

Long White

HOW CERINTHUS WAS LOST

(A Supplement to The Key to Galatians)

Why haven't you read about Cerinthus before? Why do the standard works on Paul's life leave Cerinthus out? Why, when several histories tell us the arch-heretic Cerinthus opposed Paul since 50 A.D.

No scholar questions Cerinthus' existence! No authority questions Cerinthus' fight with the Apostle John. No one questions his Gnosticism. Very few (only one or two "super" critics) question his Judaism.

The only point at which scholars balk is whether Cerinthus worked EARLIER -- IN PAUL'S DAY.

Did Cerinthus fight both Paul and John? OF COURSE HE DID, as Epiphanius, Philaster, Theodoret, Eusebius -- and several later chiefs of the Vatican Library -- all prove.

Then why do historians IGNORE AND SUPPRESS the truth of Cerinthus' fight against Paul?

The answer is simple.

Cerinthus was lost because of TWO BASIC MISUNDERSTANDINGS: a contradictory story about Cerinthus; a mistake in chronology.

Chronology is Correct

When the valuable history by Epiphanius was discovered (early 1800's), his report of Cerinthus fighting Paul seemed strange. Strange, because Irenaeus -- an earlier historian -- had not reported that same fact. Irenaeus told only of Cerinthus

and the apostle John. These scholars concluded that Cerinthus could not live so long . . . so long as to fight both Paul and John! The few early readers of Epiphanius who believed him (e. g. Lardner, etc.) were swept aside by the main current of scholarship. Later authorities accepted the original report and the judgment of those first investigators -- without checking Epiphanius himself. Here is an example of the **FOOLISH CIRCUITOUS REASONING** found among such scholars.

"Though the tradition which brings Cerinthus himself into personal collision with Saint Paul will hardly bear the test of chronology."² (The Gnostic Heresies, Mansel, p. 53.)

In other words, Cerinthus couldn't live and be active that long! But let's check Mansel's reference. Footnote two refers the reader to Neander, Planting of Christianity, p. 325. Neander -- one of the earlier scholars -- offers **NO PROOF WHATSOEVER OF CHRONOLOGICAL ERROR**, no proof that Cerinthus could not or did not live so long! His only comment is:

"Though the account given by Epiphanius of the conflict between Cerinthus and the Apostle Paul is not worthy of credit, yet etc., etc." (Vol. I, p. 325).

Where is Neander's proof? He has none!

Let's summarize. All scholars agree that Cerinthus was fighting John toward the end of the first century. Actually, the date would be **THE LATE 80's!** (Irenaeus says 88 A. D.) Why then is it so unthinkable that Cerinthus could be active at the Council of Jerusalem in 49 A. D., as Epiphanius claims?? Why is a ministry of forty years so impossible? The Apostle John lived that long -- **AND LONGER!** John was active in the 30's A. D. and lasted until 100 A. D. !!

Here is final proof -- from an authority scholars accept -- that Cerinthus was

early. Eusebius -- when read correctly -- PLACES CERINTHUS EARLY!

"We have received the tradition that AT THE TIME UNDER DISCUSSION Cerinthus founded another heresy...." (Church History, Eusebius, Vol. I, p. 263).

Scholars have NOT NOTICED -- or have not investigated -- this "time under discussion." Several sections back Eusebius tells us what time: the "time of Simon Magus and Menander," p. 259. THAT'S THE 30's AND 40's A. D. ! Cerinthus is very EARLY!

Contradictions Disappear

So the first scholars who discovered Epiphanius mistakenly rejected his information about Cerinthus and Paul just because the "chronology" seemed to make Cerinthus' ministry TOO LONG. Once Epiphanius was tossed aside, later scholars followed without checking. However, they were not entirely asleep. These later scholars found new "support" for rejecting Epiphanius in the conflicting stories about Cerinthus. Some writers say Cerinthus was a Gnostic. Other writers say Cerinthus was a Judaizer in his Gnosticism. Unable to reconcile the "conflict," SCHOLARS THROW OUT BOTH ACCOUNTS!

But let a critic himself -- Neander -- solve this problem for us in his own words.

"...For in him /Cerinthus/, as has already been shown, elements alike of Ebionism and of Gnosticism are found united. Accordingly, even among the ancients opposite reports respecting his doctrine have been given from opposite points of view, ACCORDINGLY AS THE GNOSTIC OR JUDAIZING ELEMENT WAS EXCLUSIVELY INSISTED UPON." (Neander's Church History, Vol. II, page 42).

An amazing confession!! The proper answer of course -- as Neander admitted -- IS TO ACCEPT BOTH ACCOUNTS!

Remember: there were two major misunderstandings leading to rejection of Cerinthus.

Neander saw the truth about one major misunderstanding (conflicting accounts), but retained his original error of "chronology" -- assuming Cerinthus could not be so early! Other scholars have since admitted Neander's error -- the chronological mistake. That is, they admit Cerinthus was early -- but have not seen their way through the conflicting accounts! The result? An important heretic of New Testament times has been ignored and forgotten!

More Proof

Is there any more evidence that Cerinthus was a Judaizing Gnostic? Any more evidence that his ministry was early?

Indeed!

Irenaeus is usually quoted as mentioning Cerinthus' Gnosticism. But notice Neander's admission:

"...Irenaeus, in whose account /of Cerinthus/ however, the Judaizing element OCCASIONALLY SHINES THROUGH"
(Neander's Church History, Vol. II, p. 42).

Irenaeus no doubt only emphasized Gnosticism because that was one of the prevailing heresies of his day.

We must not forget that Philaster also wrote of Cerinthus' earlier activities. Even though Philaster and Epiphanius were colleagues, he is nevertheless a separate authority for Cerinthus' fight with Paul.

More important is the evidence that Lipsius gives after a very careful study of Epiphanius.

"Epiphanius, in whose work the majority are preserved, derived the principal portion of his statements partly from Irenaeus, and partly, as Lipsius has shown with high probability, from the now lost EARLIER WORK OF HIPPOLYTUS on heresies."

(A Dictionary of Christian Biography, Smith and Wace, Vol. I, p. 448).

Theodoret is another INDEPENDENT WITNESS. Notice he not only places Cerinthus early, but also places himself in Paul's area.

"Let us now see what Theodoret says: 'About the same time,' (he had before mentioned the Ebionites and Nazarenes,) 'Cerinthus was the author of another heresy or sect. Having been a long while in Egypt, and studied philosophical learning; at length he came into Asia, and gathered disciples, which he called after his own name.'" (Lardner's Works, Vol. VIII, p. 408.)

Here are the opinions of the chiefs of the Vatican Library:

"Baronius speaks of Cerinthus at several years of the first century, NOT VERY LONG AFTER OUR SAVIOR'S ASCENSION; Le Clerc at the year 80; Basnage at the year 101, in their several ecclesiastical histories." (Lardner's Works, Vol. VIII, p. 409.)