

Parallel... Not Identical
By Charles F. Baker

PARALLEL... NOT IDENTICAL¹

No apology is needed for asking what might seem to be a question worn threadbare by usage: "Are you on the right road?" In the physical world, with its high-speed methods of transportation, this question has become all the more important, and surely in the spiritual realm it continues to be the first on the list.

The Bible presents, as it were, a great depot, where mankind enters to board the train. There are many tracks leading out of this terminal, most of them bearing very deceiving names. Of course, there is the Broadway Streamliner, upon which pleasure-mad souls may go straight to the City of Destruction, but there are also many other lines, bearing fair names, which appear to start out in the right direction, but which ultimately end at the Lake of Fire. The Legality Limited, the Religious Special, the Good Works Flyer, and the Self-Righteous Rambler are packed daily with thousands of respectable folk who suppose they are on the way to the Heavenly City.

They may claim that there are many roads that lead to Heaven, and that it doesn't matter which one you choose, if only you are sincere. They never took the trouble to read the Official Guide, which plainly states: "There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death"" (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25). They seem to be ignorant also of the fact that Jesus Christ said: "I am the Way...no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me" (John 14:6). They think that religion, good works, morality, and the like will get any sincere soul to Heaven, but the Guide Book plainly states: "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us" (Titus 3:5).

They feel that it is unethical to board the train, and without paying fare or doing any work, to ride to glory on the merits of the finished work of Christ. They consider it more honorable to get out and push their train up the hillsides of glory by their own strength. All of their efforts, however, are doomed to failure. It is beyond the power of sinful man to redeem his own soul, or to convert flesh into spirit (John 3:6; 1 Peter 1:18). Remember, sincerity will never take you to the right destination if you are on the wrong road.

God has just one road that He is running today, and it is all-important that you get on. Strange as it may seem, you don't need to wait one moment for this train to arrive. It is ever ready. The Time Table says: "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2); and, "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Romans 10: 13). Neither do you need to pay your own way on this train, for under the Table of Fares we read: "The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23); and, "To him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for

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righteousness" (Romans 4:5). There is only one gate through which you can enter and that is faith: faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. If you have never boarded God's "Salvation Liner," do so immediately and know the joy and assurance of arriving in glory some day with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (Colossians 3:1-4).

From this point on I wish to address my remarks only to those who have received Jesus Christ as Savior, to those who are on God's road to glory. We have a great need to study our Official Guide Book, even though we are on God's Way: first, lest we get side tracked on some of Satan's spurs, and second, lest we get confused and get onto the Kingdom Line. All Christians can understand the first-mentioned danger, but the great majority are completely unaware of the second. In fact, they are so ignorant of the fact that God has revealed two great lines in the Bible that they suppose that they are on the Kingdom Line, for that is the only one they know anything about.

While it is true, as I have stated before, that God has only one line which He is running today, it is also true that in the Bible there are two lines. One of these has been interrupted for the present dispensation, but since it is still in the Time Table, Christians today often get its schedule confused with their own, not realizing that there are in fact two different schedules. There are many similarities between them, or, as we may say, places where the tracks run parallel.

One of these lines began with Abraham, back in Genesis 12, and runs through Israel into the Messianic, Millennial Kingdom here upon earth. The other, and that which is God's line for today, began with the Apostle Paul, and will end in Heaven when the Church which is the Body of Christ is raptured to glory, as the Schedule Sheet shows in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. For short, we will call these two the Kingdom Line and the Body Line.

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Our purpose shall be to compare these two lines in order to be convinced that they are two distinct lines, and to see those places where the tracks run parallel, and also where they diverge. We will see that while two tracks may run parallel in places, they do not necessarily lead to an identical destination. God has two destinations for His redeemed people: Heaven and the restored earth. Our citizenship is in Heaven (Philippians 3:20); that of redeemed Israel and of the nations will be in the renewed earth (Zechariah 14:16, etc.). Most of the confusion among really saved Christians is due to a failure to distinguish between these two lines. The majority make the mistake of calling identical that which is only parallel. This results in what we might call Undispensationalism. Then there are others who make identical truth to be merely parallel, and this results in Hyperdispensationalism. When we recognize what is identical as identical, and what is parallel as parallel, then we are true Dispensationalists.

Picture in your mind these two glorious lines of truth in the Bible: the Kingdom Line and the Body Line. Remember that they are both God's lines and that Jesus Christ is the Chief Engineer on both. Be prepared to see many sections of track running parallel

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through certain parts, but do not be surprised to find widely divergent scenery on the two in some places. It is beyond the scope of this article to point out all of the places of interest on both of these scenic routes, but rather we shall look at just a few of the more important places to see the similarities and the differences.

GRACE

Because we often refer to our message as the Grace Message, or the Grace Testimony, some have received the impression that we mean that wherever grace appears in the Bible, that is for the Church, and wherever law appears, that is for the Jew. The post-millennial theologians were more or less guilty of such an interpretation, but that is not at all our view. The Kingdom program has a great deal of grace in it. While Christ was proclaiming that kingdom, the people marveled at the words of grace which fell from His mouth (Luke 4:22). Surely it was wonderful grace (Luke 7:42) where the two debtors were freely forgiven when they had naught with which to pay. And what shall we say of the grace shown to Israel when the Lord prayed, "Father forgive them, they know not what they do" (Luke 23: 34). And what of the grace poured out on Israel at Pentecost and thereafter, when God sent His salvation first of all to those who had murdered His Son (Acts 3:26)?

Israel had a grace message, and so do we, but these two grace messages are not identical, but only parallel, for we shall see many distinctions between them. The two most evident differences between them are first, Israel's message included a program of religious practices which are not included in our grace message, and second, Israel's grace was with a view to the establishment of the Kingdom on earth, whereas our grace is with a view to the calling out of a Heavenly Body.

On the doctrine of grace, therefore, we will find quite a long stretch where the Kingdom and Body tracks are parallel. It would seem that God led John to choose especially those parallels to Paul's Gospel in writing his own gospel. Therefore, we can use John today in a remarkable way in declaring the Gospel of the Grace of God, in spite of the fact that the things there recorded were spoken and ministered only to the lost sheep of the House of Israel. We find wonderful examples of grace all through the Bible which are similar to the grace shown to us today; hence, we can use all of these cases to illustrate and illuminate the message for today.

When we do this, it is as though we come to a place where the two lines run parallel, and we transfer from the Body Line to the Kingdom Line, just as long as the lines stick together, hence, seeing more of the beautiful scenery of God's grace. But as soon as the tracks begin to diverge, we must be sure to get back on the Body Line, or we will frustrate the grace which God has given to us.

To further illustrate this point, notice what Peter says in Acts 15:11: "But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we [Jews] shall be saved, even as they [Gentiles]." This might appear to be absolutely identical to Paul's message, and it is absolutely parallel at this point, but let us carefully examine the full run of the line and

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see whether Peter's message began at Pentecost with this word: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38). This was a wonderful message of grace, but was it identical to Paul's message of grace at this point? Paul said: "/ thank God that I baptized none of you...For Christ sent me not to baptize..." (1 Corinthians 1: 14,17). The Jews had to repent and be baptized with water before receiving the Holy Spirit, but is that a part of God's message of grace for today?

Look once again at Peter and the Jerusalem saints who had received God's grace. As far as we have any record, these Spirit-filled apostles and believers continued as loyal Jewish subjects. They did not break with Moses or the temple sacrifices and worship. Remember, their religious and political life was bound together in an inseparable fashion. Christ Himself had taught them to be subject to those who sat in Moses' seat (Matthew. 23:2-3), and so we see even Paul carrying out this order as late as Acts 23:2-5. These Jewish believers who had been saved by grace, according to Peter in Acts 15:11, were all zealous of the law (Acts 21:20), and we have not one word of protest from God up to this point against it. As a matter of fact, the Holy Spirit in Acts 15:28 (cf. Acts 21:25) puts a difference between the Jewish believers under Peter, and the Gentiles under Paul, plainly instructing" the Gentiles that they should observe no such things. God strongly protested against putting Gentiles under the Law, and He pronounced an anathema upon Jew or Gentile who taught justification by the works of the law (cf. Galatians 2:15-16). Paul circumcised Timothy because he was a Jew (Acts 16:3), but not for a moment would he listen to having Titus, a Gentile, circumcised (Galatians 2:3-5).

Let us look at just one further particular to see if Peter's grace message was identical with Paul's. Peter told Israel that if they would repent, God would send Jesus Christ back from Heaven to bring about the restitution of all things (Acts 3:19-21). Do we find Paul at any time making such a proposition to the Gentiles? Of course not. Paul was raised up to pronounce blindness upon Israel because of their rejection of Peter's offer, and to send salvation to the Gentiles, not to bring Jesus back to earth, but to call out a Heavenly Church which Jesus will bring up to Heaven with Himself there.

GENTILE SALVATION

This brings us to another subject in which we can see a parallel between Body and Kingdom truth, but also a great difference. Some people have the mistaken idea that wherever we read of Gentile salvation in the Bible it has reference to what God is doing today. Instead, it is only a parallel. After the whole world had given up God, and God had given up the world (Romans 1: 24,26,28), God called out Abraham and promised that He would make of him a great nation, and that through his seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:2-3). The whole story of the Bible from Genesis 12 down into the book of Acts is the story of God working through one nation with a view to blessing all nations. The Greek woman had to learn that the children (Israel) must first be filled, before the Gentiles could be blessed in full measure (Mark 7:27). In other words, on the Kingdom Line, Gentiles were going to be saved (and therein we see

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the parallel to the Body Line), but on the Kingdom Line this Gentile salvation could come in but one way - because of and through Israel's fullness. The Kingdom train arrives at Gentile salvation only after it has passed the place where all Israel are saved. Now, notice the great difference between this and Gentile salvation on the Body Line. Salvation is being sent to the Gentiles today, not because of Israel's fullness, but because of their fall. "Through their fall [not fullness] salvation is come unto the Gentiles." (Romans 11:11,12). And not only so, but whereas Gentile salvation on the Kingdom Line was predicted by all of the prophets, Paul shows that the plan and purpose of Gentile salvation under his ministry was a secret, hidden from all of the old prophets, and never before made known to the sons of men (Ephesians 3:1-9).

Some may object that Paul in such passages as Romans 15:9-12 bases his Gentile ministry upon the Old Testament prophets, but if this were true it would be a contradiction of his statements about the Mystery. Paul does not say that his ministry is the fulfillment of the Kingdom program of Gentile salvation as predicted by Isaiah, but instead he is merely pointing us to a section of the Kingdom track that lies parallel to ours. It was no mystery that Gentiles were to be saved. The mystery was that Gentiles were to be saved in spite of Israel, instead of through Israel, and that those thus saved were to become members of a joint-body of Jews and Gentiles, called the Church which is His Body, instead of becoming subject to redeemed Israel in the Kingdom.

THE GOSPEL

There are many who argue that there is only one gospel in the Bible - "If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that which you have received, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:9). We must all agree that the only gospel, or good news, that God has for lost sinners is to be found in Jesus Christ, but let us notice certain distinctions which will show that here, too, there is the Kingdom Gospel, and the Gospel of Grace given to and through Paul. These two messages are parallel in many particulars: both are based upon His death and resurrection, both bring forgiveness of sins, and both involve a new birth. But there are certain differences which will show that these two gospels are not identical.

First of all, notice that it was possible to preach the Kingdom Gospel without saying one word about the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. From Luke 9:1-6 and 18:31-34 we learn that the Twelve preached the Gospel for a couple of years while they were in complete ignorance of the fact that Jesus would even die. Peter even remonstrated with the Lord when Jesus revealed the fact of His impending death (Matthew 16:21-22). Now let us ask: Could we preach the Gospel of God for today without mentioning the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:1-4)? Of course, Christ's death was to be the ground of salvation under the Gospel of the Kingdom, but the point here is that this Gospel was preached before Christ died and it was a proclamation which said nothing about His death.

This brings us to the question, just what did people have to do to be saved, or to be born again before our Gospel was revealed through Paul? We know that without faith it

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is impossible to please God, hence, faith has been a requirement in all ages. Hebrews 11 tells us what these saints of old had to believe in order to be saved. They had to believe the message that God revealed to them. God told Abraham that He would multiply his seed as the stars of Heaven and Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness (Genesis 15:6). God did not tell him that Jesus was coming some day to die for his sins, and that if he would accept Jesus Christ as his personal Savior, he would be saved. So the people who lived under the Law were saved because they believed the message that God gave to them. When Jesus came to earth, men were saved, not by believing that Jesus was going to die for their sins, but by believing that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God (Matthew 16:16). Peter was surely saved when he made that confession, but as we have seen, he was totally ignorant of the truth that Jesus was going to die for his sins.

Notice next the case of Nicodemus. Jesus told him he had to be born again. We know from John 19:38-39 that Nicodemus was a secret believer in Jesus as the Messiah. We have every reason to believe that he was born again. If he wasn't, surely others were, but who would think of contending that a person who was saved, or born again, before the death of Christ, was in identically the same position as one who is born again today? Many things happened after Peter and Nicodemus were born again while Christ was on earth. The Holy Spirit was surely not given then as He was poured out at Pentecost. Nicodemus was surely not baptized by one Spirit into the Body of Christ; for that Body had not yet been formed. Doubtless, we who are born again today (see 1 Corinthians 4:15) have blessings and a position which those in other ages did not have. Hence, while there is a parallel in these experiences, they are not identical.

IN CHRIST

While the expression, "in Christ is almost entirely confined to the Pauline Scriptures, there is a parallel to it in those portions which pertain primarily to the Kingdom. To be in Christ today means to be in the Body of Christ, but that does not mean that believers in the Kingdom Age will not be in Christ, even though they are not in the Body. John 14:20 states: "At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you." Christ was not here giving a revelation of the Body of Christ, but of that spiritual relationship which would exist between Him and all of the redeemed, whether members of the Body or not. Many teachers are guilty of robbing Israel of all of his spiritual blessing, and in making- the Kingdom to be just an external, temporal arrangement. The New Covenant made with Israel promised the indwelling of God in them, then they were to be in Him. Let us remember that although the Kingdom will be on this earth, it is a kingdom which originates in the Heavens.

We should know that if the Body of Christ is a joint-body of Jews and Gentiles, it could not have been in existence as such before Paul was saved, and yet we read in Romans 16: 7 of Andronicus and Junia, who, Paul says, "were in Christ before me." Here then is the parallel truth: all of the redeemed of all ages will be in Christ, but only the saints of this dispensation will be in the Body of Christ.

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CONCLUSION

Space does not permit dealing with other doctrines, but in conclusion I would like to present what I believe to be an axiom: all of Paul's writings concern identical truth. That is, all of his epistles were written to and about the Church which is the Body of Christ. Of course, that does not mean that there are not references to the Messianic Kingdom in parts of his writings, but such references are clearly labeled.

As we travel through the Scriptures, let us apply and appropriate everything that parallels the Grace of God for today, but let us not rob Israel and the Kingdom subjects of these truths which belong to them, and let us not make the mistake of taking some of their things which God never purposed to be a part of our program. If you are occupied with signs, ceremonies and the Law, it is evident that you are on the wrong line.

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