

Candlelight Christian Fellowship

Ephesians 3:1-21 (NKJV)

Part 1

Ephesians 3:1–13 (NKJV)

“For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles—² if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, ³ how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, ⁴ by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), ⁵ which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: ⁶ that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel, ⁷ of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power. ⁸ To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, ⁹ and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; ¹⁰ to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, ¹¹ according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, ¹² in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him. ¹³ Therefore I ask that you do not lose heart at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.”

Paul: An Unashamed Prisoner of the Lord Jesus Christ

As noted in Chapter 1 vs. 2 we learned that Paul the Apostle was in prison when he wrote the letter to the Ephesian believers. Four books in the New Testament are included in the list of “prison epistles.” They are Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon.

As a member of the Jewish community, Paul was converted to Jesus as Messiah. As a result he suffered harsh persecution from the Jewish and Roman communities.

Concerning this persecution Paul wrote to the Corinthians. He said, *“Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I. Are they ministers of Christ?—I speak as a fool—I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness—besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.”* 2 Corinthians 11:22–28 (NKJV)

To the Philippians he said, *“Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. For me to write the same things to you is not tedious, but for you it is safe. Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation! For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh, though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of*

the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind.” Philippians 3:1–16 (NKJV)

No Regrets

It is clear that Paul had no regrets about his calling and the sufferings he endured as a bondservant to Jesus – and as the Apostle to the Gentiles.

When writing to Timothy he said, *“Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began, but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, to which I was appointed a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles. For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day.”* 2 Timothy 1:8–12 (NKJV)

We can all be thankful that God called Paul to take the Gospel to the Gentiles, and that God made known to him the mystery of the Church in the Church Age.

The Mystery

The mystery Paul refers to herein is manifested in the *“dispensation of the grace of God.”* This dispensation is a key factor in the designation given to the Church Age. This mystery, having been revealed to Paul, is communicated to both Jew and Gentile. Its resulting effect is found in the union of Jew and Gentile – in Christ. *“For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.”* 1 Corinthians 12:13 (NKJV)

As we learned in chapter 2, God made *“one new man”* from the *“two”* showing that the *“Uncircumcision”* and the *“Circumcision”* are *“now”* made one in Christ. God *“has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments.”* (2:14-15) As a result, both the believing Jew and believing Gentile are formed into one body – the Church, through the shed blood of Jesus. The Church therefore embodies the manifestation of the mystery.

Paul spoke about this “mystery” throughout his epistles. They include revelation about Jesus’ incarnation, His death, burial, and resurrection; salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone; the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (which began on the Day of Pentecost), the unity of the Church, the Rapture (which brings the Church Age to a close), and most obvious (in the context of the Ephesian letter), that the believing Jew and Gentile are made into one body – in Christ; and that the Gentiles would be fellow heirs to the promises made to the Jews through the “*commonwealth*.” These truths – although hinted at in the earlier dispensations of the Old Testament – were elusive to the Old Testament saints but have now been openly revealed to the Church.

When Paul tells the Ephesians that these truths were given to Him by “*revelation*,” he is indicating that it was through the inner working of the Holy Spirit and the direct interaction he had with Jesus Christ. He received an unveiling of those things once hidden. He told the Galatians, “*For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ.*” Galatians 1:12 (NKJV)

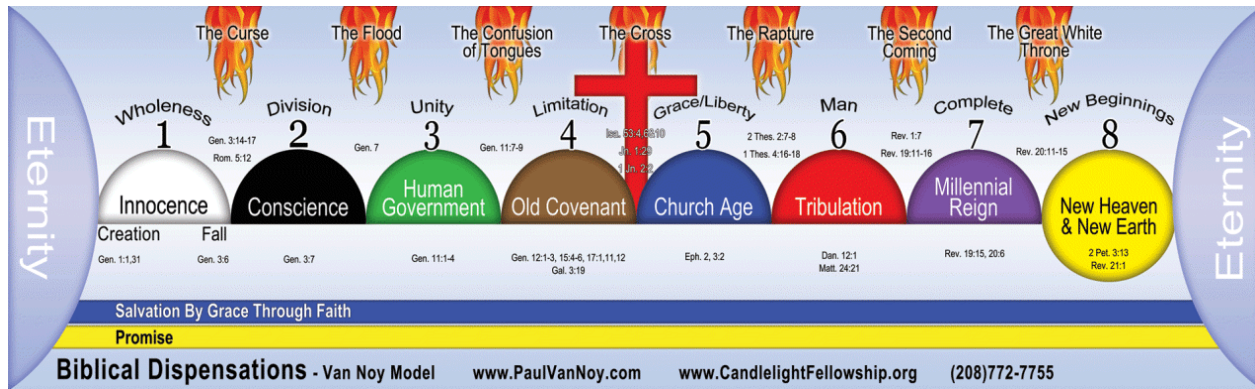
Paul does not suggest that these truths were something he alone came to understand, but that they were revealed by the Holy Spirit to the “apostles and prophets.” (vs. 5) The prophets he refers to are those of the first century who were, like the other apostles, given “revelation” from God.

Progressive Revelation

Daniel (an Old Testament/Old Covenant prophet) was given a degree of revelation from the Lord at the close of what is known as the Babylonian exile. At that time the Lord told him, “*But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase.*” Daniel 12:4 (NKJV) It is apparent that the “*time of the end*” would include the Church Age as seen throughout the New Testament writings. (See Acts 2:17. 2 Tim. 3:1, James 5:3, and 2 Peter 3:3)

It should be noted that although God will give increasing revelation (referred to as Progressive Revelation in Theological circles) to men and women today in the Church Age through the study of Scripture – coupled together with prayer, the revelations will be limited to a greater understanding of those things written in the Bible. Any extra-biblical information must in no way be put on par with the Holy Scriptures. Many an error has occurred (some with egregious consequences) by those who have added to Scripture words thought to be on par with the approved text of the Bible. (The Book of Mormon is a prime example.) In addition, any communication, be it written or verbally communicated in the first person must be carefully scrutinized through the filter of that which is written in Scripture. It is a fearful and potentially dangerous thing to speak for God in the first person, as the one communicating is verbally representing the Lord and will consequently be subject to misrepresentation of the Lord, evaluated by Scripture, judged by other members of the body of Christ, and exposed as a false prophet or teacher. Paul said, “*Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge.*” 1 Corinthians 14:29 (NKJV) God sternly warned those who spoke in His name whom He had not sent. (See Jeremiah 14:14 and 23:21)

When one speaks in the first person for God, he or she objectively communicates what would (at least in theory) be on par with the word of God. Therefore this practice tempts a line of demarcation between the authoritative word of God and any other spoken or written word.



Questions:

- 1) True or False: A dispensation is a period of time where God deals with man in a different administrative form.
- 2) True or False: Revelation in verse 3 means, to make known or to unveil.
- 3) True or False: The “other ages” Paul is referring to in verse 5 is the four dispensations before the cross.
- 4) The dispensations before the cross were: _____, _____, _____, and _____.
- 5) The _____ revealed the mystery of the Gospel of Grace to the apostles and prophets.
- 6) The _____ Paul is referring to is that the Gospel of Grace would extend to the Gentiles; and that the Gentiles would be fellow heirs with the _____ in the household of God.
- 7) True or False: The grace of God is a gift.
- 8) True or False: According to verse 7, the gifting for ministry is a result of God’s grace and true ministry is the power of God at work through His people.