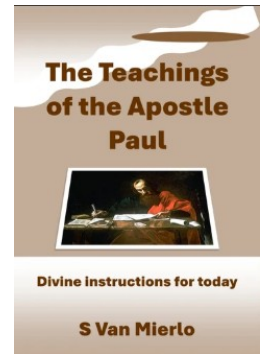


Excerpt from:
**Teachings of the Apostle Paul,
Divine Instructions for Today**
S. Van Mierlo

*Excerpts selected by Bob Evelyn
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The Introduction points out that this is the fourth in a series of five books. The summary provided of the other books contains much good information.

Book 1: Science, Reason and Faith (p. 4)

Modern science and reason may lead the man of good will to a faith in a Creator God. We draw attention to the importance of the “scientific method.” This has enabled the achievement of a synthesis of all the observations, thereby validating the basic hypothesis (or “faith”) as regards the unity and rationality of creation. Logic then imposes the existence of a Creator.

Book 2: The Divine Revelation (p. 4)

It is in the Bible that God reveals Himself to us personally. This Book is the Word of God expressed in a human language and therefore comprehensible to us. The written Word must constitute the only absolute norm, a Whole of which each part is necessary to explain the other parts.

Book 3: The Divine Plan (p. 5)

By giving careful attention to the inspired “sound words,” we can arrive at the conclusion that this history of salvation comprises five long periods called “eons” in the Greek text. To realize His plan, God proceeds with a series of elections: Adam, Seth, Noah, Shem, Abraham, and the people of Israel. It is through Israel that God desires to bless all the nations of the earth. But since this people refuses to recognize that Jesus is the Christ, they are temporarily set aside circa the year 70 of our era, i.e. near the end of the period of Acts of the apostles. Israel will be restored to their position of God’s people before the end of the present eon and the second coming of the Lord. The present period during which Israel is not God’s people constitutes a break, so to speak, in the “normal” realization of the divine plan, and consequently God presently administers the world in a completely different manner. The Old Testament prophets had no knowledge of this period and their prophecies thus are not being fulfilled at present. On the other hand, the Scriptures give no precise indication about the formation and organization of a visible church which would replace or absorb Israel following their temporary rejection.

Book 4: The Teachings of the Apostle Paul (p. 6)

Paul, the apostle for the Gentiles, is the only one who received special revelations relative to the conditions at the time of Acts and of the present period. As soon as the normal realization of the divine plan was impeded by the disobedience of Israel – who thus could not begin to accomplish their mission of making disciples out of all the nations – Paul showed a new way which does not depend upon Israel, a way open to all men individually.

Instead of speaking about a church on earth during the great dispensation, the apostle discloses the formation of the Body of Christ, a spiritual organism of which Christ Himself is the Head, and which is placed in Him at the right hand of God.

However, these special teaching of Paul have been ignored since the end of his life. Because of this, a great part of the Christendom of the first centuries, ignoring the apostle’s teaching regarding this new dispensation, has been searching for a solution to the problem which arose after the destruction of Jerusalem at the Temple in the year 70. One result was the allegorical

interpretation of the prophetic writings – a belief that Israel was merely a symbolic elected people and that a new, visible church which would be the “true Israel” had to be formed.

Although there came later a partial return to Paul’s teaching, pseudo-problems arose and the attempts at solving them have only succeeded in dividing Christendom: apostolic succession, church organization, sacraments such as water baptism and the Lord’s supper, Pentecostal gifts such as healings, and so on. By not taking into account the fact that the present period constitutes a break in the realization of the divine plan, and that the return of the Lord and the coming of the Kingdom which were at first near but later were delayed, it had to be concluded that the words of the Lord and the apostles were fallible.

And by not distinguishing what Paul had said about spheres of blessings other than that of which the Lord and the Twelve had spoken, it became impossible to escape ideas of contradictions and changes of opinion. Destructive criticism negating verbal inspiration became inevitable – and humanism and nationalism eventually seized hold of “Christian” theology.

But by taking into account the clear distinctions between the eons and the dispensations on the one hand, and the three spiritual positions on the other hand, all these problems at once disappear, and all difficulties are avoided by providing a scriptural framework for a general synthesis of all of Scripture.

Book 5: The Way of Salvation (p. 8)

By carefully distinguishing that which differs, by putting everything in its place, everything takes on full value and effectiveness – and the entire Word helps us to better know, love, and glorify Christ.

Israel After the Cross (p. 13)

After the cross Israel is not rejected. The Twelve Apostles again insist on the need for repentance and on the coming of the Kingdom.

The Law and the ceremonies are meticulously observed by the Jews, even those who believe in Christ. The Jews do not cease to be Jews when they believe in Christ, but could then be truly Jews and accomplish the Law through grace.

“Greeks” in Acts (p. 23)

There is a mention of the “Greeks” in Acts 14:1. Since these were in the synagogues, they must have been proselytes [those who had “joined” the Jewish faith].

Re-generated Jews and the Law (p. 37-40)

When Israel repents, one of the purposes of the Law will have been accomplished. But the commandments were given to be observed, and while it is true that the Israelites had to be regenerated before they could love the Law, it would be rather strange that, having arrived at that stage, they would no longer be required to carry out the commandments. When Israel will again be “My people,” the Law will still be there.

“I will put My law in their inward parts.” (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 8:10, 10:16)

They will, as anyone born from above, “delight in the law of God after the inward man” (Romans 7:22).

They are far from perfection. Although regenerated they are only “small children.” Humanity requires a great deal of time to freely evolve according to the divine plan, and it will only be at the end of the coming age that the great masses – but not necessarily all men – will have made spiritual progress.

Then, what about the Law? It remains in its essence, but the attitude of the "sons" toward it is completely changed. To them, it is no longer a series of precepts they attempt to obey, it is no longer "a letter." The ceremonies are not imposed upon them in an absolute manner, although they will continue to be observed because of those who still have need to observe them.

The spirit of the Law remains, but its form may change, because some commandments have meaning only for as long as those to whom they are addressed have not yet reached the position of "sons." The commandments are intended to help them reach that position. All the ceremonies, which are but a shadow of things, will disappear one day.

A "son" may be brought to follow the letter of the Law, and so it is not surprising to read that Paul demonstrates in public that he conducts himself as one obeying the Law, purifies himself, enters the Temple and makes offerings (Acts 21:22-26). The Law was in force for Israel in general, Christian Jews included. While it is true that Paul, being dead to the Law, was not compelled to observe the ceremonies, it was impossible to make those who were not yet dead to the Law understand this.

Attempts to replace Israel (p. 54)

[There is an] enormous error made by the majority of the Christians who believe they form a church which would be the "true Israel" during the present evil age of which Satan is "god" (2 Corinthians 4:4). This leads inevitably to total confusion. To be Israel, the church would have to assume Israel's mission, which as a matter of fact these Christians are, in part, attempting to do. But then they would remain in the old creation, in the earthly sphere, and could not follow Paul. But in that sphere the Gentiles, far from having the promise of replacing Israel, can only be blessed through Israel.

Summary of the Acts Period (p. 58)

Christian Jews always remain Jews nationally and are bound to observe the Law. They begin to form the visible church which the Lord called "My church." From this point of view there is a clear separation between the Christian Jew and the Christian Gentile. The latter cannot enter the Temple, nor participate in the ceremonies, unless he becomes circumcised and be thereby incorporated into the nation of Israel. Let us clearly recognize that the Gentile partakes only of the *spiritual* blessings, and nothing permits him to appropriate to himself an organization or ceremonies given by God to Israel.

Paul's epistles are generally (but not always) addressed to all, and concern more particularly that which must follow the new birth: reconciliation to God, death with Christ and to sin, justification, and the new creation. However, since Paul also addresses himself to the Christian Jews who are present in those local churches, and since these are still nationally Jews who have to obey the Law, these epistles also contain information applicable only to them.

After Acts 28:28 (p. 64)

When we study the epistles Paul wrote after Acts, we meet new things expressed in new words. For example: Spiritual blessings in the "above-heavens", perfect reconciliation, perfect redemption, perfection, seated together in the "above-heavenlies", appear with him in glory, the "out-resurrection."

Abandoning Paul (p. 81)

[Paul's] last epistles were written during a period when, according to tradition, the "church" would have had a large membership and been in full swing. They had faith in God, but did not reach the higher spheres of blessings. One might surmise that some excused themselves, as some still do today, by saying that what was needed was "a simple gospel." One did not have

time for all those subtleties of “intellectual thought” that were Paul’s, nor for his complicated doctrines.

[Suppositions aside] the undeniable fact is that apart from some rare exceptions, the most serious, the most pious of believers abandoned Paul after he had made known the great mystery. One may well wonder why theologians have taken so little notice of this abandonment of the doctrines made known by Paul. This does indeed present a difficult problem to those whose theology is based on some ancient traditions.

Situation near the end of Acts (p. 87)

It is clear that the mission of the Twelve to turn all nations into disciples and to baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19) had to be carried out only after the repentance of Israel and the return of the Lord, when all power in heaven and earth will not only be “given” to Him (v. 18) but when He will have *taken* His great power and taken *possession* of His reign. (Revelation 6:16; 11:15,17; 12:10; 19:1,6).

What about church organization during the Acts period? The church, or better the “Christian synagogue” of Jerusalem could be considered as the first nucleus of the Assembly that the Lord had promised to build (Matthew 16:18). Local assemblies were formed by Paul and his friends. Some of these assemblies where the Christian Jews were in the majority could probably also be considered as Christian synagogues. But in general they were mixed assemblies which could be composed of Christians both of Jewish and heathen origins and became known as “ekklesia” to distinguish them from the Jewish synagogues existing in those places. These churches, however, were not a visible representation of the church of Christ of Matthew 16:18.

Documents from the First Centuries (p. 92)

Errors should not be accepted simply because the documents are ancient.

Some First Century authors ignore Paul’s messages. In some, there is an enormous difference in language from that of the Scriptures. Some are completely foreign to and sometimes opposing the teachings of Paul.

Some documents have caused the Roman Church to derive the series of “Popes” – Peter, Linus, Anacletus, Clement, etc.

Those deemed to be heretics were not those who were opposed to the Word of God – but those who did not believe human tradition.

Some refer to Irenaeus in everything and confirmed the rivalry between those who supported Peter and those who favored Paul. Tertullian denied that Paul preached a gospel other than Peter’s. Some (e.g. Cyprian) do not mention Paul.

But Clement of Alexandria and Origen seem to oppose the primacy of Peter and of Rome. Origen especially seems to realize that Paul’s message differs from that of the Twelve.

Eusebius attempted to write a systematic history of the development of the church, and was greatly hampered by the lack of clear, positive documents. He tells that some fourth-century martyrs gave themselves Jewish names to show that they were the true Israel. He noted that the prophecy of Isaiah 35:1-6 would not concern Israel, but rather events which took place since the advent of Constantine. This would be the blossoming forth of the “church.”

So we see that the idea that the “church” replaces Israel and will establish the “Kingdom of heaven” on earth leads to making it a political instrument and an organization that belongs to this world. Eusebius knew Paul, but not his doctrines.

From the documents coming from Christians who played an important part in the establishment of what is designated by the term "universal church," we see very clearly that the special teaching of Paul were completely ignored.

The theologians after Augustine and especially after the Reformation have reflected a greater appreciation of the fundamental ideas in the epistle to the Romans. But they were far from showing a complete appreciation of Paul's characteristic teachings relating to the spheres of heavenly and above-heavenly blessings.

Formation of the so-called "Universal Church" (p. 109)

The period from the year 70 up to the third century is known by only a relatively small number of documents, the contents of which are not always reliable – sometimes even contradictory – and which do not always present events objectively.

For Israel in general, the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple was certainly a terrible disaster. Furthermore, notwithstanding the fruitless attempt of Bar Kochba (circa 132) Israel ceased to have a national existence. And the death-blow was given by the emperor Adrian when he forbade circumcision.

As the Temple worship ceased, the Jews were led to consider more closely moral questions and to study the Torah.

They believed that Jesus was the Son of God, and therefore also in His virgin birth. They had great respect for Paul as an apostle to the nations but did not understand his teaching. Therefore, they did not see that the events of that time confirmed what Paul had said and that Israel had now temporarily ceased to be God's people.

The prophecies of the Lord as we have them in Matthew 23:36-39 could have prepared them for the destruction of Jerusalem, but not for the rejection of Israel. Their solution was to follow the trend of ideas of the Jews of Alexandria who, in contact with the Greek civilization and separated from Jerusalem, had learned to explain many parts of Scripture allegorically.

[But] not only had the Lord and the apostles never said anything about a well-organized, visible church *before* the return of the Lord, but until about 100 years after Pentecost *nobody* had been thinking about such an institution.

But the Lord tarried and gradually they started to believe that this return ought not to be taken literally – that the Lord had already come back "spiritually." It became necessary, therefore, to start the preparation of a well-organized church through which the Kingdom would be established.

The Jewish Passover was changed to a Christian Passover and also provided the new "Catholic church" its principle "sacrament." From the documents of that time it can be determined how the rituals of the Jewish Passover and of the sabbath meal were transformed into the Roman "mass."

From whom had the clergy received its authority? From the apostles, naturally. One hundred years after the death of the last apostle, authority was transferred to the "bishops" (episkopos) and so, through an "apostolic succession," this authority had passed from one bishop to another.

It is quite remarkable that the epistles of Paul occupy such an important place in the Canon when we reflect that this apostle had been abandoned by most Christians toward the end of his life, and his teaching had been neglected afterwards, precisely at the time when the "church" had to accept the canon. It seems clear therefore that we should recognize here an action of the Holy Spirit which compelled this organization to act in a way which was, in effect, contrary to its own tendencies. [i.e. including Paul's epistles though they largely ignoring them.]

In this period a living authority was formed, apart from the Scriptures, and soon put itself above them, since the clergy claimed to possess a verbal divine tradition, and that it solely was able to understand and correctly interpret the Scriptures. It was therefore necessary to believe what the bishops taught, and not what God could say personally through His written Word to anyone ready to listen to Him.

The church was more or less persecuted till the fourth century, but its rule seemed to have started definitively at the conversion of emperor Constantine. His aim, after all the fighting, was to establish a stable empire, and Christendom – which had spread everywhere – could help achieve his objectives. As “Pontifex Maximus” he appropriated to himself the right to rule over the ecclesiastical institutions and definitely founded the church.

The present situation (p. 130)

All Jews, the justified, the regenerated, and those not believing in Christ – still had to observe all the institutions of the Law.

The Christian Jews had to keep all commandments to the letter, not in order to be justified thereby before God, but in love to God, out of reverence for what God esteemed to be right, in love to other Jews. Neither for the Lord nor the Twelve nor Paul had the ceremonies and offerings any value in themselves; they were only representations and shadows of spiritual realities. But these symbols were nevertheless indispensable in order to lead the masses to Christ. And this, not only during Old Testament times and the period of Acts, but even in the future during the Kingdom – as long as Israel has not completed its mission to the nations – as long as there may be Jews and Gentiles who are not disciples of Christ.

As soon as it became evident that [his] gospel did not correspond exactly with that of the Lord and the Twelve, Paul had practically everybody against him. They did not understand, and either turned away from him or became adversaries.

But by abandoning Paul they deprived themselves not only of more abundant blessings but were led to the fatal idea of a visible church consisting mainly of Christianized Gentiles, considering themselves to be the “true Israel” – replacing Israel.

Since the setting aside of the chosen people, God administered the world in a different manner and let all the nations walk in their own ways, as in times past (Acts 14:16). Certainly, in contrast to the Acts period, all signs, wonders, and powers of the next eon ceased to accompany the preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom. But though the visible and public actions of the Holy Spirit ceased, did not mean that He remained entirely inactive.

The action on the masses by means of visible and public operations of spiritual forces was replaced by an invisible action of the Spirit upon the spirits of men of good will.

Paul had never spoken of a universal church which would have been instituted by God before the return of the Lord, and had done nothing to prepare for it. He knew that his teaching would be neglected or rejected, that there would arise men speaking perversely to draw disciples after them (Acts 20:29-31), that there would come a time when people would not endure the sound doctrine (2 Timothy 4:3,4). His friends had to be satisfied to hope that God would give repentance to the acknowledging of the Truth to them who opposed themselves (2 Timothy 2:25,26).

Paul was far from thinking about a general church which would already, in the present evil eon, introduce God’s Kingdom on earth in a powerful and visible manner.

We may conclude that it was through the operation of the Holy Spirit on individuals that, in spite of the abuses and errors of men, many could become true Christians – even if most of them remained in the sphere of the new birth.

All through the ages movements have arisen which did not proceed from ecclesiastical superiors, but from individual Christians who tried to come back to a more Scriptural teaching and who have opposed the authoritative and worldly churches.

Besides the normal tendency of man to resist God and His Word, and besides the blinding activities of the powers of darkness, the fundamental reason [for today's visible "church"] should be looked for in the [erroneous] idea that Israel was only a symbolic people and that a universal, visible church should be formed *before* the return of Christ. All spiritual movements were paralyzed because they continued basing their doctrines on human traditions which themselves resulted from this idea. All present theological systems are still based on these false premises.

We should not still go on appropriating to ourselves many things which belong to [Israel]: the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the Law, the service of God, the promises (Romans 9:4).

Further, if it is suggested that Christ has already been reigning for 1900 years by means of Christendom or "the church" and that God has already set up His Kingdom on earth, what a scandal this presents to a reasonable man who observes not only the divisions and discords in "the church," but also the miserable general condition of the world and its continuous de-Christianization.

Far from having given any detail concerning a visible organization, neither the Lord nor His apostles have ever hinted any visible unity other than that of the converted people of Israel during the next eon. Even as late as some hundred years after Pentecost, their only expectation was still the early return of Christ to set up His church and establish His Kingdom on earth.

The period of revelations closed with the apostles. The present action of the Spirit is limited to the enlightenment of the mind in order to be able to understand *what had already been revealed* and can be found in the written Word (Psalm 119:18; Luke 24:45).

We believe the Scripture refers only to one visible Church as such, namely the Assembly of Christ (Matthew 16:18) which will be made up of the converted people of Israel during the next eon. This Assembly will be led by the twelve apostles of the circumcision, after their resurrection at the end of the present eon. It is this Assembly which will have the mission of discipling all nations (Matthew 28:19).

Summary and Conclusion (p. 153)

In the Gospel of the uncircumcision which Paul calls "my gospel," the Jews are not excluded. The word "uncircumcision" refers only to the fact that the spiritual blessings had already been promised to Abraham before circumcision had been instituted.

This gospel was never proclaimed by Peter, James, John, or Jude, whose missions were directed towards the conversion of the people of Israel. It is only after this conversion that the Messiah will return to establish His Kingdom on earth, that the prophecies will be fulfilled, and that through Israel the entire world will be regenerated.

It is clear that the Twelve could not (yet) proclaim Paul's gospel relating to the heavenly blessing which became accessible only because of the disobedience of Israel and in order that, through jealousy, they turn to their Messiah.

After the sentence pronounced by Paul in Acts 28:28, everything changes because Israel is temporarily set aside as an elected people. The Kingdom on earth is now far off in the future, and God now administers the world differently, without Israel. All the signs showing the imminence of the Kingdom naturally cease, and there is no more question of prophecies being fulfilled, for those relate to Israel.

Since it was the converted people of Israel which were to form the *visible* church which the Lord called "My church" (Matthew 16:18) all matters of organization and ritual relating to this church disappear when that people is set aside. And Scripture does not give clear information which could be applied to a new, visible organization and a new liturgy.

It is in Paul's epistles written after Acts 28:28 and especially those written from prison (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 2 Timothy) that we find information applicable particularly to the present dispensation. The apostle announces that believers can now already have access, in spirit, to a sphere of blessings which surpasses all the others, for it relates to perfection in Christ. It no longer concerns the earth of the heavens but reaches out beyond creation: the "above-heavens" where Christ is at the right (hand) of God.

To summarize – while the twelve apostles of the circumcision speak exclusively concerning the earthly sphere and the new birth, Paul – the apostle to the Gentiles – also speaks about heavenly spheres of blessings.

All that pertains to the earth will be realized fully during the eon to come. Israel will be re-established as elected people and will accomplish their mission, the purpose of their election, relative to all the nations, turning them into disciples of Christ. Following this will come the eon of the new creation where the heavenly sphere will reign. Then will come the perfect state where all humanity will have entered into the above-heavenly sphere and where God will be "all in all."

We have seen that Paul was abandoned. Consequently, during the first centuries the great majority of Christians thought they had to form a visible organization, a church, which would replace the people of Israel or absorb them. They then attempted to adapt to this church the ancient prophecies, the covenants, the ceremonies, feast, gifts – in short, all that belonged to Israel or related to the time when the people were still the elected people.

The failures of the mass of Christians during our present period do not present an obstacle to the Christian thirsting for the Truth. No obstacle exists which would prevent him from studying the inspired Word, from being enlightened by the Holy Spirit in order to understand Paul and follow him in his solitary cause.

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Note: Born in Antwerp, Belgium in 1888, Van Mierlo trained in the scientific disciplines, eventually becoming responsible for the direction of research activities in the laboratories of an international telecommunications corporation in five European countries. To these responsibilities he added extensive research in archeology, theology, philosophy, ancient writings, and records of abnormal phenomena. A frequent visitor to the British Museum Library and other centers of information, he met and consulted with many biblical authorities in several countries. He spoke several languages and knew Greek and Hebrew.

Bishop Butler has stated that the only way to study the Word of God is the way in which physical science is studied. In his "Analogy", Part II, ch. 3, he says, "The whole scheme of Scriptures is not yet understood, so if it ever comes to be understood before the restitution of all things, and without miraculous interpositions, it must be in the same way as natural knowledge is come at – by the continuance and progress of learning and liberty, and by particular persons attending to, comparing, and pursuing intimations scattered up and down it, and which are overlooked and disregarded by the generality of the world." [Joseph Butler, 1692-1752, wrote "The Analogy of Religion" in 1736.]

Excerpts selected by Bob Evelyn