



The Apostle Paul

The religious leadership of first century Israel recognized that Peter and John were “ignorant and unlearned” (**Acts 4.13**) They were fishermen but it was noted that they had been with Christ. Their speech and determination to preach the gospel defies explanation when one thinks of the troubles that came upon them for doing so. Gamaliel advised the council to consider what decision they made as they may find themselves fighting against God (**Acts 5.39**). Gamaliel reasoned, from a common sense perspective that if this was of men it would come to nothing as had other such movements (**Acts 5.35-38**). While the council noted that a miracle had indeed taken place in the healing of the lame man (**Acts 4.16**), they could not accept the power by which it was done. Lacking education and sophistication, how is it that these men could have implemented a complex conspiracy about Christ and hidden it? What incentive did they have for doing this as they were obviously without their leader, Christ, who had been killed? Ignorance can account for a lot of things and people are fooled every day by the slick appearance of lies. In contrast to the ignorance of these men, Saul of Tarsus, later the apostle Paul, demands some investigation. Paul was a Pharisee who had been taught by Gamaliel and was apparently moving upward in Jewish religious circles to a prominent position (**Acts 22.3, Gal 1.13-14, Phil 3.5-6**). Paul had gone so far as to persecute the church and was present at the death of Stephen (**Acts 7.58**). Such involvement against the church was driven by zeal and the conviction that what he was doing was correct. Recognizing that the majority of the New Testament was written by Paul, what force could have driven him to change his way of life and preach the gospel after being so violently opposed to it? If this was a complex conspiracy, it seems that Paul would have, and indeed did have, the resources at his disposal to uncover and expose such a lie. The scriptures reveal how this change came about as Christ appeared to him as he traveled to Damascus to arrest Christians (**Acts 9.3-9**). When the gospel was preached to him, and he learned what had to be done, Paul did so and continued as one of the most active preachers of the gospel in the history of the early church. Was this change of heart based on the appeal of a conspiracy? Paul was not ignorant, of the Law, nor of the impact of his decision to follow Christ. The simplest answer is that Paul indeed saw the risen Christ and then did as he was instructed, carrying the gospel to the Gentile world and to as many of his own

nation as would listen. Paul even prayed that those of the Jewish world would repent and recognize the truth of what he taught (**Rom 10.1-4**). It may be possible to fool the masses, but what about one such as Paul, who was educated and knew the Law and the scriptures. It is my belief that Paul saw the truth and that he faithfully preached the word of the Lord to a lost world. During his work, Paul himself was persecuted and tormented for the labor that he undertook. Such conviction may have been the result of ignorance on the part of some, but it is inconceivable that an individual, having the intellectual capabilities of the apostle, would have bought into something without irrefutable proof of its validity. Paul was later accused of being “mad” as he defended his preaching. **“And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad.”** (**Acts 26.24**). To the Romans, and the Jewish leaders, the resurrection of the dead was ridiculous. They, like many today, refused to believe that such an event had occurred, and even denied the possibility. This was not just opposition to a “new” religion, it was a statement of faithlessness in God who has the power to raise the dead, as He did in the case of Christ. While the preaching of Peter and John had been refuted based on their assumed “ignorance”, the preaching of Paul was contested based on his advanced knowledge. In short, those who fought against the truth had no intention of admitting to it or acknowledging the probability that it was the work of God. In our own day and time those who seek to follow the scriptures, whether educated or not, are regarded as those who have accepted a belief that is founded on the impossible. This is a functional statement of disbelief and hatred for the Lord. Many “learned” people today view Christians as misguided individuals who are more like Linus Van Pelt waiting for the appearance of the Great Pumpkin in the most sincere pumpkin patch on Halloween. The Great Pumpkin never appeared and so neither will Christ, or so they believe and teach. Just as the leaders in the first century expended great resources to belittle the teachers of the word, so do those today who seek to make Christians appear as outdated fools who have accepted a lie.