

“The Knowledge of the Mystery Is Critical”

Review:

- ***In our last fellowship we singled out only one section of Ephesians chapter 3 to illustrate the truth Paul dedicated his life to communicating as the apostle of the Gentiles. Today we will proceed from there to consider the details of what God is doing today under grace. We are today again dedicating ourselves to these scriptures because it is always necessary to keep in mind that each aspect of this distinctive truth as taught here is critically important for us to know today. For in these letters of Paul we learn how God is working today according the riches of his grace. An analogy will illustrate the importance of this: driving ones car legally. . . So Paul writes often therefore of the need for us to know these details. One example is in Eph. 3 where we have looked before:***

Eph. 3:1-9

1 For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles,
2 If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward:
3 How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words,
4 Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ)
5 Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit;
6 That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel

7 Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power.
8 Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ;
9 And to make all [men] see what [is] the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ:

Rom. 16:24-27

24 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ [be] with you all. Amen.
25 Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began,
26 But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith:

27 To God only wise, [be] glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen.

- ***As the apostle has written so powerfully here in Romans chapter 16, the revelation of the “mystery” had been kept secret but is now revealed and is truth for today. AND SO IT IS THAT TODAY, we need the Pauline truth, the Pauline revelation for salvation, for growth, for our maturity as believers***
- ***We are living in the dispensation of the grace of God and not in another dispensation. God is dispensing his grace to and through the Body of Christ, a most blessed truth. Having received this truth, we must then be bold to proclaim it, for without it, neither we nor others have the truth of God for today. Apart from Pauline teaching, the churches often promote mere religion and works salvation. Without spiritual food, what will our lives be like?***
- ***We can enjoy the Bible as God intended it by RIGHTLY DIVIDING THE WORD OF TRUTH, AND ONLY BY RIGHTLY DIVIDING THE WORD OF TRUTH! Have you considered properly the mystery, the sacred secret of the grace of God? This should be on our mind as much as anything in the Scriptures if not more.***

In summary, the dispensation of the grace of God is “better” [or literally, “different”] in all of these ways and more:

2 Tim. 2:14-16

14 Of these things put [them] in remembrance, charging [them] before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, [but] to the subverting of the hearers.

15 **Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.**

16 But shun profane [and] vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness.

Phil. 1:10 . . . That ye may approve things that are excellent [that differ]; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ;

Our Outline for This Series on the Seven Dimensions of the Mystery:

1. ***A New Dispensation, Our Current Reality (Eph. 3:1-9)***
2. ***A Better Gospel, Given for the Faith of Sinners (1 Cor. 15:1-8)***
3. ***The Church Which Is One Body, Given for Our Blessing (Eph. 4:4; 5:32)***
4. ***An Abundant Life, Offered Freely! (Rom. 5:17)***
5. ***The Blessed Hope & Expectation. Assured by Almighty God (Tit 2:11-14; 1 Cor. 15:51; 1 Thess. 4:15-18; 5:9-11; 2:1-3; 2:13-17)***
6. ***A Heavenly Warfare, Demanding Our Constant Engagement (2 Thess. 2:6-12; 2 Tim. 4:1-4)***
7. ***Every Benefit of Christ’s Work on Calvary, Fully Provided (Eph. 1:3; Rom.***

8:28-30)

The many, many contrasts (the Phil. 1 “better or more excellent things”) may be expanded upon at great length and their full revelation makes up the majority of Paul’s letters. But foundational to it all is the revelation by the Lord God to the Apostle Paul of the new dispensation of the grace of God. We looked at this last time but a little repetition will be beneficial.

I. A New Dispensation, Our Current Reality (Eph. 3:1-9)

[READ] Eph. 3:1-6

1 For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles,
2 If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward:

[READ] Eph. 3:7-9

3 How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words,

4 Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ)

5 Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit;

6 That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel

7 Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power.

8 Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ;

9 And to make all [men] see what [is] the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ:

- ***The word “dispensation” is VERY important as it speaks of what God is doing in reference to mankind.***
- ***In each dispensational plan there is always a test. Every dispensational plan is characterized by a test. Under the Mosaic Law the test was very simple: obedience to all of the law.***
- ***Today, under grace, it is simple as well: Today the test is whether we will be motivated by grace or by works***
 - ***What the key phrase “under law” means, dispensationally: It***

- means to be bound to obey every detail of the law*
- *What this key phrase “under grace” means, dispensationally: It means to be bound by God’s grace, or by the reality of the riches of Christ as already provided to us believers. What a difference this is!*
 - *This is all about motivation, isn’t it. It is the difference between seeking to keep the law in order to be accepted by him, on the one hand, and bearing fruit unto him because of his great gifts to us already given freely and abundantly.*
- *The word “revelation” as used here is significant also. This knowledge regarding the dispensation of the grace of God was not learned from others, but rather was received directly from the risen and ascended Christ! See Galatians for more details on this.*
 - *And then we also saw how the word “mystery” is most important. This revelation was kept secret until it was revealed to Paul. Do you see the significance of this? . . . For the dispensation of the grace of God it was kept secret from the foundation of the world, for the Kingdom it was revealed from the foundation of the world. What a difference indeed. One revealed -- the other kept secret!*
 - *But, in contrast, the gospel of the Kingdom was revealed progressively from Genesis onwards. More revelation will be given after the Tribulation begins specifically for those living at that time.*
 - *To summarize, the contrast between how God is and would work under grace compared to how he has worked under the kingdom expectation and promise is most instructive.*
 - *Under law NO BLESSINGS were given by God UNLESS obedience was forthcoming. For judgment and cursings from God were delivered when obedience was not present. Under the Law of Moses mercy was also available, but the terms and conditions of the ceremonial law were also strict regarding sins of every kind as defined there.*
 - *Under grace blessings were, on the other hand, given freely based on Christ’s finished work with personal fruitfulness the order of a new life “in the spirit”. The Holy Spirit is given to all believers today at the moment of saving faith. That was never the case under the law and according to the prophet Jeremiah the Spirit was not even available until the Kingdom was established. Similarly, eternal life which is possessed now by every believer was never possessed by Israelites and they*

**could could hope for it when the Kingdom was established
(see Dan. 12:2; Mt. 19:29; 25:46; Lk. 18:30)**

- ***This revelation, this “word of truth”, this revelation, is called a “mystery” because it was not made known previously (and couldn’t be)! Only when God had set Israel aside could this be revealed.***
- ***When we study the word of God, rightly divided, we distinguish the various dispensational dealing of God with man. There are a number of these “dispensations” according to Scripture. They are all different in many ways from one another although those from Promise on (starting with Abraham) are about Israel as a nation, except for the current dispensation of Grace. Conscience is not Human Government, nor is it Promise, nor Law, nor Pentecostal, nor Kingdom, nor Grace. They are all different and must be distinguished or the truth is replaced with total confusion. Yes, there are similarities. But the differences are often great, and for us today, most blessed indeed.***
- ***The largest division in Scripture is between PROPHECY and MYSTERY!! Let’s explain this. The one revealed the plan of God for Israel and the nations. Of course this was centered ultimately on Israel’s Messiah, the seed of the woman of Prophecy, Gen. 3:15. Most of the other dispensations apart from the current one of Grace focus on Israel and on this promise, while each emphasizes a different working of God in man. This dispensation alone is for the church which is his body.***
- ***The word “Mystery” signifies that which was previously kept secret but has now been revealed. The mystery is not “mysterious”. Once it is revealed it may be well understood with the help of the Spirit’s teaching. To understand this, we need to consider the other terms used in connection with this, such as “not made known”***
- ***“Not made known” before, pure and simply that. How could this be communicated any more directly and straightforwardly? Well, Paul a little later does explain it even further when he says that this dispensation was “Hidden in God” - verse 9. This means it was not partially known or progressively revealed throughout the ages as so many have been teaching down through time. No, it was kept “hidden in God”!! Consider the full meaning of this. He does not say “hidden in the Bible” but “hidden in God” or not even revealed yet.***
- ***Each dispensation has a test. This is a critical part of each***

dispensational working of God. Without a knowledge of this it is simply not possible to enjoy the Lord according to his working today which is according to the wealth or riches of his grace! Amen. The key test in each dispensation is whether man will take God at his word and receive the blessings he is pouring out at that time.

- ***Not rightly dividing the word obscures the truth, therefore. This is most critical to understand and know. It affects everything including the very gospel itself. There are many gospels revealed in scripture but only one gospel of the grace of God. And that is Paul's gospel.***
- ***Considering these distinctive contrasting teachings, it is most unfortunate that so many today reject rightly dividing and try to read law into grace and grace into law, thereby diminishing each. But may we be those who would be good students of the word of God, rightly dividing the word of truth!! Amen and amen.***

II. A Better Gospel, Given for the Faith of Sinners:

- ***A good place to start regarding this “better” gospel, this “excellent and most distinctive gospel” is 1 Tim. 1:11-16:***

[READ] 1 Tim. 1:11-16

11 According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust.

12 And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry;

13 Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.

14 And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.

15 This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.

16 Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting. [comment on “first” and on the sufferings of Paul, Acts 9:16]

- ***This ministry was “given”, “committed” to Saul (later renamed Paul), or, “entrusted” to him. And what a difference this made to the elect of that time and for all the centuries since Paul took on that most amazing challenge provided by the Lord of Glory and Grace that day so long ago on that road to Damascus. That ministry was given according to the grace of God and in no way was it based on Saul's works as he points out there in 1 Tim. 1:13-14.***

[READ] 1 Cor. 15:1-8

1 Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand;

2 By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.

3 For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;

4 And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:

5 And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve:

6 After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep.

7 After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles.

8 And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.

- ***Note what this actually says (and what is not said) for it is so important. If believing the gospel is necessary for salvation as Paul says here, then it is critical that we know what this true and authentic gospel actually is. That should be so clear. For otherwise, how can we know exactly what to believe and how can there be any assurance of salvation after we have believed?***
 - ***This is an area of much confusion today. That is because in fact many different and incompatible gospels are being preached in the churches today.***
- ***The simplicity of grace and its gospel is most distinctive and noteworthy. Colossians 2 is so precious:***

[READ] Col. 2:13-14

13 . . . and you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, **having forgiven you all trespasses;**

14 Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross . . .

- ***But, in contrast, the gospel of the Kingdom . . .***
 - ***Just one example will surely suffice. The so called “Lord’s Prayer” is a very concrete example.***

[READ] Matt. 6:14-15

14 For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will

also forgive you:

15 But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Or,

Lk. 6:37 Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven:

- ***Take note here that requirements are always according to this gospel placed upon the granting of forgiveness. These verses may be well known and beloved, but that does not change the fact that their meaning is quite incompatible with the teachings of the apostle of the Gentiles. But it is entirely understandable under the covenant the Lord God had made with Israel, for example.***
- ***Ah, the simplicity of Jesus Christ! So wonderful and so precious for the believer under grace. Salvation today is dependant on only one thing, taking God at his word regarding the revelation of his grace through his son Jesus Christ. Faith in him is alone required. No works at all are demanded. Such a contrast is revealed here between the gospel of the grace of God and the gospel of the kingdom with all of the latter's many requirements and demands.***
- ***We will now (and in our next fellowship, Lord willing) go on to consider even more of the dimensions of the sacred secret:***

III. The Church Which Is One Body, Given for Our Blessing:

- ***First, we shall read some additional relevant verses:***
 - ***Rom. 11:32-33***

32 For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all.

33 O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!
 - ***Eph. 2:14-16***

14 For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us;

15 Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace;

16 And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby:

[READ] Eph. 3:6 That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel:

[READ] Eph. 4:2-4

2 With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love;

3 Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

4 [There is] one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; [See also Eph. 5:30-32 and many other scriptures]

- ***Take note of the references to Gentiles, to the several “singularities”. An equally good “paraphrase” of this might be by using the words “of unique magnitude and quality”. And this is in reference to all of the following:***
 - ***“Co-heirs”***: lit. ***“joint-heirs”***
 - ***“Of the same Body”***: lit. ***“joint Body”***
 - ***“Partakers of his promise”***: lit. ***“joint partakers”***
 - ***Note that this all about Jews and Gentiles together. This is not for the Jews only! Both needed the “reconciliation”!***
 - ***This is a new creation indeed. Jews and Gentiles together, not because we Gentiles have accepted the Jewish, Mosaic rule for ourselves as had often been the case in ages past, but because “one new Body” had been created when the “partition” was removed.***
 - ***Israel had to be set aside by God for that to fully be manifested.***

- ***So this is all about an organism and not an organization. Take note of that for this is an area where there is so much confusion today among those that name the name of the Lord. We are talking about a spiritual building here and not a physical building at all. Most physical buildings dedicated to the glory of God build now through human history were not in fact built for God’s glory at all! Travel the world and that will become so clear.***

- ***This is the spiritual food needed by each of us today. There is no spiritual health possible without it! Will we take God at his word or not?***

- ***But, in contrast, the gospel of the Kingdom which is all about a different set of distinctives in every case, for these distinctives for***

the Church which is His Body are unique for us under grace. They were never revealed until Paul and are distinctive for us today.

- *Most precious indeed is this teaching regarding the Body of Christ for us who by his grace have come into the fellowship of his dear Son, our Lord Jesus. Amen.*

Conclusions:

- *A New Dispensation, Our Current Reality (Eph. 3:1-9)*
- *A Better Gospel, Given for the Faith of Sinners (1 Cor. 15:1-8)*
- *The Church Which Is One Body, Given for Our Blessing (Eph. 4:4; 5:32)*

===== NEXT TIME =====

- *An Abundant Life, Offered Freely! (Rom. 5:17)*
- *The Blessed Hope & Expectation. Assured by Almighty God (Tit 2:11-14; 1 Cor. 15:51; 1 Thess. 4:15-18; 5:9-11; 2:1-3; 2:13-17)*
- *A Heavenly Warfare, Demanding Our Constant Engagement (2 Thess. 2:6-12; 2 Tim. 4:1-4)*
- *Every Benefit of Christ's Work on Calvary, Fully Provided (Eph. 1:3; Rom. 8:28-30)*
- *The differences are often the most critical for us to understand. What is God doing today under grace? How important is it for us to understand the answer to this question? Paul answered that question at the end of the Romans, chapter 16:*

Rom. 16:24-27

24 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ [be] with you all. Amen.

25 Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began,

26 But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith:

27 To God only wise, [be] glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen.

- ***THROUGH THESE SCRIPTURES, THE APOSTLE PAUL IS ANSWERING THIS MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION: WHAT IS GOD DOING TODAY? THE ANSWER: THROUGH THE PREACHING OF JESUS CHRIST ACCORDING TO THE REVELATION OF THE MYSTERY HE IS SAVING MANY BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH ALONE, ENTIRELY ON THE BASIS OF FAITH. WORKS ARE NOT PART OF THIS MESSAGE OF GRACE. FOR IF WE ARE SAVED***

TODAY, IT IS NOT IN ADDITION TO OUR WORKS THAT HAVE JUSTIFIED US (AS JAMES WRITES IN HIS LETTER), BUT ENTIRELY ON THE BASIS OF CHRIST'S CALVARY WORK FOR US ALONE. "TO HIM THAT WORKETH NOT BUT BELIEVETH" IS PAUL'S CLEAR STATEMENT TO THAT EFFECT IN THE ROMANS LETTER.

- **AMEN AND AMEN!**