the *temple*, Jesus said God is resident in me, therefore the authority of God is with me. The destruction of the temple in Mark and Matthew was a more abstract affirmation of the transfer of divine authority from Israel to Jesus. Matthew, of course, went to great pains to clarify that transfer of divine authority was the new covenant, was deeply rooted in Jewish history, and was a continuation of that history. The literal destruction of the temple in 70 AD threatened that presentation of Jesus's teaching, and appeared to validate the more abrupt discontinuity between Israel and Jesus implied in Mark's Gospel.

³ Refer to “a vision” and the section “judging the nations,” on this Website.

The issue of discontinuity between Israel and Jesus was further exacerbated by Paul. Paul had been a student of the respected rabbi, Gamaliel, was “. . . *educated according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers . . .*” (Acts 22:3), and became a Pharisee (Acts 23:6). Pharisee was the title for a Jewish layperson who took a public vow to uphold the Jewish law perfectly.⁴ That solemn commitment to Jewish law only caused Paul to war against God by warring against, and killing Christians. Indeed, Paul was on his way to Damascus to persecute Christians (Acts 9:1ff) when he experienced Christ’s transcendence. He thereafter became a most inspired disciple. Paul’s persecution of Christians, abruptly followed by his inspired missionary zeal, dramatized the discontinuity between the divine authority of Israel and the divine authority of Jesus. Furthermore, Paul’s experience with Christ exactly fit the model for discipleship development set forth in the Gospel of Mark.⁵

- I. Jesus revealed his transcendent glory to Paul. (Act 9:1ff)
 - A. *“Suddenly, while he was traveling to Damascus and just before he reached the city, there came a light from heaven all around him. He fell to the ground, and then he heard a voice saying, ‘Saul, why are you persecuting me?’ ‘Who are you, Lord?’ he asked, and the voice answered, ‘I am Jesus, and you are persecuting me. Get up now and go into the city, and you will be told what you have to do.’”*
- II. Jesus established an intimate and empowering relationship with him.
 - A. *“For several days he was with the disciples in Damascus. And in the synagogues immediately he proclaimed Jesus, saying, ‘He is the Son of God.’ All who heard him were amazed . . . ”* (Acts 9:20-21)
 - B. *‘And God did extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so remarkable were the miracles worked by God at Paul’s hands that handkerchiefs or aprons were carried away from his body to the sick, and diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them.’* (Acts 19:11-12)
- III. Paul went through a vain period during which he was certain he was the most important disciple.
 - A. *“For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not man’s gospel. For I did not receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ. . . . But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order 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 . . . ”* (Galatians 1:11ff)
- IV. Paul matured into a highly effective suffering servant in the Lord’s kingdom.
 - A. *“First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world. For God is my witness, who I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God’s will I may now at last succeed in coming to you. For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you, that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith, both yours and mine.”* (Romans 1:8-12)

⁴ Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus, Joachim Jeremias, Fortress Press, Philadelphia 1962, pages 246-267.

⁵ Refer to Mark’s Gospel on this Website.

The confluence between Paul's experience and Mark's presentation on discipleship development confirmed Paul's authority as impeccable. There was also confluence between Mark's Gospel and Paul's experience on the discontinuity between the cessation of Israel's divine authority and the commencement of the divine authority of Jesus. Together they posed a problem for the Christian community. On one hand Paul could not be dismissed. On the other hand he appeared to undermine the teaching of Jesus as presented in Matthew on the continuity between Israel and Jesus, and the Kingdom of heaven as the new covenant.

The problem was further complicated by Paul's letter to the Romans. First, it was brilliant to the point of being mesmerizing. Second, rather than resolve the appearance of discontinuity between Israel and Jesus, it offered a sound theological explanation for that discontinuity. The resultant doctrine of "salvation by faith," was really a theological version of Paul's personal experience. He was not saved by his zealous commitment to the law, but only by the free gift of faith given him by Christ on the road to Damascus. Paul, in turn, made that gift of faith available to all. It was a much more appealing and exciting version of Christianity than the radical obedience demanded in Matthew.

There was a very real possibility of a schism in Christianity . . . Paul's Christianity, and the Christianity of the original twelve disciples. It was Luke's call to ensure that did not happen. It was therefore stipulated that the Gospel of Luke was:

1. Written after The Gospel of Matthew, and after Paul's letter to the Romans.
2. Written after Paul's martyrdom.
3. Written after the destruction of the temple in 70 AD.
4. Written after knowledge of the stunning success of Paul's missionary journeys had spread throughout Christendom.

Consideration of Luke's Gospel must include Acts because Luke began both his Gospel and Acts with an address to Theophilus:

“. . . it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus . . .” (Luke 1:3)

“In the First Book (The Gospel of Luke), O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commandment through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.” (Acts 1:1-2)

The principal element in the structure of Luke's Gospel was a steady and unrelenting progression of Jesus' earthly ministry from Galilee to crucifixion in Jerusalem. Acts addressed the steady and unrelenting expansion of Christianity out from Jerusalem to the world. The fact that Mark, Matthew and John portrayed Jesus as entering and leaving Jerusalem a number of times did not challenge Luke's thesis, because his focus was not the physical movements of Jesus. Rather his intent was to establish a steady progression in the comprehension of Jesus' divine authority vis-a-vis Israel. Jesus' divine authority threatened Israel, and Israel's full comprehension of that threat led to the crucifixion. The resurrection was confirmation that God the Father had, indeed, transferred all authority over heaven and earth to his Son.

Luke's focus on Jesus' authority in his Gospel allowed him to transfer that focus over to Acts. So Acts became the story of the expansion of Jesus' divine authority out from Jerusalem to the world.

Least we conclude that Luke’s model of expansion was his own theological construction, we must remember that same model was implicit in John.⁶ Though the structured reasoning necessary to develop that implicit model was not John’s forte, it was Luke’s.

Paul’s doctrine of “justification by faith” implicit in Paul’s experience of Christ, and developed in his letter to the Romans (Romans 2:1 thru 8:39), focused on that initial experience of conversation and belief referred to as *meta-noia* by Matthew.⁷ Though Matthew, and the other Gospel writers, understood that kind of dramatic change, it got scant attention from them. The reason was clear. All of the disciples other than Paul, and the collection of stories about Jesus’ ministry used by Mark and Matthew, developed over a period of several years. It was only after some period of time that at least some of the disciples realized Jesus was the Christ. It was not until after the resurrection they clearly understood who he was, and the full importance of everything he did and said. Consequently, the events freshest in their minds were the most recent, and therefore all of the Gospels were in close agreement in their portrayal of the passion, crucifixion and resurrection. Likewise, they were most divergent in their portrayal of the earliest events of Jesus’ life and ministry. The full emotional impact of their initial bonding to Jesus, that caused them to drop everything and follow him, was overshadowed by the many powerful experiences that followed. Nevertheless, that initial experience of conversation . . . of *meta-noia* . . . of *justification by faith*, was the critically important point of beginning of life in Christ, and the critically important point of beginning of the *Kingdom of heaven*.⁸ The conversion of Paul, and the ministry of Paul, was essential to the expansion of the authority of Christ Jesus out into the world because he understood, and could powerfully communicate, that initial experience. Luke understood the power and importance of Paul’s ministry on that point. Luke also understood Paul’s message was not a complete understanding of Christianity. The prescriptive behavior necessary for the construction of the *Kingdom of heaven*, was also essential. But the strong admonitions and calls for radical obedience included by Matthew were a difficult sell to gentiles. Luke therefore, resolved to present the softer, gentler side of Christ, and clarify Paul’s commitment to teamwork, cooperation, and respect for the other disciples.

Luke tempered Matthew with the following:

MATTHEW	LUKE
<i>“Blessed are the poor in spirit. . .”</i> 5:3	<i>“Blessed are the poor. . .”</i> 6:20
<i>“Blessed are the meek . . .”</i> 5:5 ⁹	Omitted
<i>“Blessed are the merciful . . .”</i> 5:7	Omitted
<i>“Blessed are the pure in heart . . .”</i> 5:8	Omitted
<i>“Blessed are the peacemakers . . .”</i> 5:9	Omitted
<i>“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake . . .”</i> 5:10	Omitted

⁶ See pages 2-3 of this essay.

⁷ See page 7 of this essay.

⁸ See [Discerning the Need for God in Young Men](#) on this Website.

⁹ The latest use of “meek” in the Old Testament was Zeph 2:3 & 3:12ff, where it meant “those who kept the requirements of God, hence those who despite the outward appearance of lowliness were conscious of God’s activity in human affairs, and could accept their condition and/or circumstances without complaint or anger. The Greek root was associated with the test of a war horse wherein a flaming torch could be passed under the belly without the horse flinching.

<i>"You are the salt of the earth . . ." 5:13</i>	<i>"Salt is a good thing . . ." 14:34</i>
<i>"You are the light of the world . . ." 5:14</i>	<i>"No one after lighting a lamp puts it in a cellar or under a bushel, but on a stand . . ." 11:33</i>
<i>"Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them." 5:17</i>	Omitted
<i>"For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished." 5:18</i>	Omitted
<i>"You have heard that it was said to the men of old, 'You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgement.' But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother shall be liable to the council, and whoever says, 'You fool! Shall be liable to the hell of fire.'" 5:21-22</i>	Omitted
<i>"But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be in secret . . ." 6:3-4</i>	Omitted
<i>"But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret . . ." 6:6</i>	Omitted

Included by Luke but omitted by Matthew:

". . . he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor?' Jesus replied, 'A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion, and went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring oil and wine; then he set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' 'Which of these three, do your think, proved neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?' He said, 'The one who showed mercy on him.' And Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise.'" 10:29-37

"Now as they went on their way, he entered a village, and a woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with

much serving; and she went to him and said, 'Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me.' But the Lord answered her, 'Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things; one thing is needful, Mary has chose the good portion, which shall not be taken away from her.'" 10:38-42

"Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. And there was a woman who had had a spirit of infirmity for eighteen years; she was bent over and could not fully straighten herself. And when Jesus saw her, he called her and said to her, 'Woman, you are freed from your infirmity.' And he laid his hands upon her, and immediately she was made straight, and she praised God. But the ruler of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, said to the people, 'There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day.' The Lord answered him, 'You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his ass from the manger, and lead it away to water it? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?' As he said this, all his adversaries were put to shame; and all the people rejoiced at all the glorious things that were done by him." 13:10-17

"And he said, 'There was a man who had two sons; and the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that falls to me.' And he divided his living between them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took his journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in loose living. And when he had spent everything, a great famine arose in that country, and he began to be in want. So he went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would gladly have fed on the pods that the swine ate; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants.' And he arose and came to his father. But while he was yet at a great distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet, and bring the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and make merry; for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.'" 15:11-31

"He entered Jericho and was passing through. And there was a man named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector, and rich. And he sought to see who Jesus was, but could not, on account of the crowd, because he was small of stature. So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, 'Zacchaeus, make haste and come down; for I must stay at your house today.' So he made haste and came down, and received him joyfully. And when they saw it they all murmured, 'He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.' And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, 'Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have defrauded any one of anything, I restore it fourfold.' And Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost.'" 19:1-10

In addition to having made known the kinder, gentler side of Jesus, Luke knit Paul into the

Christian community which had arisen around the other disciples with his detailed account in Acts, of the experience of those disciples after the resurrection, and of the interaction between Paul and that community. He specifically included Peter's vision at Jaffa which anticipated Paul's teaching on the law.

"The next day, as they were on their journey and coming near the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour. And he became hungry and desired something to eat; but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance and saw the heaven opened, and something descending, like a great sheet, let down by four corners upon the earth. In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. And there came a voice to him, 'Rise, Peter; kill and eat.' But Peter said, 'No, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.' And the voice came to him again a second time, 'What God has cleansed, you must not call common.' This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven."

"Now while Peter was inwardly perplexed as to what the vision which he had seen might mean, behold, the men that were sent by Cornelius, having made inquiry for Simon's house, stood before the gate and called out to ask whether Simon who was called Peter was lodging there. And while Peter was pondering the vision, the Spirit said to him, 'Behold, three men are looking for you. Rise and go down, and accompany them without hesitation; for I have sent them.' And Peter went down to the men and said, 'I am the one you are looking for; what is the reason for your coming?' And they said, 'Cornelius, a Centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house, and to hear what you have to say.' So he called them in to be his guests."

"The next day he rose and went off with them, and some of the brethren from Joppa accompanied him. And on the following day they entered Caesarea's. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his kinsmen and close friends. When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him. But Peter lifted him up, saying, 'Stand up; I too am a man.' And as he talked with him, he went in and found many persons gathered; and he said to them, 'You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit any one of another nation; but God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without objection. I ask then why you sent for me.'"

"And Cornelius said, 'Four days ago, about this hour, I was keeping the ninth hour of prayer in my house; and behold, a man stood before me in bright apparel, saying, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon who is called Peter; he is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the seaside.' So I sent to you at once, and you have been kind enough to come. Now therefore we are all here present in the sight of God, to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord.'"

"And Peter opened his mouth and said; 'Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation any one who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. You know the word which he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace by Jesus Christ (he is the Lord of all) . . ." (Acts 10:9 thru 10:36).

Luke also specifically included those events which illustrated Paul's concessions to the experiences and understanding of the other disciples.

“After these days we made ready and went up to Jerusalem. And some of the disciples from Caesarea went with us, bringing us to the house of Mnason of Cyprus, an early disciple, with whom we should lodge.”

“When we had come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. On the following day Paul went in with us to James; and all the elders were present. After greeting them, he related one by one the things that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. And when they heard it, they glorified God. And they said to him, ‘You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed; they are all zealous for the law, and they have been told about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or observe the customs.’”

“What then is to be done; They will certainly hear that you have come. Do therefore what we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow; take these men and purify yourself along with them and pay their expenses, so that they may shave their heads. Thus all will know that there is nothing in what they have been told about you but that you yourself live in observance of the law. But as for the Gentiles who have believed, we have sent a letter with our judgment that they should abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from unchastity.’ Then Paul took the men, and the next day he purified himself with them and went into the temple, to give notice when the days of purification would be fulfilled and the offering presented for every one of them.” (Acts 21:15-26)

Conclusions

Luke did succeed in integrating Paul into one Christendom. His contribution was an addition to the core of Christian understanding, which included the Gospels of Mark and Matthew, Paul’s letter to the Romans, the Gospel of Luke, and then the Gospel of John. Each of those contributions provided an essential segment of Jesus’ life and/or teaching, but would not have been complete nor effective without the whole. It was a remarkable example of inspired collegiality, and it established Christ’s intended method of operation in teaching his people, and for making his will known. That model of delegated collegial authority was essential to the future of Christianity. Though it was evident and effective during the period of the Apostolic Fathers, it was completely forgotten by the imperial Church of the Middle Ages, and not remembered by the institutional churches spawned by the Reformation.¹⁰ Nevertheless, it remained the prescribed model for the future of Christianity. However, the failure of collegiality was preceded by the failure to understand the Gospel of Mark. Apostolic authority was established by Christ alone, and he established that authority according to a predetermined process experienced by the original apostles and fully articulated in Mark’s Gospel. No human, even an existing apostle, and no group of humans, even all of the original apostles, had the authority to designate another apostle.

The problem was not assuaged by the Reformation. Martin Luther had focused on Paul’s doctrine of salvation by faith,¹¹ as set forth in his Letter to the Galatians and his Letter to the Romans. That was a meaningful counterpoint to the Christendom of the High Middle Ages, which had become enveloped in a grim obsession with sin. The renewed understanding of Paul’s doctrine created a ground-swell of excitement much like it had created during Paul’s earlier missionary journeys.

¹⁰ See [A Treatise on Christian Authority](#), on this Website.

¹¹ [Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians](#), Martin Luther, 1535.

But the cohesive understanding of Christianity expressed through the integration of Mark, Matthew, Paul's letter to the Romans, Luke and then John, had become fragmented. Luther did not understand the Gospel of Mark and did not understand the structure and process of the Kingdom of heaven. Consequently, the Reformation lacked the inner strength and discipline necessary to generate a Christ dominated cultural process known as the "*Kingdom of heaven*." Rather, the Protestant denominations spawned by the Reformation remained subordinate to the secular culture within which they existed.

The Catholic Church fared no better. It had been the principal force in the construction of Western Civilization, but it had abdicated its responsibility for the *Kingdom of heaven*, and turned control over to the "divine right of kings."¹² Those kings soon eclipsed the Church in power and authority. First the Church was relegated to enabling empire through its missionary outreach, and then to the cultural side-lines as it watched the once proud kingdoms of Western Civilization slowly self-destruct.

The informal gathering of Christ's people, referred to by Matthew as the *ek-klesia*,¹³ must never forget the power and authority of that initial experience of bonding to Christ, whether termed *meta-noia* or *salvation by faith*. That initial experience was the foundation from which all inspired behavior derived.¹⁴ But the initial experience was just that . . . an initial experience, and it was only confirmed by the appropriation of a disciplined and holy life of service.

The *ek-klesia* must never forget the Gospel of Mark, and the clear process through which Christ forms the character of those he has called as Apostles. Likewise, the *ek-klesia* must never forget the intimate picture of Christ in the Gospel of John, nor the inspired collegiality that produced the core knowledge of Christendom, nor the bold missionary journeys of Paul. And most important for this age, the *ek-klesia* must never forget the call to stand before kings, presidents, and prime ministers, to bear witness to the *Kingdom of heaven*.

¹² See [A Treatise on Institutional Authority in Christianity](#), on this Website.

¹³ Ibid, page 1.

¹⁴ See [Discerning the Need for God in Young Men](#), on this Website.