

***“Paul’s Letter to the Colossians, Introduction —
The Seven Dimensions of the Mystery, Part 3”***

Review (The Mystery or Sacred Secret, Dimensions 3 - 4):

- ***The Indwelling of the Triune God, Providing Constant Resources in Living (Col. 1:26-27; Rom. 8:8-10)***
- ***The Church Which Is One Body, Given for Our Mutual Blessing (Eph. 4:4; 5:32)***
 - ***Paul gave details regarding this life and its outworking that is really astounding if we would take the apostle seriously in his writings. For example:***

Col. 1:26-27

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:

- ***We see here that great secret, kept hidden in God from before the foundation of the world, that for Gentiles, apart from the covenants and promises given to Israel, God’s “chosen people”, God had planned and prepared a great salvation indeed, and all though the riches of grace made sure for us by the completed and perfect sacrifice of his own beloved Son, Christ Jesus. This is most wonderful and blessed and is at the heart of Paul’s doctrine. This blessing is part of the whole realm of blessings, under grace, which he describes here at the beginning as “given to me for you (or “for your benefit”). This teaching is contained in seven (or more) parts and I have called them here the various Dimensions of the Mystery”, The Seven-Fold Dimensions of the Mystery Dispensation of the Grace of God (Eph. 3:1-9):***

- 1. A Better Gospel, Given for the Faith of Sinners (1 Cor. 15:1-8)***
- 2. Every Benefit of Christ’s Work on Calvary, Fully Provided (Eph. 1:3; Rom. 8:28-30)***
- 3. An Abundant and Eternal Life, Offered Freely, Based on Christ’s Righteousness (Rom. 5:17), and The Indwelling of the Triune God, Providing Constant Resources in Living (Col. 1:26-27; Rom. 8:8-10)***

4. *The Church Which Is One Body, Given for Our Mutual Blessing (Eph. 4:4; 5:32)*
 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. *The Mature Life of the Believer Under Grace, Endowed in Every Way to His Glory (Gal. 5)*
 7. *A Heavenly Warfare, Demanding Our Constant Engagement (2 Thess. 2:6-13; Eph. 6:10-12; 2 Tim. 4:1-4)*
- *We looked in our last two fellowships here at several of these dimensions including last time the indwelling every believer today of the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The various manifestations of their presence in the realms of the new nature of the Father, the eternal life of the Savior, and the empowering of the Spirit, we our subject last time. Paul writes of this in many places in his letters including in Romans chapter 8:*

Rom. 8:1, 8-11

1 There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit, and Holy Spirit.

...

8 So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.

9 But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.

10 And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.

11 But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.

- *All believers are blessed today with these gifts for they are all part of his working under grace in each of us as the apostle writes in such a compelling way in verses 8-10 here. But it is in Ephesians, a later letter written along with Colossians, Philippians, and Philemon from a prison setting in Rome that Paul writes the details concerning these great gifts based in many cases on the indwelling of the Triune God in each of us his children. Indeed, as he wrote in 1 Cor. 3:16 and 6:19, that the spirit of God dwells in us and that we are the temple therefore of the Holy Spirit. But in his later letters we see the full glory of God's working in us today revealed, for in general, and then in specifics:*

Eph. 3:14-19

14 For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

15 Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named,

16 That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man;

17 That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love,

18 May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height;

19 And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.

- *The indwelling of the Triune God is a teaching that we simply cannot live without. If we did not possess this reality we would have so little of what we have been blessed with today under the fullness of his abundant grace. For we have been given an empowering that was never given to man before!! Amen.*
- *We now move onwards. One of the most blessed and consequential Pauline doctrines is that of the Body of Christ, the “one body” teaching so clearly made known in Eph. 4. After early in chapter 3 revealing the Mystery or Sacred Secret teaching given to him for us Gentiles, he gives instruction in that chapter of a general nature as we have seen and now proceeds to give detailed and specific instruction in words that are most glorious.*
- *Now he continues here in the following verses to give practical teaching of how these gracious gifts are designed to work together in our lives. But, he writes these gifts resulted in gifted believers that are thereby designed by God Almighty to work together “to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.”*

Eph. 4:14-16

14 That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;

15 But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:

16 From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

- ***But there is even more revealed about the Body of Christ in chapter 5, with the analogy of husband and wife in the marriage bond. That seems on first look to be a teaching about marriage, but Paul corrects that by his wording in verse 32.***
- ***Only to Paul was given the teaching for the church which is his Body. Believe it. It is true. Check it out. Even Peter was not given the teaching through Christ, but received it through Paul and found it “difficult” to understand years later as he writes in 2 Pet. 3:15-18.***

WHAT IS GOD DOING IN THIS DISPENSATION OF GRACE? QUITE SIMPLY, HE IS WORKING HIS GRACE INTO US AND THROUGH US, ONE TO ANOTHER, AND THOUGH THIS “DISPENSATION” HE HONORS HIMSELF THOUGH SUCH AS OURSELVES. OR, AS HE WRITES IN 1 TIM. 3:14-16:

Introduction: “The Seven Dimensions of the Mystery, Part 3”

This brings us to our lesson for today, The Blessed Hope, or the Rapture of the Church. This is one of the most glorious teachings of all, that of the Blessed Hope of the believer today under grace. Today we live in a time when this teaching, one of the Seven Dimensions of the Sacred Secret given to Paul, is demeaned and distorted and so often denied as even true and authentic. Many once believed this teaching and no longer do. But this is our Blessed Hope and so much of our faith and our lives depend on a proper understanding of it. It is a common theme of the Apostle and as such will require some time to even summarize it. We will rely on Paul’s own outline of this teaching, embedded in his Corinthian and Thessalonian letters and also his letter to Titus where we find this outline:

Our Outline Today: 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 Thess. 2:13-17)

- ***The Privilege of Grace - The Blessed Hope Teaches That Which Was Previously Kept Secret (1 Cor. 15:50-54)***
- ***The Prospect of Grace -The Blessed Hope Is the Source of Our Comfort (1 Thess. 4:15-18, 5:4-11; 2 Thess. 2:3)***

NEXT TIME, Part 2 of the Rapture Teaching Regarding Our Blessed Hope:

- ***The Presence of Grace - The Blessed Hope Delivers Us From Fear (2 Thess. 2:1-3)***

- ***The Power of Grace - The Blessed Hope Protects Us From License (Tit. 2:11-14)***

I. The Privilege of Grace - The Blessed Hope Teaches That Which Was Previously Kept Secret (1 Cor. 15:50-54):

- ***Its Nature — a Transformed Body and Spirit Promised for all Believers at the Rapture of the Church***

[READ] 1 Cor. 15:50-54

50 Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.

51 Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,

52 In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal [must] put on immortality.

54 So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.

- ***These are most important words and are all directly relevant to our focus today. The word “mystery” in verse 51 is critical to what Paul is saying here, as he makes a point that is often misunderstood. Like the Gospel of Grace, the Dispensation of Grace, the Church which is His Body, and the new Eternal Life in Christ Jesus, all of these including the Rapture of the church are part of the “mystery” or sacred secret revealed to and through Paul. As such they are not found even mentioned in passing in the other writings of scripture. For if they were, the revelation of them though Paul could not have been called a Sacred Secret or a Mystery. It is that simple.***

That is a most profound truth and critically important for every believer to know and cherish always.

- ***The particular truth revealed here has to do with the “inheritance of the kingdom of God” (verse 50) and on truth concerning it. This concept as well as the central theme behind “the kingdom of God” are generic and have application in any and all dispensational contexts. But there are differences in how that kingdom or rule of God manifests itself in the varying dispensational circumstances.***

The Kingdom of God under Adam is not the same as that under Noah, for example, or that under Moses compared to the 1000 year Millennial Kingdom yet future, or that under Abraham, or David compared to what we see and know today of God's working under his abundant grace. If these differences were not important then God would never have raised up Paul, for he already had the Twelve apostles prepared and ready to preach concerning the coming Kingdom for Israel once his death and resurrection had been accomplished.

- ***The Pauline teaching is so critically important for the church today as it was that teaching that Paul was so willing to sacrifice his life for. Let's see why.***
- ***The scripture here draws several sharp contrasts that reveal great differences between prophecy and the mystery:***
 - ***Flesh and blood bodies and spiritual bodies or the corruptible verses the incorruptible, the mortal vs the immortal (or subject to dying versus not subject to death)***
 - ***The fact of the coming transformation for all***
 - ***Furthermore, what is revealed is that all will enter into our full inheritance with transformed bodies. The teaching to Israel, on the other hand, was that many would enter that promised realm in their natural bodies and that would be the normal result for those alive when the Lord returned. The difference has to do with a Heavenly Inheritance on the one hand, and with an Earthly Inheritance on the other.***

For Israel, only those that had died first (like Job, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, David and so many other saints according to Hebrews 11 would receive a resurrection body at that time. The rest would receive their inheritance when Christ welcomed them into his earthly and millennial kingdom. But for us under grace it is so different. Our inheritance and only be entered with a resurrection or transformed body for it is a truly heavenly inheritance indeed! Amen.

Again, then, what stands written?

1 Cor. 15:50-54

50 Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.

51 Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,

52 In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal [must] put on immortality.

54 So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.

Amen. It is such a blessing know this, isn't it?

- ***Then, to cap it all off, this truth is called a mystery or sacred secret! There are some consequences of this teaching that we may not have yet considered:***

- ***Firstly, no conclusions regarding the Rapture may be drawn from non - Pauline writings - regarding the nature or the timing of the Rapture, for example, since those distinctive of grace teaching had not been revealed yet (in prophecy, whether in the Old Testament or by Christ in his earthly ministry, or by Peter or James in the early Acts) or had not been given to those authors (Peter or John for example). What we see in all of those writings is truth regarding Israel's Earthly inheritance.***
- ***Secondly, the scriptures relating to the Second Coming cannot provide to us encouragement except in a general sense (God keeps his promises, he will care for his own)***
- ***But what specifically was kept secret but now for us it has been revealed to and through Paul? It has to do with the essence of that promised inheritance:***

For all those that were promised the Millennial Kingdom were promised those rights and privileges to be provided in due time. But only those who were alive at the time the Kingdom was to be initiated on earth would be entering into it in flesh and blood bodies. The rest would have to enter in resurrection

bodies, of course.

BUT, IN STARK CONTRAST TO THAT, THE PROMISE OF GOD FOR US TODAY IS THAT ALL THE SAINTS WHO WERE MEMBERS OF CHRIST'S BODY CHURCH WOULD INHERIT THEIR KINGDOM PROMISES NOT WITH FLESH AND BLOOD BODIES BUT WITH RESURRECTION BODIES! We understand why that is when we see the difference between heavenly and earthly inheritances. There is a critical and undeniable difference between them. AMEN AND AMEN. WHAT A BLESSED Hope indeed!

II. The Prospect of Grace -The Blessed Hope Is the Source of Our Comfort (1 Thess. 4:15-18, 5:4-11):

- *Its Benefit - Comfort Now and Forever Blessed in Heaven's Glory with our precious Lord Jesus*
- *The Thessalonian believers were troubled in their spirits because of false teachers that had come to Thessalonica after Paul had founded the church, taught the believers, and then left for the next part of his missionary journey. Their false teaching can be discerned from Paul's positive instruction found here:*

[READ] 2 Tim. 2:15-18

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.

17 And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus;

18 Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some.

- ***But Paul's primary teaching on the Rapture is found in the Thessalonian letters for the most part:***

[READ] 1 Thess. 4:15-18

15 For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent [Gr. "precede"] them which are asleep.

16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

17 Then we which are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

18 Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

- *So the teaching here is that those that die before the Lord's calling into glory will not miss the joy of his coming and the full benefits of that heavenly inheritance together with us, for they will be raised first! Apparently Paul's teaching was so powerful that the expectation, the hope, of his coming had transformed their mental and emotional lives to such a degree that everything else was to little account. But the false teachers were so successful with their satanic lies that many saints had left the teaching of the Blessed Hope behind. Then, when some in the fellowship, probably family members, had died [and were perhaps even martyred], they thought that their beloved ones had missed out on the blessing of being caught up together to meet the Lord in the air as Paul had faithfully taught them.*
- *Another aspect of this may have been that they had now been taught that the dead would never be resurrected with new bodies at all. In fact, they may have been taught that in the eternal state believers would be disembodied spirits, spirits without bodies at all. In that case they would never see their loved ones again. If some had died and then after that the false teachers had come to town this teaching would have been devastating. But Paul corrects the error by simply stating the truth concerning the Rapture. That both the dead and the living would be caught up together to meet him in the air. And so they would always be together with the Lord. The wording "shall rise first" implies physical and bodily resurrection. Indeed, the word resurrection means "to stand up"!*
- *The timing of this event compared with what had been taught previously to Paul's teaching to the Body of Christ is found next in this letter. But first he gives the teaching that was true for Israel prophetically as the Lord had taught and as Daniel and the prophets had revealed (see Dan. 2:21, etc.). This is a standard form of teaching by the apostle and we also find it in 2 Thess. But first what had been taught regarding "the times and the seasons" of*

prophecy? That is all about the return of the Lord for Israel and the years preceding it.

We should take special note of this teaching given here. Because apart from the Pre-Tribulational catching up into heaven's glory, BEFORE the beginning of the Tribulation Period of prophecy begins, only the prophetic message for the Kingdom would stand. And that message does not yield a basis for taking comfort and rest, but only the opposite as we see in Mt. 24-25, etc.... Paul makes that so clear here in 2 Thessalonians:

1 Thess. 5:1-3

1 But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you [because I already have taught you that that teaching was not for you but was for Israel]

2 For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.

3 For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.

- *We see the same language here that is found in the Lord's teaching recorded for us in Matt. 24 & 25, Mk. 13, Lk. 21, and Acts 1:7. But Paul is giving that as a contrast to the teaching he will now give regarding the Lord's plan for the Body of Christ. Notice the contrasting teaching, even pronouns, "they" as opposed to "ye", "you", "we" and "us", characterizing different persons living in very different times. We, Paul writes here, are living with the current expectation of Christ's possible soon return, his imminent return, as it were, while they, those living in the Tribulation period, are looking for the signs of the times and are preparing for that event, they might not be caught unawares.*

What God was planning for believers living in Paul's day (and in ours as well) was so very different, for it was their blessing, not their trial and the greatest testing ever to come upon this earth:

[READ] 1 Thess. 5:1-11

1 But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you.

2 For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.

3 For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.

4 But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.

5 Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness.

6 Therefore let us not sleep, as *do* others; but let us watch and be sober.

7 For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night.

8 But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation.

9 For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ,

10 Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him.

11 Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.

- *Here Paul contrasts (and this is key) the false teaching that had so disturbed the believers in Thessalonica and the true teachings as the apostle had previously given it. He begins by using the phrase “of the times and the seasons”. That expression was used regarding prophecy regarding Israel and their promised earthly Kingdom still yet to come.*
- *He then contrasts what happens in the world around us in the day as opposed to the night, but of course his teaching is concerning the spiritual application of that analogy.*
- *There are several words used here that must be understood well or we can never understand this teaching regarding the blessed hope of the Body Church. For it may seem that Paul is comparing believers that are still living at the return of the Lord versus those that have died. But the key to understanding this is seen in the underlying Greek words translated here as “wake” and “sleep”.*
 - *“Wake”: γρηγορεύω (grēgoreúō / gray-gor-yoo'-o)
Strong's: to keep awake, i.e. watch (literally or figuratively)*
 - *“Sleep”: καθεύδω (katheúdō / kath-yoo'-do)*

Strong's: to lie down to rest, i.e. (by implication) to fall asleep (literally or figuratively)

- ***But these words are never used of living versus dying in scripture. On the other hand, in 1 Thess. 4:13, a passage that addresses believer who have died and others that are still alive, a different word altogether is found, one that often is used of those that have died:***

κοιμάω (koimáō / koy-mah'-o)

Strong's: to put to sleep, i.e. (passively or reflexively) to slumber; figuratively, to de cease

- ***So we conclude that the intention of the apostle Paul here is that rather than contrasting in chapter 5 between those that are living and those that are dead as he had in chapter 4, the apostle is writing about the living who are saved as opposed to those that are not, and what awaits us compared to them at the rapture. ...***
- ***These verses therefore are the summary statement on the whole subject:***

1 Thess. 5:9-11

9 For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ,

10 Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him.

11 Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.

- ***So, to translate without the ambiguous words “wake” or “sleep”, the verses would read like this: “For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, Who died for us, that, whether we are alert [or watching] or distracted [and unaware], we should live together with him.” This is quite contrary to the principle that will be in effect during the Tribulation Period, where the applicable principle is rather as the gospel accounts make so clear. I plan to examine with you those scriptures in detail next time, Lord willing. For some of the same scriptures teach us about our hope and its comfort while the teaching itself is many dimensioned and needs to be studied in depth to grasp its full meaning.***
- ***“What is God doing?” is always the critical question, dispensationally speaking, when the believer’s life is examined. Grace is operative to***

the fullest today as verse 10 states, while it is not in the Tribulation Period, since then a Kingdom legal requirement in addition to faith applies.

Conclusions / Application:

- ***So, as grace abounds, Paul writes in chapter 2 of the second letter to the Thessalonians (which we shall also look at next time) some very comforting words:***

2 Thess. 2:13-17

13 But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth:

14 Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

15 Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.

16 Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace,

17 Comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work.

- ***Such wonderful and comforting words are these of the Apostle Paul for us Gentile saints. We will not need to endure the trials brought upon God's people the Jews during the coming Great Tribulation. No, we shall be raptured into heaven's glory with all that have gone before, all members of Christ's heavenly Body, all to receive the promised heavenly inheritance we all long for in this life daily.***
- ***Praise be to God for giving us understanding of the Word Rightly Divided. What a blessing indeed to know what God has promised to us. And it is so comforting to know that the false teachers, with all their unscriptural lies and distortions regarding our precious deposit of grace and truth, were and are never right about what God is doing today under grace.***

FOR TODAY GOD IS MANIFESTING THROUGH US EARTHEN VESSELS THE EXCELLENCY OF HIS POWER AND IN DUE TIME, PERHAPS TODAY, HE WILL CATCH US UP TO RECEIVE THE REST OF OUR HEAVENLY BLESSING GRANTED TO US IN CHRIST JESUS. AND WE WILL BE UNITED WITH OUR LOVED ONES THAT HAVE GONE ON BEFORE.

BRETHREN, COMFORT YOURSELVES WITH THESE WORDS! AMEN.

NEXT TIME, Part 2 of the Rapture Teaching Regarding Our Blessed Hope:

- ***The Presence of Grace - The Blessed Hope Delivers Us From Fear
(2 Thess. 2:1-3)***
- ***The Power of Grace - The Blessed Hope Protects Us From License
(Tit. 2:11-14)***