

WE ARE SAVED BY GOD'S GREAT GRACE, NOT BY THE LAW. Rev.22v14.

In Rev.22v14., "Blessed are those who do his commandments," is taken by some to mean a return to the rigors and bondage of the Law. However, there is good evidence that this verse should read, "Blessed are those who wash their robes."

The evidence that "blessed are those who wash their robes is the correct reading in Rev.22v14.

The Critical Texts, Aleph and Codex A; about 15 minuscules, including 1006, 2020, 2053, the Old Latin ar, c, dem, div, haf; the Vulgate; the Coptic Sahidic; the Ethiopic; Athanasius; Fulgentius; Aspringius; Ps-Ambrose, and Haymo, read, "Blessed are those who wash their robes;" "Makarion hoi plunontes tas stolas auton;" "plunontes is the present active participle of "pluno" "to wash;" the same verb that is used with "stolas" in Rev.7v14.. In Rev.3v4. the negative statement occurs and Jesus says that only few in Sardis had white garments, the rest had defiled garments, "defiled," is "emolunan," the first aorist active indicative of "moluno," "to smear over as with mud or filth, to make foul, to soil, to pollute." See 1Cor.8v7. Compare Rev.14v4.

The United Bible Societies Translator Handbook follows, "those who wash their robes," "hoi 3588, plunontes 4150, tas 3588, stolas 4749, auton" 846. "Plunontes" is the present active participle of "pluno" 4150, to "plunge," i.e. to wash: with reference to clothing, and figuratively here, of those who sins are regarded by God as washed away through Christ's atoning blood. **See Rev.7v14.**, for this same verb with "stolas" 4749. **See also 1Cor.6v11.**, "And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God." (NKJ)

In Rev. 22v14. "Blessed are those who wash their robes," is the translation followed by, The New American Standard, and Update. The New International Version. The Revised Standard Version. Today's English Version. Darby's Translation. And The New Living Translation. The American Standard Version, reads, "Blessed are they that wash their robes."

We read in Rev.7v14., "They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." This is a way of proclaiming the fact of our purification from sin through the atoning death and shed blood of Jesus. "And they washed, is "kai eplunan," the aorist active indicative of "pluno" 4150, to wash, it only occurs in the New Testament in Lk.5v2. Rev.7v14. and 22v14.. "Made them white," is "eleukanan," the aorist active indicative of "leukaino" 3021, to whiten. The aorist tenses looks back to the time on earth, when they were cleansed by faith in Jesus and His atoning shed blood.. See Heb.9v14., "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God." (KJV). See also 1Jn.1v7. "But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin." (NKJ).

An examination of the Greek text of Revelation makes one feel that Satan has made a determined assault upon its Greek text through biased and conceited people, or people with a theological axe to grind, who thought that they knew better than God, what the text should be. There seems to be a definite attack on the washing in Christ's blood. This is seen at the start of Revelation in Rev.1v5., which reads, "From Jesus Christ, ----who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood." (NKJ). Here the majority of manuscripts read "washed us from," "apo;" the Critical Texts read "loosed us out of," "ek." "Washed us from our sins in His own blood," makes much better sense and follows the language and theme of Revelation more accurately than, "loosed us out of our sins by His blood." The washing white of robes in the blood of the Lamb is referred to in Rev.7v14.; and in Rev.5v9.; we are purchased to God with the precious blood of Jesus. 1Pet.1v18,19. Rev.12v11.

Burgon was one of the greatest textual scholars of all time, and on page B-29 of "Unholy Hands On The Bible," a compilation of Burgon's works, the following comment is made on Rev.1v5., in favour of the A.V. reading "washed."

"The beautiful expression which has found its way into so many tender passages relating to Christian devotion, 'Who has washed us from our sins in His own blood' has been replaced in many critical editions by 'Who has loosed us from our sins by His blood.' In early times a purist scribe, who had a dislike of anything that savoured of provincial retention of Aeolian or Dorian pronunciations, wrote from unconscious bias 'u' for 'ou', thereby transcribing 'lusanti' instead of the correct 'lousanti' (unless he were not a Greek scholar enough to understand the difference). And he was followed by others, especially those who, whether from their own prejudices or due to sympathy with the scruples of other people, but in any case under the influence of a slavish literalism, hesitated about a passage in which they did not rise to the precious meaning really conveyed in it. So we find the three uncials which are nearest the point of corruption adopt it, and they are followed by nine cursives, the Harkleian Syriac, and the Armenian versions. On the other side are two uncials B/2 of the eighth century and P of the ninth, and the Vulgate, Bohairic, Ethiopic versions - and what is most important - all the other cursives." End of quote.

The textual evidence for "Blessed are they that do His commandments," in Rev.22v14.

In Rev.22v14. The Textus Receptus, Authorised Version, most minuscules, the Old Latin gig, the Syrian Philoxenian and Harklean, the Coptic Bohairic, Tertullian, and Hodges and Farstad, read, "Blessed are they that

do His commandments;" "Makaríoi hoi poiountes tas entolas autou;" "poiountes," the nominative plural masculine present active participle of "poieo," "to do." So there is considerable evidence for the reading "do His commandments," However, The United Bible Societies, "A Textual Commentary On The Greek New Testament," edited by Bruce M. Metzger, states that the reading, in Rev.22v14., "Blessed are those who do His commandments," "**appears to be a scribal emendation,**" because "**the prepossessions of the scribes, would have caused them to favour this reading,**" for elsewhere the author uses the expression "**terein tas entolas**" (Rev.12v17; 14v12)."Quote ends. This means that the scribe's prejudiced mindsets caused them to alter the text.

In Rev.12v17. "And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and went off to make war with the rest of her offspring ("sperma" 4690, something sown, a seed, offspring; remnant), who keep ("tereo" 5083, to attend to carefully, to take care of, to guard, to observe) the commandments of God, and hold fast to ("echo" 2192, to have, to possess, to hold fast, to adhere or cling to) the testimony of Jesus." This text reveals to us Antichrist's ferocious warfare ("polemos" 4171) against godly Jews and Christians, who stand true to God, and who he tries to murder, but God protects many of His saints. Rev.12v6,14.

In Rev.14v12."Here is the endurance of the saints; here are those who keep ("tereo" 5083, again) the commandments of God, and the faith in Jesus. "Endurance," is "hupomone" 5281, steadfastness, constancy, brave endurance, and perseverance, even in the greatest trials and sufferings. God reveals in advance the constancy and brave endurance that saintly Jews as well as Christians will manifest in their sufferings at the hands of Antichrist, towards the end of the Great Tribulation, and commends them for it. Robertson says it should read, "The faith **in** Jesus" (objective genitive) as in Rev.2v13. Mark.11v22. James.2v1."

These texts certainly cannot mean that Christians should keep the Law to be saved, for the New Testament is full of warnings against the teaching of the Judaizers, who caused havoc in the Church. Some scholars, who appear to have missed the prophetic significance of Rev.12v17. and 14v12., say they could simply be stating that we must obey God's commandment to believe in Jesus, and love one another. Although this is not the basic meaning here, it is a valid New Testament truth, for Jesus said, in **John.6v29.**, "This is the work of God, **that you believe in Him** whom He sent." John also states in **1John.3v23.**, "And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment." John again writes in **1John.3v11.**, "For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another." **Jesus said in John.14v21,23,24.**, "He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, **and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.**" v23 --"If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, **and We will come to him and make Our home with him.** v24 "He who does not love Me does not keep My words." **Note also John.13v34.**, "**A new commandment I give unto you, That you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.**" **Note John.15v12,17.**, "**This is my commandment, That you love one another, as I have loved you.** v17 **These things I command you, that you love one another.**" **Paul states in Rom.13v8-10.**, "Owe no one anything except to love one another, **for he who loves another has fulfilled the law.** v9 For the commandments ----are all summed up in this saying, namely, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." v10 **Love does no harm to a neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilment of the law.**" See also 1Thes.4v9., 1Pet.1v22. 2John.1v5.

See 1Jn.4v7-12., "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. v8 **The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.** v9 By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. v10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. v11 **Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.** v12 **No one has beheld God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us.**" Paul states in **Rom.3v31.** "Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law." Faith in Jesus establishes the moral Law of God. It is the ceremonial laws and circumcision that are now negated. **Col.2v14-17.** Paul states in **1Cor.7v18.**, "**Is any called in uncircumcision? let him not be circumcised.**"

The Judaizers caused havoc in the Early Church. We read in **Acts15v1,5.**, "And certain men which came down from Judea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. v5 ---there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses." This problem was brought to and discussed by the apostles and elders and all the Jerusalem church. After much discussion, James, the brother of our Lord, gave the counsel that settled the issue. We read in Acts.15v24,28,29. "Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, 'You must be circumcised and keep the law'-- to whom we gave no such commandment--v28 For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: v29 that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.

Paul states that Christians who go back and try to be justified by Law are under a curse, and are severed from Christ.

We read in Gal.1v8,9. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that

which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. v9 As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed. **Paul affirms in Gal.5v4., You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.** Paul declares in Gal.2v16,20,21., **"Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ,** even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: **for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified."** v20 **I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.** v21 **I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.**

As Jesus said in **John.5v45.**, the Law of Moses will always accuse us when we fail, the Gospel forgives and liberates. The Scripture states that our "right" ("exousia" 1849, authority) to eat of the tree of life, and to enter the heavenly city, is not due to our keeping of the commandments, or our works, or merits, but through God's great grace, and the cleansing blood of Jesus.

THE DECREES ("ta dogmata") OF THE "COUNCIL" OF JERUSALEM.

In Acts.16v4., the decisions of the churches at Jerusalem are called, "the decrees," "ta dogmata," meaning decisions, or decrees, from "dokeo," to give an opinion. Many church leaders believe that councils of ministers should make decisions for their churches, and they quote "The Council of Jerusalem" to prove their point. However, if we examine Acts.15, we will find that it gives no authority for councils, or synods composed of ministers, or representatives, to autocratically decide the policies of their churches. Dean Farrar writes on page 243 of his, "The Life and Letters of St. Paul:" "It is only by an unwarrantable extension of terms that the meeting of the Church of Jerusalem can be called a 'Council,' -- It was not a convention of ordained delegates, but a meeting of the entire Church of Jerusalem to receive a deputation from the Church of Antioch."

1. Notice who gathered at Jerusalem and why.

God had opened "a door of faith" to the Gentiles, but Satan tried to destroy the basic and essential truth of justification by faith, through those who had joined Christ's Church. Satan had tried to destroy the Church by persecution, but his attack by intrigue from within was far more deadly and dangerous, and but for the apostle Paul would undoubtedly have succeeded. Certain "false brethren" from Judea tried to close "the door of faith," and bring the lovely converts at Antioch into the bondage of their own belief, they demanded obedience to the Law of Moses, instead of proclaiming the glorious liberty and freedom of the New Covenant. These Judaizers refused to accept the obvious implication of God's dealing with Cornelius and his friends. Satan through them tried to destroy the Church with the God-given tradition of the Old Covenant. The Judaizers blindly refused to see that Christ had fulfilled the Law with its types and prophecies, so the type was no longer necessary; they had Christ the living fulfilment of the type, not the shadow. Heb.8v1-13. 9v15,23,24. 10v8,9.

The Judaizers inferred that the Gentile Christians were not only inferior to unregenerate Jews, they systematically taught that Gentile converts had to be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses, or they could not be saved. Acts.15v1,5. "Except," is "ean me." In Acts.15v1., the word "taught," is "edidaskon," the imperfect active of "didasko," to teach, to teach or speak in a public assembly, the imperfect shows that they began to teach and kept it up. The Judaizers made a systematic attempt to bring the converts at Antioch into legalism, they practised a determined espionage and proud indoctrination of these lovely young converts. Antioch had proved its love and friendship with the church at Jerusalem with a very generous gift. Acts.11v30.

These Gentiles' hearts burned with love for Christ and their Jewish brethren in Christ, Paul was determined that this was not going to be extinguished by legal bondage. Paul and Barnabus challenged these Judaizers, "they had no small dissension and disputation with them," Acts.15v2., the word for "dissension" is "staseos," which means "insurrection" or "violent disruption;" the word for "disputation," is "zeteseos," which means dispute or discussion. It was a prolonged row, and these Judaizers refused to accept the revelation of the Church age as preached by Paul, Satan made a determined attempt to destroy the New Covenant truth through these Judaizers. Gal.5v1-4. Even the combined mighty ministries and Scriptural knowledge of Paul and Barnabus failed to convince these self-appointed guides of Christ's Church of the error of their ways. The church at Antioch appointed Paul and Barnabus and some others to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders to settle this matter.

On their journey to Jerusalem Paul and Barnabus reported to the churches of Phoenicia and Samaria how the Gentiles had turned to God, and their news was received with great joy and praise. At Jerusalem Paul and Barnabus again "declared all things that God had done with them." Acts.15v3,4. After the welcome of the Jerusalem Church and the elders and apostles, battle is joined, the Christian Pharisees insist that these Gentile converts "must," "dei," be circumcised and charged to keep the Law of Moses. They evidently were still as narrow in their outlook as when they challenged Peter over his preaching to the Gentiles in the home of Cornelius. Acts.15v5. with 11v2-18.

We read in Acts.15v24., that the Judaizers from the Jerusalem Church had greatly troubled and subverted the church at Antioch. "Troubled," is "etaraxan," the aorist of "tarasso," to agitate, to disturb, to throw into confusion, to make the heart palpitate. Jn.14v1,27. "Subverting," is "anaskeuazontes," the present participle of "anaskeuazo," to plunder, ravage, pervert, and destroy," it has the thought of the reversal of good that had been done, or the tearing down of what had been built, and is used to describe the plundering of a town. The

idea of deciding the matter with the church at Jerusalem, came from the church at Antioch, not from the church at Jerusalem, and so all the Jerusalem church, and representatives of the Antioch church, gathered to discuss the problem. The Judaizers had greatly damaged the church at Antioch, and were severely censured for it. It seems the Judaizers either withdrew, or submitted to the decision for a while, whatever they did at this point, they later certainly started up their divisive and satanically inspired activities again.

This conference at Jerusalem was not a conference of ministers from many churches, but appointed representatives of the church at Antioch, meeting the whole church of Jerusalem. This is the only meeting of this kind recorded in the New Testament, even though, by modern standards, many more would have been thought necessary, and held on a regular basis. It was a meeting to decide the answer to a fundamental doctrinal point. The decision had consequences for the Church universal, for it decided whether the Church and Gentile believers were to keep the Jewish Law, or be separate from Judaism.

When Christian leaders insist that they have the right to lead and decide matters on their own, they are departing from New Testament principles, and in particular Acts.15v22,25., where we see that "the whole church" was involved and of "one accord" in this critical decision. The Holy Spirit confirmed their decision, "It seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us." Acts.15v28.

N. B. It is obvious that the first gathering at Jerusalem in Acts.15v4. was adjourned, for 15v6., speaks of another gathering. It is between these two gatherings that the private conferences of Gal.2v1-10. undoubtedly took place. Dean Farrar writes: "I have here assumed without hesitation that the visit to Jerusalem of Gal.2v1-10., though here mentioned as though it were a second visit, was identical with that of Acts.15., and therefore was in reality his third visit." End of quote.

Farrar then gives details of Paul's five visits to Jerusalem, which I have described as follows. in my own words.

1. Paul's visit after his conversion on the Damascus Road. Acts.9v26.
2. When Paul brought the contribution for the poor at Jerusalem. Acts.11v30.
3. Paul's visit to resolve the problem of the Judaizers at the Council of Jerusalem. Acts.15v2.
4. Paul's visit after his second missionary journey. Acts.18v22.
5. Paul's visit to fulfil a vow at Jerusalem, and before his imprisonment at Caesarea. Acts.21v17.

Farrar continues: "Now this visit of Gal.2. could not possibly have been the first; nor as it is proved by Gal.2v7., as well as by the whole chronology of his life, could it have been the second; nor, as we see from the presence of Barnabus (compare Gal.2v1. with Acts.15v39.) could it have been the fourth; for no one can assume that it was without accusing Paul of disingenuous suppression when he spoke to the Galatians of this sole intercourse which he had with the apostles; and that it was not the fifth is quite decisively proved by Gal.2v11. By the exhaustive method, therefore, we see that the visit dwelt on in Gal.2. must have been the third. It would, indeed, be inconceivable that it was some visit not recorded by the author of the Acts, if there were any reason whatever for such a supposition; but when we consider how impossible it was that such a visit should have occurred without the knowledge of St. Luke, and how eminently the facts of it accorded with the views which he wished to further, and how difficult it is to find any other occasion on which such a visit would have been natural, we have no reason for adopting such an hypothesis. Nor, indeed, can anything be much clearer than the identity of circumstances in the visits thus described. In the two narratives the same people go up at the same time, from the same place, for the same object, in consequence of the same interference by the same agitators, and with the same results. Against the absolute certainty of the conclusion that the visits were one and the same there is nothing whatever to set but trivial differences of detail, everyone of which is accounted for in the text." End of quote.

Luke would hardly have passed over the events of Gal.2v1-10., if they had taken place in Acts 11v29,30.; it is also difficult to fit 14 years between Acts.9v27. and Acts.11v29,30.; also Gal.2v1-10. cannot be Acts.11v29,30., for Paul saw the elders, not the apostles, and in Gal.2v1-10., Paul is proving that he is not behind the greatest apostles in experience and knowledge. So taking all things into consideration, we come to the conclusion that in Acts.15v5-29., we have the public narrative of events, and in Gal.2v1-10., we see the private discussions of Paul with the other apostles. Paul and Barnabus saved the Church from staying within the Old Covenant.

We see, then, leading men among the brethren meeting for discussion, but not for decision without the approval of the rest of the church at Jerusalem. In Acts.15v4,6,12,22., the whole church at Jerusalem gathered to consider the problem of the relation of Gentile Christians to the law and circumcision; not only apostles and elders, but "all the multitude," and "the whole multitude of disciples," and "the whole church," were involved in the discussion and the decision.

2. Notice the freedom of participation in discussion.

The apostles did not assume authority over the meeting of the two churches, they let discussion freely take place, they did not direct by apostolic authority, or by prophetic revelation. Nor did the elders, who were the pastors of the two flocks, insist that they were the only ones to hear and decide the matter. The apostles and elders did not decide the issue on their own, all the Jerusalem church was there, all God's local family was at the discussion. Considerable time was given for people to air their points of view, grievances and objections. The Judaizers were given opportunity to fully state their views and there was "much questioning and disputing,"

"polles zeteseos," but there was no attempt to silence them, or to rush things to a decision by a majority vote, or to limit discussion and debate. There was a prolonged controversy and discussion over what to believe, it was a question of faith, and all could take part, not just a select few. This questioning, debate and discussion, was a blessing, it made everyone think through the implications of the New Covenant.

After there had been much debate, Peter stands up and repeats how God directed him to preach the Gospel to Cornelius and his friends (about twelve years before), all of whom were Gentiles. God saved these Gentiles and filled them with the Holy Spirit just as He did the Christian Jews. Peter then asks the telling question, "Why tempt ye God?," that is, How could they accuse God of making a mistake, or refuse to follow His guidance as the Israelites had done at Massah and Meribah. Exod.17v7. Deut.6v16. 1Cor.10v9. Peter then says that the Christian Gentiles should not be compelled to carry a yoke which they as Jews had never been able to bear. Mt.11v30. 23v4. Peter finishes by saying that salvation is by faith in Christ not in ceremony or ritual, and it is fitting that the last words of Peter in Acts are for forgiveness and liberty in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul and Barnabus follow up Peter's account and conclusions from God's dealings with Cornelius, with their own account of God's dealings and mighty workings with the Gentiles. Peter's words had silenced everybody, Acts.15v12., and prepared the way for the appeal to Christian experience, these facts were far more eloquent than any intellectual argument.

James then gives the Scriptural proof to back up God's directive to Peter to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles, by quoting Amos.9v11,12., from the Septuagint, and finishes by recommending four simple prohibitions for the Gentiles, which would stop them stumbling the Jews. These were abstaining, **1.** from eating food offered to idols; **2.** from things strangled, Gen.9v4. Lev.3v17. 7v26. Deut.12v16. 1Sam.14v33. Acts.10v15. Rom.14v14.; **3.** from blood, dishes made from blood were common among Greeks and Romans; and, **4.** from fornication, which was treated very lightly, indeed, as natural and permissible, by the heathen. Acts.15v21. Notice the insistence of appeal to God's workings and God's Word, not only to God's Word, or just God's workings, but to both. Peter, Paul and Barnabus, tell of God's workings, Peter gives a very strong Scriptural warning as well, and James concludes with Scriptural proof, and the practical application of that truth.

3. Notice the unanimous decision.

There was prolonged discussion, then decision; nothing was done until unanimity was reached, **v25. "Having come to one accord."** **v22. "Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church."** **v28. "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us."** The decision was confirmed to be of God by the unanimous decision of the whole church, and the Holy Spirit.

We cannot expect to get God's will in a church with a prayerless and worldly "rule by majority vote," this is a carnal expedient. We know that elders were elected by the popular vote of Christians, but this was a statement of confidence in proven ministries, and this was done prayerfully, and is quite different from worldly majority voting. Both Christian and worldly experience has often proved the majority to be wrong and the minority right. The report of the twelve spies proves that the carnal and unbelieving often outnumber the spiritual and full of faith. Num.13v1 to 14v45. Rule by majority vote often brings dissension, disagreement, confusion, distrust and hinders fellowship, which is certainly against the divine desire that God's children should be one. Rule by majority vote has led to families and friends being either estranged, or indoctrinated to vote certain ways, and has resulted in fights for power behind the scenes, which can only be described as worldly and wicked. It is a tragedy when churches are divided into voting power groups, these power struggles destroy fellowship, and frustrate the desires of the Holy Spirit, and instead of the unanimity that brings certain victory, there is a division that brings sure defeat.

We must seek "the mind of the Lord," and recognise Jesus as the Head and Guide of His body the Church. Rom.12v4,5. 1Cor.12v12-27. Eph.4v11-16. A body goes into convulsions when it is sick and is not directed by the head, this is a true picture of Christ's Church, when we do what we want, and not what He wants. We must be willing to pray until we all come to the same mind, this proves our subjection to Jesus. Jn.17v20-22. Rom.15v5-7. 1Cor.1v10-13. 2Cor.13v11-14. Eph.4v1-6,14-32. Ph.1v27. 2v1-5. 4v2. 1Thes.5v12-15. Jesus desires us to be one as He was with the Father, this oneness springs from mutual love, and this alone gives an effectual testimony to the world. A public practical unity of the spirit is essential, and the God who brought the Christians of the early Church, with their different ways, thoughts and backgrounds, to one accord, will do the same for us if we will humble ourselves and seek His face.

To obtain the mind of the Lord, prolonged united prayer has to be exercised by a church, there is no short cut. Prophecy may well confirm guidance from God, but it can never do away with the necessity of a person or church earnestly seeking God for His will. All local church members must have God's peace in their hearts before important decisions are made, if there is no unanimous decision, the matter should be left week by week, month by month, again and again, until all are of one accord. The China Inland Mission of Hudson Taylor practised this method, the secretary said, "When there has been a delay, it has always proved to have been a wise step, and the necessary guidance has come later on,---no inconveniences have been found to arise from the plan." In an age of rush, quick decisions and worldly government and management techniques, churches have to be careful not to partake of the spirit of the world, or they can miss the good and perfect will of God. The Trinity works by unanimity of plan, and churches should too, we should seek and follow the perfect plans that God has for His churches. If the early Church had been as prayerless as many modern churches, Satan's

attack by cherished tradition would certainly have succeeded. Without diligent waiting upon God in prayer and worship, defeat is inevitable.

Some have objected to the practice of unanimity on the grounds of 2Cor.2v6. "hoi pleiones," "the many," or "the majority," of 2Cor.2v6., means all the church except the sinning brother. A church should restrain action until there is unanimity of opinion, this demands the fruit of the Spirit, longsuffering and self-control, but it is the divine highway to divine guidance.

4. Notice the appealing and reasonable spirit of the decrees to the churches.

The apostles and elders at Jerusalem gave their decisions to the Gentile churches in a gracious manner, and in an appealing advisory way. they did not pontificate or act as lords. Mt.20v25-28. 1Pet.5v3. For we read in Acts.15v28,29., "For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; v29. That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well." "Ye shall do well," is **certainly not hard legalism**, it is the language of love and reasonableness.

The important thing about the Jerusalem decree was that the heads of the church at Jerusalem, and the apostles, admitted that circumcision was not essential to salvation, and a Gentile was not to be compelled to be circumcised or keep the Law. This brought temporary peace to the Gentiles, but, as we shall see, it did not solve the problem.

We read in Acts.16v4., that the decisions of the apostles and elders and members of the church at Jerusalem are called, "the decrees," "ta dogmata," meaning decisions, or decrees, from "dokeo," to give an opinion. "Dogma" is used in Col.2v14. and Eph.2v15., of the legal requirements of the ordinances of the Law, and in Lk.2v1. and Acts.17v7., of the decrees of the Caesars. The decrees of Acts.16v4., are said to be, "ordained of the apostles and elders;" "ordained," is "kekrimena," the perfect passive participle of "krino," to judge, to decide, the perfect emphasises the permanence and abiding nature of the decrees. In Eph.2v20. and 3v5., Paul confirms that the foundation of doctrine was laid down by apostles.

5. Notice the danger of being restricted by a former God-blessed tradition.

There was a great conflict in the early Church over the relation of the Law to Christianity; even genuine Christians were very slow to realise that Christ had fulfilled the types and prophesies of the Old Covenant, and He had instituted a completely New Covenant. The early Jewish Christians still followed and cherished their old forms and traditions, we are no different from them, we too are often slow to follow the Lord Jesus to the blessings of the New Covenant. In our day we often still see former God-blessed cherished traditions being an hindrance to Christians experiencing the fullness of New Testament Christian experience. The numbers of zealous Jews who became Christians was so great, that it appears from Gal.2v12., that Peter, James and Barnabus compromised New Testament truth through fear of offending them. This proves how we all need to watch our hearts, if men of God of this calibre can be inconsistent and compromise truth when pressured to do so by Jews who were loathe to lay on one side their former Jewish traditions. We can all fail God if we do not keep close to Jesus. It is only as we seek the mind and will of God in earnest prayer, that we shall be clear-sighted enough to discern God's will, and strong and courageous enough to perform it.

We read in Gal2v11-21., that Paul reprovved Peter and Barnabus, for living like Christians one day and like Jews another day. It was very wrong for them to treat Gentile Christians as brothers one day, and then to shun them as Gentiles another day, because of the fear the Jews and the Judaizers in the Church, so Paul publicly rebukes Peter and Barnabus for this. Paul's words were obviously received by Peter, for we find no trace of bitterness in Peter towards Paul, he recognised his great ministry, and his divinely inspired New Testament truth. 2Pet.3v15. Peter and Paul honoured and respected each other, and Paul's correction did not spoil their affection for each other, they parted in friendship, a lesson we need to note. Barnabus did not separate from Paul on the grounds of this correction, it was on the issue of Paul's rejection of Mark, a relative of Barnabus. Paul later as good as admitted that he had been wrong over Mark, when he asked for his help, and Peter spoke well of Mark also. Col.4v10. Phil.v24. 2Tim.4v11. 1Pet.5v13. This teaches us that even the judgement and actions of apostles and notable Christian men, can be suspect at times, "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord." 1Cor.1v26-31.

When Paul went to Jerusalem after his second apostolic mission, the relationship of Christianity to the Law came to a head again. The church praised God for what He had done through Paul, but they were obviously suspicious of Paul's doctrine. They asked Paul take a Nazarite vow in the Temple, to refute the accusation of the Judaizers, that he taught "apostasy from Moses." Satan inspired this wilful distortion of Paul's teaching, for Paul taught the fulfilment of Mosaic type and prophecy in Christ.

Paul had made a vow in Acts.18v18., and undertook a Nazarite vow in Acts.21v23-27.. This involved the sacrifice of burnt offerings, sin offerings and peace offerings, as well as a basket of unleavened cakes and a libation of wine. Num.6v1-21. While it is true that God had ordained the ceremonies of the Law, and the Jews had practised them in God's will for fifteen centuries, and the apostles had used the Temple for a period, Lk.24v53. Acts3v1., there can be no doubt that the Old Covenant had passed away when Christ came and died. Jn.1v17. Mt.11v11-14. Heb.8v7-13. 10v1-9. It is almost unbelievable to see Paul, the chief exponent of justification by faith, not only standing in the Temple and submitting himself to the Law, but also to the petty ceremonial additions of the Rabbis. Paul must have realised that he was giving the Judaizers, who had seized on

his circumcision of Timothy as a proof of his inconsistency, Acts.16v3., some real ammunition to use against him. Why did Paul do it? Some justify Paul's participation in Temple worship at Jerusalem on the following grounds, which I personally do not accept.

1. They say that though Paul observed Temple rites, he did not give way on the issue of justification by faith, and that the brethren at Jerusalem admitted that this was not the issue. Acts.21v25. They say Paul was acting on the principle he laid down in 1Cor.9v19-23., it was an act of love, to the Jews, he became a Jew to win them to Christ. **However, this expediency involved a huge compromise with truth.** Paul had called the Judaizers, who said that keeping the Law was essential to salvation, "false brethren," "dogs," "false apostles," "deceitful workers," and servants of Satan. 2Cor.11v13-15. Gal.2v4. Phil.3v2. In Galatians and Corinthians, Paul had said that no one could be justified by the Law, and said that all who taught they could were accursed. Gal.1v6-10. 2v16. 3v10-14. Paul had called the ceremonies of the Law "weak and beggarly elements," as a means of justification, and said that circumcision was an unnecessary mutilation. Gal.4v9-11. 5v12.

2. Those who try to justify Paul's observation of Temple rites, say that when Paul withheld truth from those who could not bear it, he was following the example of Jesus who withheld truth from those who could not bear it. Jn16v12. Jesus did veil the truth of the implications of the New Covenant from His apostles, even after His cross and resurrection, because of their inability to bear that revelation, because they were so bound by the traditions of the Old Covenant. Jesus had to leave that to the ministry to the Holy Spirit. It is evident from the apostles question, "Lord will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" that even after the forty days ministry of the risen Christ, the apostles did not understand the truth about the Church.

After the personal warning from Jesus that the Jews would not listen to him, and the great number of warnings from the Holy Spirit not to go to Jerusalem, it is unlikely that Paul tried to justify his observation of Temple rites by thinking that if Jesus had been limited in what He could say to His apostles, then he could act in the same way. However, whatever was in Paul's mind, the results were disastrous, it produced havoc in the Church, and great opposition from the Jews. Nothing can justify Paul's visit to Jerusalem, for the Lord had told Paul not to go there. The problem of the relation of the Church to Judaism was going to be solved a mere ten years ahead, when the destruction of Jerusalem ended the Jewish state and religion. Those who defend Paul's action, say that he looked upon his vow as an act of public consecration to God and as an appeal to the Jews, not as a means of justification, however, it was an act of expediency, and a carnal attempt to remove barriers and win people over, but instead of doing this it produced a riot and more persecution, just as the Lord had warned Paul.

N. B. Paul disobeyed God when he went to Jerusalem.

Paul was warned in every city through Christians, and by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, of the dire consequences of going to Jerusalem. Acts.20v22-24. "And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, **v23** except that **the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me. v24** But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God." We cannot help but admire Paul's desire to serve Jesus, but his disobedience brought about tragic results.

We read in Acts.21v4., that the Holy Spirit told Paul NOT to go to Jerusalem. "When we came in sight of Cyprus, leaving it on the left, we kept sailing to Syria and landed at Tyre; for there the ship was to unload its cargo. **v4** After looking up the disciples, we stayed there seven days; **and they kept telling Paul through the Spirit not to set foot in Jerusalem.** (NAU)

In Acts.21v10-14. The prophet Agabus warned Paul not to go to Jerusalem, but when Paul insisted, they thought it must be right, and quite incorrectly thought that it was God's will. **v10** "And as we were staying there for some days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. **v11** And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands, and said, "This is what the Holy Spirit says: 'In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'" **v12** And when we had heard this, we as well as the local residents {began} begging him not to go up to Jerusalem. **v13** Then Paul answered, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." **v14** And since he would not be persuaded, we fell silent, remarking, "The will of the Lord be done!" (NAS)

Why, then, did Paul disobey the Lord and go to Jerusalem? We read in Rom.9v1-5., of Paul's great love for his own people, the Jews, and the intolerable grief within him because of their rejection of Jesus. Paul's love for his people drove him to Jerusalem, he was willing even to be accursed from Christ, if it could only have saved them. It is very sad that the apostles and elders of the church at Jerusalem were the means of bringing the prophetic warnings to pass. They should have defended Paul's teaching on the New Covenant, but their appeal was based on an unscriptural expediency, and it nearly cost Paul his life. This all shows how difficult it is to break free of our traditions, and how the fear of man can hinder and harm the Church of God. If we are not careful we can be as presumptuous and disobedient as the Israelites, who disobeyed God's command to Moses that nothing was to be added or taken away from the pattern that He had given. Heb.8v5. They ignored and rejected God's command and added thousands of their traditions and rules, which made the Word of God of none effect. In the end they persuaded themselves that their tradition was God's truth, and rejected their Messiah in favour of their own tradition. We need to take heed to the strong warnings given in Rev.22v18,19.,

not to alter, add, or take away, from God's Word, for doing so can not only effect our rewards, it can even alter our eternal future welfare and destiny. We need to take heed to Isaiah.66v1-5., and tremble at the Word of the Lord. God is looking for people with this kind of attitude to His Word.

Isaiah.66v1-5.

1. Thus says the LORD: "Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool. Where is the house that you will build Me? And where is the place of My rest?"

2. For all those things My hand has made, and all those things exist," says the LORD. "But on this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word.

3. "He who kills a bull is as if he slays a man; he who sacrifices a lamb, as if he breaks a dog's neck; he who offers a grain offering, as if he offers swine's blood; he who burns incense, as if he blesses an idol. Just as they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delights in their abominations,

4. So will I choose their delusions, and bring their fears on them; because, when I called, no one answered, when I spoke they did not hear; but they did evil before My eyes, and chose that in which I do not delight."

5. Hear the word of the LORD, you who tremble at His word: "Your brethren who hated you, who cast you out for My name's sake, said, 'Let the LORD be glorified, that we may see your joy.' But they shall be ashamed." (NKJ)

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