

Sunday, September 18, 2022—Galatians 1:13 Is The Church Of God An Exclusive Reference to the Little Flock?

Galatians 1:13

- **For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it:**
- Before we deal with verse 13 specifically, we need to remember the context in which the verse appears. Paul is in the process of certifying that mankind had nothing whatsoever to do with the origin of his gospel or apostleship.
- **For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews religion**—Paul had no doubt told the Galatians about his past life and status in the Jewish religion.
 - Acts 22:2-4—Paul had been trained at a Jewish seminary to be a Pharisee.
 - I Timothy 1:13—this is what Paul called himself looking back on his life prior to his salvation.
 - Acts 7:28-60—Saul was a member of the Sanhedrin. As such he was part of the judicial system of the nation of Israel. He was present at Stephen's trial and consented "unto his death."
 - Philippians 3:4-6—according to Jewish religious customs, there was no more devoted follower than Paul. He was a Hebrew of the Hebrews and blameless concerning the Law.
- **how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God and wasted it**—first, we need to remember what we have already studied about the word "church." It comes from the Greek word *ekklesia*, which simply means "a called-out group." We have already considered how *ekklesia* is not a technical word; the context will define the specific group or "church" that is being referred to.
 - Acts 19:32, 39-41—here the word *ekklesia* i.e., "assembly" in English is used to describe an unruly mob.
- Recall our previous study of the three Bible churches.
 - Acts 7:38—makes reference to another "church" of called-out people that existed in the wilderness. Here we have an example of a group of people that was considered a "church" that had nothing whatsoever to do with the Body of Christ.
 - Acts 2:47—the "church" of Acts 2:47 was the Jewish kingdom church that was waiting for the establishment of the kingdom according to the prophets.
 - Ephesians 3:2-10—the Church, the Body of Christ, was the subject of the mystery not revealed to the prophets.

- Ephesians 2:13-14—the Church, the Body of Christ, is fundamentally equality between Jews and Gentiles.
- Acts 2:47—most people think that Paul is referring to the body of Christ in Galatians 1:13 when he uses the phrase “church of God.” According to this line of thinking, Paul was persecuting the church, the Body of Christ, which had started in Acts 2. We reject this position.
 - Romans 11:31-32—the Body of Christ could not have been formed in Acts 2 since Israel had not yet been rendered and included in unbelief with the Gentiles.
 - Galatians 3:28.
- Luke 12:32—the church Saul was persecuting was the Jewish Kingdom church i.e., “the little flock” that was awaiting the second coming of the Messiah to establish the prophesied kingdom. This was the “church” that was being “added to” in Acts 2:47. Remember that Saul was a Pharisee. Did the Pharisees believe that Jesus was the Christ, or Messiah of prophecy? No. Therefore, they hated the message that the twelve and Stephen had been preaching. Consequently, Saul began persecuting this particular “church” or called-out group.

The Question of the Church of God

- Galatians 1:13—Paul’s use of the phrase “church of God” is being misunderstood and misapplied in our day.
- I Corinthians 10:32—is the “church of God in this verse a reference to the “little flock” or the body of Christ? Some who ascribe a particular/unique meaning to the phrase “church of God” believing that it is always and only a reference to the “little flock” and never to the church the body of Christ. This argument is made on account of Galatians 1:13
 - Galatians 1:13—in this context Paul is recounting his activities in Acts 7-9 before he got saved. Did Paul persecute the “church of God” that was in existence at that time? Yes. Was that “church” which he persecuted at that time the “Little Flock” or the believing remnant of Israel spoken about in the gospels? Yes. Does this mean that every time Paul uses the phrase the “church of God” he is speaking about or to the “Little Flock?” NO!
- Using this logic/reasoning many are arguing that the Corinthian epistles are written to the “little flock” and not the body of Christ.
 - I Corinthians 1:2
 - II Corinthians 1:1
- II Peter 3:15-16—is used to close the loop on this argument. According to those making this argument, Paul wrote unto Peter’s audience i.e., “the little flock” in verse 15. The phrase “church

of God” is used in Galatians 1:13 to refer to the “Little Flock.” Therefore, Paul wrote I & II Corinthians to the “little flock” i.e., the “church of God.”

- First, this line of argumentation confuses what Paul may have written to Peter’s audience with Holy Spirit inspired “scripture.” We already know from our studies of I Corinthians that Paul wrote other things that were not inspired and were therefore not included in the canon.
 - I Corinthians 5:9—Paul had already written to the Corinthians prior to authoring I Corinthians. Yet, this prior letter is not in the canon because it was not regarded as inspired scripture. So, this proves beyond doubt that Paul wrote other things in addition to his 13 canonical inspired letters.
- A second problem with this line of argumentation is that it applies a meaning to the phrase “church of God” that breaks down when applied to other verses containing that phrase.
 - Acts 20:28—was the church at Ephesus a “little flock” assembly as well? Paul calls them the “church of God.”
 - I Timothy 3:5 (15)—is Paul instructing Timothy in how to identify leadership in the “little flock?”
- The phrase the “church of God” needs to be understood within the context it is used. Paul uses the phrase to refer to both the body of Christ as well as the Jewish kingdom church i.e., the “little flock” that he persecuted during the early Acts period before his conversion. The context determines the meaning and usage.
 - I Corinthians 15:9—in this case Paul is referring to the believing church of Acts 7-9 that he persecuted i.e., the “little flock.”
- I Corinthians 10:32—Paul wrote I & II Corinthians to the body of Christ i.e., the “church of God” of this dispensation. Paul established the church Corinth, and it was not a “little flock” assembly. It was a Pauline grace church.