

“Wherefore We Henceforth Know No Man ...”

“... after the flesh: even though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now we know him so no more. Wherefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature: the old things are passed away; behold they are become new” (2 Cor. 5:16-17).

There are some who conclude from Paul’s words here “though we have known Christ after the flesh” that he was personally acquainted with Jesus. It is possible that their paths might have crossed in Jerusalem for while Paul was likely a bit younger than Jesus and his home was in Tarsus, Celicia (Acts 21:39), he had brought up in Jerusalem at the feet of the noted Pharisee rabbi, Galamiel (Acts 22:3) and thus he likely was in Jerusalem at sometime during Jesus’ visits there. Still, not all people who lived in Jerusalem while Jesus lived and preached there were acquainted with Him. When Jesus made His triumphant entry into Jerusalem, fulfilling Zachariah’s prophecy concerning Him (Zech. 9:9); it is written that “all the city was stirred, saying, Who is this?” (Mt. 21:10). It seems to me that had Paul been personally acquainted with Jesus he would not have asked, “Who art thou, Lord?” when Jesus appeared to him on the Damascus road (Acts 9:5).

Notice the contrast: “we know no man after the flesh ... we have known Christ after the flesh.” Shall we conclude from these statements that Paul personally knew no man? Certainly not. His “knowing man after the flesh” was not personal acquaintance, it involved something more than that, and it was in that sense that he wrote “even though we have known Christ after the flesh.” Paul was claiming a physical relationship with Christ — more appropriately with THE Christ. He was claiming kinship because the two were both of the seed of Abraham. Christ was of the seed of David (Rom. 1:1-2) and also a descendant of Abraham and while Paul did not claim to be a descendant of David (he was of the tribe of Benjamin; David of the tribe of Judah, Phil. 3:5), he did claim to be of the seed of Abraham. God had made a covenant with Abraham that through Isaac his seed would be called and this fleshly, physical link was the binding tie by which one Jew know all other Jews. God had promised Abraham that in his seed would all the families of the earth be blessed (Gen. 12:3) and so it was. The Christ had come as the Lord promised and through the offering of Himself, He became the sacrifice for sin and man’s subsequent hope. But the Christ died for all and the binding tie of men is no longer that a man be a descendant of Abraham but that all, Jew or Gentile are bound by the tie of Christ’s blood.

“Wherefore, if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature. The old things are passed away; behold they are become new.” The old life is gone. In Christ one has been washed and sanctified through His blood. In Christ one has new goals, ambitions, and destiny.

There is also another fact to consider. Elsewhere the apostle had written, “For neither circumcision is anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature” (Gal. 6:15). To this the apostle adds “and as many as walk by this rule, peace be upon them, and mercy upon the Israel of God” (Gal.6:16). The rule of which the apostle writes is that neither

circumcision nor uncircumcision accounts for anything in God's sight. What matters to God is that one be a new creature. Being a "new creature" is what makes a man part of the Israel of God.

Paul had been born into physical Israel, of which also was the Christ. But those old ties were gone. He was now a Christian, redeemed by the blood of Christ. It was of this new creature that Jesus spoke when He told Nicodemus, "Except a man be born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God" and then, to clarify Nicodemus' bewilderment at these words said, "Except a man be born of the water and spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (Jn. 3:3, 5) You can know Christ the same way Paul knew him, by becoming a new creature in Christ. Paul tells us how (just as Jesus told Nicodemus) "according to his mercy he saved us, through the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit" (Tit. 3:5).

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