

My first car was a WB Holden ute (that's what all the country lads wanted to drive back in the day). And of course, being a young fella, I did a few things to customise me ute, so it wasn't the same as everybody else's...

- *Bullbar;*
- *Driving lights;*
- *Pin-striping down the side;*
- *7Db UHF Stick aerial mounted behind the cab;*
- *Stickers on the back window;*

And I had a sticker on the inside of the car, close to the glovebox (right in front of the Passenger seat), and it said, "Passengers ride in this vehicle at their own risk, as the driver could disappear at any moment." ...

And of course, that was referring to a "pre-tribulation rapture" – a belief that is very strongly held in the US, that before the big trouble begins – before the great tribulation, all the Christians are going to be snatched out of the world, and not have to go through it...

And when I was 17/18years old, that was the most predominant teaching coming out of the big-named churches and from the popular preachers in the US, and I just accepted it as 'a given' ...

....
I don't any more.

You see, as I read my Bible, and studied God's word, I could not get around the fact that so much of the New Testament,

was preparing the people of God, to be able to go through persecutions, and preparing us for the Great Tribulation...

And so I investigated it further, and I discovered that throughout the centuries, the Christian church had always understood that Christians will be in the world during the tribulation... And that it's only since the 1800's, this view was made popular in the study notes of the Schofield Bible (printed in the US)...

*Before then, this view had no traction... But now today (at least in the US), if you **don't** believe in the pre-tribulation rapture, at best, you're thought of as 'strange'. At worst, you're thought of as 'a heretic'....*

Now, I'm telling you this, not because today's Bible reading has anything to do with pre-tribulation / post-tribulation rapture, but it was the best example that I could think of, to share with you, one of my failings – how (for a time), I let the prevailing popular view, shape what I believe, rather than what God's word said...

You see, as I was studying this reading, what kept coming through to me, is that it's so important, that we listen to the Word of God, rather than the teachings of men. It's so easy for our theology, and our understanding of the Gospel, to be shaped and formed by those who are around us (often prominent people), and by those we listen to, rather than by the word of God itself...

Even the Apostle Peter found himself in that position... God had very clearly shown Peter that he was to fellowship with the Gentiles, and that all foods are clean. In Acts chapters 10&11, at the direction of God, he went to the house of Cornelius (a Gentile). And there he preached the gospel, and the Gentiles believed, and were filled with the Holy Spirit (even before they were baptised)...

And Peter returned to Jerusalem and told them about this, but the circumcision party were very unhappy with Peter – you’ve been with those unclean, uncircumcised gentiles, and you’ve even eaten with them... But Peter stood his ground, and told them what God had done. And even the circumcision party rejoiced, and they said: “Then to the *Gentiles* also, God has granted repentance that leads to life.”ⁱ

Alright, God had shifted Peter from his attitude, “Ow, I can’t go to the gentiles – they’re unclean..”, and he would fellowship with the Gentiles, and even eat with them...

But then later on, Peter was influenced by the teaching of the Judaisers, and he began to withdraw from fellowshiping with the Gentiles...

Peter’s theology and understanding of the Gospel, had been influenced (in a negative way) by others. He’d listened to men, instead of listening to the word that he’d received (direct from the mouth of God)...

Now, when I first started reading this, I really struggled with it.

To me, Paul sounded so arrogant “I didn’t go looking for teaching from the other apostles; I didn’t look for teaching about the Gospel from anybody else – I just got it straight from Jesus...”

Now, if anybody said that to me today, alarm bells would ring..... This person’s a nut... They think they know all about God, and they’re too arrogant to come under the teaching of a Godly teacher, who’s been walking with Jesus for decades...

But then I understood what Paul is trying to tell us... Paul was an **apostle** (you see). The Lord Jesus Christ **did** come to Paul, and Jesus **did** reveal the Gospel to him... Alright, so Paul’s an apostle. I’m not. And neither is any wacko-crazy-person today, who wants to make up their own version of the Gospel...

And for 3 years, Paul heads off to Arabia. BTW, what Paul calls “Arabia” isn’t what we know as Arabia – it’s most likely the kingdom of “Nabatea” (just south of Damascus)ⁱⁱ.

And some people say, “That was a retreat for 3 years, where for 3 years he prepared (out in the wilderness) for ministry, before going on mission”... Well, the Bible doesn’t actually tell us that. Jesus tells Paul to go and preach to the Gentiles, and he heads off to Arabia (guess who’s there – Gentiles)... Now, I have no doubt that he **was** studying the Scriptures, and that he **was** learning all he could about the Messiah, but I’m pretty sure it wasn’t a retreat...

And I want you to know today, if God is calling you to Bible college, to prepare for a life of ministry, that's not a retreat... If God is calling you to preach, preach you will – even as you study...

Anyway, it was 3 years of preaching the Gospel, before Paul finally went to Jerusalem, and caught up with Cephas (Peter), and spent 15 days with Peter. The only other apostle he met with (at that time), was James (Jesus' brother). And then he went back to preaching to the Gentiles again. That's where Paul was called. That's what he did...

And after 14 years of following Jesus, and preaching the Gospel, Paul wanted to check that he **was** on the right track, and so he gets together with what he calls the Pillars of the church (James, Cephas and John). (Cephas = Peter)..

And at that visit, it all went well. He told them what he'd been preaching. They agreed "That's the Gospel". Even Titus (a Gentile) who was with Paul – they didn't say "You need to be circumcised, Titus"...

And he says that even these influential ones – the pillars of the church, didn't add anything to him... In other words, they didn't correct him "Oh, you've got this bit wrong Paul..." They didn't correct him – in fact, they affirmed him, that he should preach to the Gentiles....

Just as Peter was called to preach to the Jews, Paul was called to preach to the Gentiles, And it's the same Holy Spirit, who was at work, in the preaching of both of them...

And Paul says V10: the only thing they asked, was that they would **remember the poor** – and he was very eager to do that...

And he **did** remember the poor. In a number of Paul's letters, we can see discussion about taking up a collection to take back to Jerusalem. You see, the Christians back in Jerusalem, were basically starving (because they were being persecuted)...

And it seems that Paul's message to the Gentile Christians, wasn't that they were separate, but that they were brothers and sisters in Christ to be cared for...

And if you want to know more about how the Pillars of the church handled this discussion, and the decision they came to about the Gentiles, read Acts 15. Or you can go to www.bushdisciples.church, and listen to the message on Acts 15.

Anyway, the outcome of that visit, is a letter that was sent to the Gentiles, and it said this:

Acts 15: (ESV)

²³ "The brothers, both the apostles and the elders, to the brothers who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greetings. ²⁴ Since we have

heard that some persons have gone out from us and troubled you with words, unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions, ²⁵ it has seemed good to us, having come to one accord, to choose men and send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, ²⁶ men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁷ We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth. ²⁸ For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements: ²⁹ that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell."

Alright, that's a very simple letter, basically saying, you don't need to keep all of the Jewish works of the law.

And Peter was involved in writing that letter... But something changed...

We should never take delight, when a Christian gets it wrong, but I actually do take comfort here, that even the one whom

Jesus chose to be the leader of the church (the Apostle Peter), wasn't perfect, and even Peter sometimes let Jesus down...

Do you take comfort in that??? You know, when I let Jesus down, I find myself feeling "I'm not worthy to even be a disciples of Jesus – never-lone a minister/pastor"... Do you ever feel like that??? Well, even the apostle Peter let Jesus down here. And Paul opposed him to his face...

Peter was going 'great-guns', but when certain influential men came to town, he drew back from the gentiles, and separated himself from them, because he feared the circumcision party...

And that set the scene. When someone as respected as Peter drew back, others followed suite...

This, my friends, is the danger, when we listen to men, instead of listening to God.

There's a strange world-wide phenomenon, that's been going on for many years, and it increases and increases... A celebrity preacher might come up with a certain teaching, which totally misrepresents the Scriptures... And other preachers latch-hold of it, and regurgitate it, and never look into their bibles to see if it is true... And before long, entire segments of the Christian church, are believing something which isn't at all the teachings of Jesus (or of the Apostles)... Why? Because countless preachers have listened to man, and have not checked with God's word, to see if it is true.

And I hope that (not celebrity preacher) you don't ever take everything I say, as Gospel truth. If Peter could get it wrong, I can get it wrong. I'm not the repository of truth – the Scriptures are. And I do the best that I can, to teach the simple biblical truth...

But I'm not perfect. And I pray that we as a church, will become more and more like the Bereans. When the Bereans heard the word that Paul preached, they **examined the Scriptures daily to see if these things were soⁱⁱⁱ** ...

Don't just take my word for it. Go back to the Word of God, and check it out – does this line up with the Word of God???

And no matter how grand the preacher is (or how popular they are),,, don't be influenced by men – hold firm to the word of God.

The very thing that was at stake here, was the Gospel itself.

You see, the whole 'works of the Law' attitude (that the circumcision party had), misses the point that we are all sinners.

The Jews saw themselves as 'the righteous sons of Abraham', and the Gentiles as 'the sinners'... But Paul says:

¹⁶ yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be

justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

In Christ, we are all on an equal footing. Isn't that good news...

Some of us have come from:

- good Christian families;
- broken homes;
- before we were saved, some of us were highly regarded in the community;
- others of us were pretty much despised, and we probably deserved it;
- have come from a position of wealth;
- others of us, were battlers and lived in poverty...

But the one thing we all have in common, is we were justified in Christ Jesus, not by our background or who we were in the past, but by believing in Christ Jesus, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

That's what was at stake, and I praise God, that Paul stood up to Peter, and reminded him, not to listen to man, but to obey God...

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father,
We want to thank You for the pure Gospel:
That by works of the law, no one will be justified;
That by faith in Jesus Christ,
we are justified, and forgiven,
and restored to relationship with You.

Lord, what a wonderful,
lifegiving Gospel.

Lord, we pray that You would help us
(by Your Holy Spirit)
to be able to discern truth in Your word.

Lord, help us to test the teaching that comes from men,
that we would know what is true and what is false.
Lord, even when the influential; and
the popular; and the respected,
are the ones who bring a message,
help us to not just blindly accept the teaching of man,
but to hold firm to Your gospel,
even when it's not the popular way.

But Lord, let us never be filled with pride,
And that we would humble ourselves before You,
And accept even what is difficult to accept in Your word,
Knowing that You are Lord,
And Your truth gives life in Jesus' Name.

Amen.

ⁱ Acts 11:18

ⁱⁱ Dunn J.D.G. 1993. "Blacks New Testament Commentary – The Epistle to the Galatians".
Hendrickson Publishers. P.69

ⁱⁱⁱ Acts 17:11