

***“Paul's Letter to the Colossians, Introduction —
Paul, the Administrator of Grace”***

- ***Introduction:***
 - ***Paul mentions a number of persons by name, some of them part of his ministry team at the time the letter was written. Other relate directly to the content of the letter, such as Epaphras who is mentioned by name twice. Epaphras, it seems, came to Rome to see Paul reporting on the great challenges he faced there as their pastor and the letter was written in response to those issues. False teachers had come into the church and were teaching some kind of Gnostic legalism which denied Christ's uniqueness and even deity and promoted Jewish legalisms. So it was a mixture of Greek philosophy and a works-oriented religious system which was subverting the truths of grace. We live in a similar time today with new-age spirituality replacing the word of grace on every side.***
 - ***One cannot find higher, more exalted and heavenly teaching anywhere in the Bible than this here except perhaps in the Ephesian letter written at the same time. Along with the letter to Philemon, the Ephesian and the Colossian letters were carried to these cities by Tychicus and Onesimus according to tradition.***
 - ***This letter was written probably during Paul's first imprisonment in Rome under Nero in the year 62 or 63 A.D.***

Review: Glory, Glory, Glory, According to the Revelation of the Mystery Through Paul:

- ***God Wants All To Know That He Has Worked in Us Gloriously by his Grace***
- ***God Desires That We Know How Glorious his Work of Grace Is***
- ***Christ the Creator of all Things Is Also our Glorious Savior and Head***
- ***We Are the Eternal Focus of Christ's Glorious Plan of Reconciliation***
- ***Paul's Message and Ministry for his Church Is Now Revealed for his and our Eternal Glory***

Our Outline Today: “Paul, Administrator of Grace”

- ***Paul's Glorious Message and Ministry to the Body Church Is Revealed***
- ***Paul Is Called and Instructed by the Ascended Christ Jesus***
- ***Paul Is Installed as Administrator of a New Dispensation of the Grace of God***

- ***The Central Doctrine of the Dispensation of Grace Is Revealed Through Paul Alone***

I. Paul's Glorious Message and Ministry to the Body Church Is Revealed:

- *Let's look at the text itself, reminding us of what we saw in our last meeting and perhaps, Lord willing, grasping on to even more today:*

[READ] Col. 1:24-29

24 [Paul] ... Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church:

25 Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God;

26 Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints:

27 To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:

28 Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus:

29 Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily.

- *These are some of the most exalted words ever written in the English language and the Greek words are similarly that in the Greek language. The difference is that the Greek original was inspired by God, meaning God the Holy Spirit breathed out those words through the human author and ensured a perfect representation on the written page. Oh, how wonderful! How very transforming it is to know that. May we dwell here long and grasp the full significance of it, for now and forever.*
- *We considered this transforming revelation the last time we met. But today our focus will be at a higher level, on Paul's special and distinctive ministry, its origin and purpose, and on the body of scriptural truth delivered by him to the churches for their (and our) instruction and edification. Nevertheless, these verses demand repeating as they are most critical for our understanding:*
- *These are truly heavenly and spiritual words and some of the most exalted words to be found anywhere, are they not?*

II. Paul Is Called and Instructed by the Ascended Christ Jesus:

- ***We see what is written here in chapter 1 of the letter to the Colossians. But do we understand them? We would do well to consider the context and background of what is written here if we would understand what Paul has written here even better.... What about Paul's calling and instruction? What is written elsewhere about this? Surely there is much written here in sacred scripture about something this critically important. And indeed there is!***

Acts 9:1-16

1 And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest,

2 And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.

3 And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven:

4 And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

5 And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: *it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.*

6 And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord *said* unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.

7 And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man.

8 And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought *him* into Damascus.

- ***The following verses are about a man named Ananias, selected by God for a special mission of identification of Paul to the primarily Jewish brethren assembled there in Damascus. We will look into that a little more next. But especially in Paul's testimony before King Agrippa reported in Acts 26 we see some of the features of that as he recalls much later. There is more revealed in chapter 26 of the Acts. We will quickly look there where Paul recounts his testimony to King Agrippa:***

Acts 26:13-18

13 At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me.

14 And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? *it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.*

15 And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.

16 But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee;

17 Delivering thee from the people, and *from* the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee,

18 To open their eyes, *and* to turn *them* from darkness to light, and *from* the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.

- *It was Paul therefore that was taught by the risen and ascended Christ Jesus from heaven. He was given that message that he preached to the Gentiles by the Lord himself.*
- *He was instructed more than once according to verse 16. More than likely it was often. It is that instruction that he shares with us in his letters according to verses 17 & 18 and many other references including the most inclusive one:*

2 Tim. 3:15-17

15 And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

16 All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

17 That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

- *And so Paul's letters were written, containing the words of the risen and ascended Christ Jesus:*

1 Tim. 6:3 If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, [even] the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness;

- *Restating our main point today, it was given to Paul to bring us the word of grace and truth for today, for this Dispensation of the Grace of God. That is our next point today:*

III. Paul Is Installed as Administrator of a New Dispensation of the Grace of God:

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:

- *Note that it was not given to Peter or to the Eleven, but to Paul. This is confirmed in other scripture so there should not be any confusion about it:*

Acts 13:39-48

39 And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.
 40 Beware therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets;
 41 Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you.
 42 And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next sabbath.
 43 Now when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas: who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.

44 And the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God.

45 But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming.

46 Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.

47 For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth.

48 And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.

- *But what led up to this independently of Paul's first missionary journey? For there was a transition between the preaching of the Kingdom by the Twelve and Paul's new ministry. That is in Acts chapters 9, 10 & 11, the history of which is referred to by Peter in what we read in Acts chapter 15 giving us a concise overview of what had happened earlier to convince Peter of the Lord God's movement now to the Gentiles. Paul had been called out and saved, and now it was time for the outreach to the Gentiles to begin in earnest. Peter was called to be a primary voice in support of this new movement of God Almighty.*
- *Peter's accreditation of Paul is so very important, at least for the other Jewish believers in Jerusalem and elsewhere who had believed regarding Jesus and the coming Kingdom. For without that the Judiazers would have had such an advantage that the news of grace to Gentiles through Paul could easily have been overshadowed permanently by some form of Judaism. It nearly was anyway, but by the power of Almighty God it has endured.*
- *In response to the threat by Judaizer from Jerusalem, in Acts 15 Peter responds to the conflict they had with Paul in Gentile lands by proclaiming that the admission of the Gentiles into the church was accredited by the signs and wonders that God had given (see account of that in Acts 11 etc).*
- *Paul's calling as the apostle of the Gentiles and as the administrator of this dispensation are not disputed at the Jerusalem council by the 11, Peter, or by James - Gal. 1 & 2. It is here in the Galatians letter*

that Paul's distinctive administration is defined and accepted by the Twelve:

[READ] Gal. 1:6-12

6 I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel:

7 Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ.

8 But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.

9 As we said before, so say I now again, If any *man* preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.

10 For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.

11 But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man.

12 For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught *it*, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.

- ***But what about the Great Commission? The Twelve were under the preaching of that during Christ's earthly ministry. But they were not abiding by the terms of it as it is often explained today. They were going to the Jews only. Acts 10 & 11 make that so clear. They did not believe that it was the right time to go to the Gentiles! Were they merely carnal or did they know something that is still not known by many today, nearly 2000 years later? Well, Paul fills in the details and gives us a foundation to stand upon in his teaching in Galatians 2:***

Gal. 2:1-9

1 Then fourteen years after I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and took Titus with *me* also.

2 And I went up by revelation, and communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to them which were of reputation, lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain.

3 But neither Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised:

4 And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage:

5 To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.

6 But of these who seemed to be somewhat, (whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me: God accepteth no man's person:) for they who seemed *to be somewhat* in conference added nothing to me:

7 But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as *the gospel* of the circumcision was unto Peter;

8 (For he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles:)

9 And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we *should go* unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision.

- *So the Great Commission was not in effect. For Peter, James, and the other Eleven agree with Paul here that their ministries would be distinct, with the Twelve ministering to the Jews the distinctive message for Israel and the coming Tribulation and Kingdom and Paul ministering to the Gentiles, neither Jew nor Greek, the Dispensation of Grace with the teachings contained in the sacred secret revealed to him, the Mystery. Let us see what is written about that:*

IV. The Central Doctrine of the Dispensation of Grace Is Revealed Through Paul Alone:

[READ] 1 Tim. 1:1-4

1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the commandment of God our Saviour, and Lord Jesus Christ, *which is* our hope;

2 Unto Timothy, *my own son* in the faith: Grace, mercy, *and* peace, from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.

3 As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine,

4 Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying [lit. "The dispensation of God"] which is in ["lit. Or "by"] faith: so do.

- *There are countless passages in Paul's letters to the Romans, etc. that teach these distinctive doctrines. They focus on salvation by grace through faith apart from legal works-oriented living, on the doctrine of the Body of Christ and his indwelling spirit and life, on distinctions between grace teaching and Jewish legalisms, and on the coming catching up into heavens glory, so different in nature and in timing with the hope of Israel. Finally, our heavenly hope is central as opposed to and so different from the earthly and Millennial hope of Israel.*

These teachings and far more are all part of the Sacred Secret. I will focus specifically on those doctrines revealed to Paul for us next time, Lord willing. But for today we will look into the Ephesians letter to see how clearly Paul writes of how this dispensation with its revelations were committed to him:

[READ] 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:

- ***This teaching is so different from what had been taught before Paul's message and ministry were given by the Ascended Christ Jesus. Peter was preaching to the Jews regarding how God was holding them accountable for the crucifixion of our Lord and that the resurrected Christ was coming again in judgment. That was not good news for them. Much soul searching and repentance was needed therefore. But for Paul the message was all good news indeed. Christ in his death had paid the penalty for the sins of the world by shedding his own blood as the Lamb of God. Anyone who believed in his completed work and glorious resurrection was declared righteous in and through him, whether Gentile or Jew, for the message was now the same for both. What a glorious redemption was now available to all! All are sinners before the righteous and holy God today. So all must be saved the same way, by grace through faith alone!! Praise God.***

[READ] Rom. 5:17-21

17 For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.)

18 Therefore as by the offence of one *judgment came* upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one *the free gift came* upon all men unto justification of life.

19 For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.

20 Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound:

21 That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.

- ***Considering the depth and scope of Pauline teaching and doctrine, all of which was as he writes here in Eph. 3 and in our Col. 1 texts, were hid in God and not revealed until given to Paul, it should be clear that this revelation as Paul gives it in his letters to the churches “fills up” or “completes” the Word of God. We plan to examine that as part of our focus here next time.***

Conclusions / Application:

Eph. 1:2-9

2 Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and *from* the Lord Jesus Christ.

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly *places* in Christ:

4 According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:

5 Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,

6 To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.

7 In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;

8 Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence;

9 Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself:

- ***Only those saved by grace through faith are promised these heavenly and eternal blessings. Israel and the Jews were promised***

very much in earthly blessings which they have not yet received. According to Hebrews 11, our blessings are greater than theirs! Furthermore, part of the essence of our promises as revealed in the mystery given to Paul for us is that we would receive these blessings before they receive theirs. Oh joy!

- ***So we see that our blessings will be completed in the heavens before the Millennial Kingdom is established at Christ's second coming. But since the Lord's refocusing on Israel in preparation to fulfilling his promises to the Jews begins during the Tribulation period, the rapture of the Church Which is His Body must occur before that. The dispensational change to the Kingdom and its preparation will in fact be initiated once our calling into glory in the Blessed Hope has occurred. This part of the sacred secret revealed to Paul is found nowhere outside Paul's writings. Only he received this teaching and only he is able to reveal it for us. The other scripture writers agreed to that in Gal. 2.***

Let's remember that as we study God's Word of Truth which has now been "completed". As we study that word now by necessity comparing scripture with scripture, discerning the word according to dispensational context and understanding it accordingly, let us recognize what God was and is doing in every dispensational context. For us today living under the Dispensation of the Grace of God, let us relish and rejoice in the full extend of his grace and abound in it, confirmed and built up and enabled by the word of that grace, that we might be shining witnesses in his continuing ministry of that grace.

Let us never be drawn aside by other teachings that are given for our faith and understanding but not indeed for our obedience. Stealing other's blessings as our own is not our way I would hope. LEt us be content always with what God has provided and promised to us Gentiles, forgiven, justified, and perhaps soon glorified! Amen.

***"Jesus, Thy Blood and Righteousness"
By Count Zinzendorf, translated by John Wesley***

***1 Jesus, thy blood and righteousness
my beauty are, my glorious dress;
'midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed,
with joy shall I lift up my head.***

2 Bold shall I stand in thy great day;
for who aught to my charge shall lay?
fully absolved through these I am
from sin and fear, from guilt and shame.

3 When from the dust of death I rise
to claim my mansion in the skies,
ev'n then this shall be all my plea,
Jesus hath lived, hath died, for me.

4 Jesus, be endless praise to thee,
whose boundless mercy hath for me -
for me a full atonement made,
an everlasting ransom paid.

5 O let the dead now hear thy voice;
now bid thy banished ones rejoice;
their beauty this, their glorious dress,
Jesus, thy blood and righteousness.

Next Time:

- ***Paul's Doctrine Fills Full or Completes the Word of God***
- ***Paul's Doctrine Is Essential for our Understanding***