

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

Review: “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***

- ***Paul's Glorious Message and Ministry to the Body Church Is Revealed***

- ***We should remember these words when we think of Paul's ministry to the church:***

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?*
- *Paul Is Called and Instructed by the Ascended Christ Jesus*
- *He even ascribes his words to the saints in these letters as "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;

- *The point here is that it was Paul who was gifted with the word of grace and truth for today. The revelation, the teaching, the doctrine concerning the Dispensation of the Grace of God was given to Paul for us. And, not surprisingly, he was also given the position of divine administrator of this dispensation. That is a central teaching of his letters.*
- *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 where it was challenged by members of the Twelve Apostles and by James in Jerusalem. False teachers were in fact sent out from there to Paul's churches. Much in his letters speaks to that point and reasserts his divine authority over this dispensation and its doctrine. Councils in Jerusalem also confirm in described in Acts 15 and Gal. 1-2. There the Twelve Apostles including of course Peter and also James are in agreement with Paul's strong statements:***

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 to 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:*

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

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 which will be the primary focus of our teaching today.

- *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. Let’s consider that in closing today:*

Our Outline for Today: “Is Paul’s Mystery Teaching Really That Important?”

- *Paul’s Doctrine Fills Full or Completes the Word of God*
- *Paul’s Doctrine Is Essential for our Understanding and Spiritual Growth*
- *The Seven-Fold Dimensions of the Mystery (Parts 1-3 today)*

I. Paul’s Doctrine Fills Full or Completes the Word of God:

- *In Col. 1 we read these words which we should never forget:*

Col. 1:24-26

24 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:

- *There is much wonderful truth here. But what is Paul saying? Why is he using the word “fulfill” here?*
- *There are several different ways to explain what Paul’s words here, “to fulfill the word of God” are saying. Some of them are these:*
 - *View #1: They were the last written: But so much more was actually written later, the gospels, the general letters, Revelation, etc.*

- ***View #2: This teaching adds to the prophetic revelation and completes it by adding additional details: But there is a disconnect between the prophetic writings and Paul's in that Paul's do not correlate well with the former unless he is explaining the former prophetic teachings which he sometimes does. Otherwise Paul's teachings are quite different in so many ways.***
- ***View #3: They constitute a fulfillment of previously given prophecies regarding how God would be working in the future: But Paul's teachings do not show a fulfillment; rather they do sometimes point out similarities as in the word of God going to the Gentiles at God's appointed time for example. The error of teaching that Paul's revealed truth may be understood correctly simply by taking about types and their fulfillment is of this sort. A corollary to this error is that the believers who lived in times before Paul should have known these Pauline truths even though they were hidden in God and never before revealed is a similar error.***
- ***View #4: They make the previous teachings more understandable by the Gentile world by using non-Jewish language that would have been more easily understood by Greek speaking non-Jews: This would be a strange way to say that, using the word "fulfill" or "complete". Paul was raised in a Roman colony, Tarsus, that was on major trade routes at the time, and he was educated as a Roman citizen. But his writings highlight primarily what would never have been acceptable to a Greek or Roman Gentile. He writes strongly against those perversions and idolatries.***
- ***What does the context indicate for the answer to this question? That these mysteries or sacred secrets regarding the dispensation, the gospel of grace, and the body of Christ all relating directly to the current working of God under grace were previously unrevealed and have now been revealed. So Paul's letters revealing these truths "complete" or "fill full" the word of God as verse 25 indicates. That should be so clear. Has this truth changed your life? It surely has mine.***

II. Paul's Doctrine Is Essential for our Understanding and Spiritual Growth:

- *What did Paul write here in Colossians that would explain his and the Lord's goals for giving this revelation? And does that help us to understand the meaning and critical importance of these doctrines for the believer today? These are essential questions to ask and hopefully easily answer by looked at what is written in God's holy word of truth.*
- *These are essential questions because without knowing what God is doing our works are inevitably in vain. For our works must be in line with his. If we are trying to do what only he can do we will surely fail. And when it has been revealed what he is doing and we continue to do our own thing, no matter how religiously, we only underscore further our error. Those works which are fleshly and carnal at their base can never glorify God.*

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.

- *So Paul's writings "complete" or "fill full" ("fulfill" in the KJV) word of God. This does not mean that no inspired scripture would be written later, for the gospels and the writings of Peter, John and Jude as well as the book of Acts were written later. But the Pauline teaching provided the revelation concerning this current Dispensation of the Grace of God without which the word of God would be seriously lacking.*
- *Then, growth and maturity in the faith today is and must be founded upon this doctrine. Why would that be? Because the issue is what is God doing today, not on what did God do in the other*

dispensations now past or what will he do in the dispensation of the millennial kingdom (or the Great Tribulation) still future...

- ***This is most wonderful and blessed. This 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 call them here the various Dimensions of the Mystery".***

III. The Seven-Fold Dimensions of the Mystery:

- ***The Seven Dimensions, Listed:***
 - ***A New Dispensation, Our Current Reality (Eph. 3:1-9)***
 - ***A Better Gospel, Given for the Faith of Sinners (1 Cor. 15:1-8)***
 - ***Every Benefit of Christ's Work on Calvary, Fully Provided (Eph. 1:3; Rom. 8:28-30)***
 - ***An Abundant Life, Offered Freely, Based on Christ's Righteousness! (Rom. 5:17)***

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

- ***The Church Which Is One Body, Given for Our Blessing (Eph. 4:4; 5:32)***
- ***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; Eph. 6:10-12; 2 Tim. 4:1-4)***
- ***In one very long sentence, this may be stated this way:***

"By faith alone through the gospel of our salvation, joining the assembly of saints which is his Body, receiving the imputation of Christ's own righteousness, Christ indwelling our spirits with new life, empowered by the Spirit, reigning in life under the principle of the abundance of his grace, sharing in his sufferings for his body's sake, all while the mystery of iniquity reigns, but possessing the heavenly hope with all spiritual blessings freely given, and loving the expectation of his upward calling, with the promise of eternal manifestations of his kindness towards us saints." Amen! That is the. Content

of the sacred secret given to Paul. This is our subject for today.

○ **A New Dispensation, Our Current Reality:**

- *The subject of a dispensation is all about “the rule of the house” since that is what the word “dispensation” means. So to speak of a dispensation of God is to speak concerning the rule of or principles of God’s working, or, as I like to put it, “what God is doing”!*

[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 [the] 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:

- *There are key parts of the “mystery” or “sacred secret” identified here and they are truly essential for us to understand:*
 - *These truths were “kept hidden in God”, hidden from even the apostles and prophets — vv. 5 & 9*
 - *This is all about the Gentiles and how God’s working today is to make them “fellow heirs” — v. 6a*

- *These Gentiles are included in the “one Body” — v. 6b*
- *They are also given “the promise in Christ” — v. 6c*
- *And it is all “by” or “through” “the gospel” — v. 6d*
- *This gospel was given to Paul to administer by a great gift of God’s grace.*

This leads to the next segment of the mystery for us to look into today, that gospel itself. Paul says it was part of this mystery and therefore hidden until given to Paul. So there were other gospels and this one is distinctively different!

○ ***A Better Gospel, Given for the Faith of Sinners:***

[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.

Gal. 1:6-8

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.

- *But if it is even the gospel itself that is therefore under attack, Paul’s teaching is so very desperately needed as the corrective or antidote for those errors. It is there that we find*

our defense.

These verses make it clear that the enemy desires very much to pervert Paul's gospel by adding legal requirements to it when in its essence it is all about God's abundant grace! The enemy sincerely desires and will use every means available to present the lie that the revelation given to Paul for us Gentiles including the gospel itself is not really unique and different but just an "evolution" of what had been revealed before to the Jews.

- *In fact Paul's gospel is quite unique and that is understood only as we read his letters and dwell upon their content, receiving this truth as our spiritual food.*
- *Every Benefit of Christ's Work on Calvary, Fully Provided:*
 - *So we see that the sacred secret now finally revealed is all about what God is doing today according to the riches of his grace. God has opened the door of salvation and blessing to the Gentiles by removing the law which was the great barrier. To accomplish this the law was "nailed to the cross" as he wrote it in Colossians:*

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..

- *And what blessings are these so freely given now even to Gentiles? Ephesians 1 tells us both in general, "all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ", and specifically, our election in him before the foundation of the world, our sonship, our inheritance in him, our redemption through his shed blood with the full forgiveness of sins, and all the "according to the riches of his grace". How wonderful indeed.*

[READ] 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!***

But there is more, so much more, and even includes our life itself which is a very special gift of God's unlimited grace:

- **An Abundant Life, Offered Freely, Based on Christ's Righteousness:**

[READ] Rom. 5:17, 20-21

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.)

...

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.

- ***Paul gives details regarding this life that is now abounding:***

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:

Rom. 8:8-10

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.

- ***Praise God. We have been given an empowering that was never given to man before!! Both the indwelling of the Spirit of God and the indwelling of the risen Christ. All of us have both, and if you can receive it, even more, for the Father also dwells within each of us, for we are his children and we have our new nature from him. Praise God and the riches of his grace. It is so amazing and so wonderful indeed.***
- ***And these blessings will never end, for it is also written thus:***

[READ] Eph. 2:4-9

4 But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us,

5 Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)

6 And hath raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus:

7 That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in *his* kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God:

9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.

- ***And also, we are so blessed in this word of truth with so many assurances like what we see in Romans 8:***

[READ] Rom. 8:28-30

28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

29 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.

30 Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.

- *But we must stop here and save the rest for next time, Lord Willing.*

Conclusions / Application:

- *The Mystery or Sacred Secret revealed to Paul for us Gentiles contains such a wealth of truth that it is somewhat foolish to attempt to present it all in one hour.*
- *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 from the Lord working according to his unlimited grace to a working with his long awaited Kingdom will in fact be initiated once our calling into glory in the Blessed Hope has occurred. The truths contained in the sacred secret revealed to Paul are found nowhere outside Paul's writings. Only he received this teaching and only he is able to reveal it to 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.***

“It May Be At Morn”, By H. L. Turner, Composer: James McGranahan

1. It may be at morn, when the day is awaking,
When sunlight through darkness and shadow is breaking,
That Jesus will come in the fullness of glory
To receive from the world His own.

Chorus

O Lord Jesus, how long, how long
Ere we shout the glad song?
Christ returneth,
Hallelujah! hallelujah!
Amen,
Hallelujah!
Amen.

2. It may be at midday, it may be at twilight,
It may be, perchance, that the blackness of midnight
Will burst into light in the blaze of His glory,
When Jesus receives His own.

3. O joy! O delight! should we go without dying,
No sickness, no sadness, no dread, and no crying,
Caught up through the clouds with our Lord into glory,
When Jesus receives His own.