



Bible Student's Notebook™

The Herald of His Grace

Presenting *every man* perfect in Christ Jesus. Colossians 1:28

Volume XV
Issue 360

The Fellowship of the Mystery

A Study of the Book of Ephesians

Part 2 of 3

by — Ike T. Sidebottom (1899-1970)

EPHESIANS 2:11-12

The past condition of these who have been redeemed from among the Gentiles is indeed a dark picture. "At that time," that is, "in time past," they were,

Without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world (:12).

God has a good reason for excluding the Gentiles of "time past" from the commonwealth of Israel and from the covenants of promise.

Because that, when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image like to corruptible man, and birds, fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore, God gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: and likewise also the men: leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lusts one to



another; men with men, working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind to do those things which are not convenient; being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant-breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them (Romans 1:21-32).

Three things stand out in the above quotation, namely,

God gave them up to uncleanness (Romans 1:24).

God gave them up to vile affections (Romans 1:26).

God gave them over to a reprobate mind (Romans 1:28).

This explains why God had to call Abram out from among his Gentile kindred in order to establish with him the covenant of promise.

(see *FELLOWSHIP*, page 3243) ↗

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Paul Our Guide – Christ Our Goal

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This free weekly electronic publication (52 times a year) is dedicated to:

- the proclamation of the riches of God's abundant, exceeding grace (Romans 5:20; 11:6; Ephesians 1:7);
- the affirmation of God's purpose to save all mankind through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (I Timothy 2:3, 4; 4:10; Titus 2:11);
- the "preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began" (Romans 16:25);
- true freedom and liberty apart from law (Galatians 5:1);
- the organic nature of the church, the Body of Christ (I Corinthians 12);
- the distinct message and ministry of Paul, the apostle to the nations (Romans 11:13);
- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15);
- the recovery of rich Biblical truth that has too long remained hidden under the veils of traditionalism, prejudice, misunderstanding, and fear (Mark 7:7, 13);
- the completeness of the believer in Christ (Colossians 2:10), with:
 - total freedom from sins (Colossians 1:14);
 - identity in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6);
 - adult sonship position (Galatians 4).

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FELLOWSHIP (continued from front page)

Now the Lord had said to Abram, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; And thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 12:1-3).

Later God gave to Abraham and his seed circumcision in the flesh as a sign of this covenant.

God said unto Abraham, "Thou shall keep My covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations. This is My covenant, which ye shall keep, between Me and you and thy seed after thee; every man child among you shall be circumcised. And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of a covenant betwixt Me and you. And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man child in your generations, he that is born in thy house, or bought with money of any stranger which is not of thy seed. He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised: and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken My covenant" (Genesis 17:9-14).

These truths clearly bring to our attention the good reason for those of the "circumcision in the flesh made by hands" calling the Gentiles the "uncircumcision" according to Ephesians 2:11. This "time past" condition of the Gentile could be changed in only one way, and that one way was Jesus Christ.

We are told by the Lord that circumcision was included in the Mosaic covenant also. In John 7:22 we find this statement:

Moses therefore gave unto you circumcision; (not because it is of Moses, but of the fathers).

This sign in the flesh was to remind God's called out people of what He expected them to be at heart. This

is made clear in Deuteronomy 10:16 where God said to Israel,

Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiff-necked.

The Lord wanted His people to be separate and apart and distinctly different from the corrupted Gentiles.

EPHESIANS 2:13-22

Beginning with :13, we no longer see the Gentile as he was "in time past."

But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.

Christ not only has become our Savior, but,

He is our peace, Who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; having abolished in His flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in Himself of twain one new man, so making peace; and that He might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: and came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father (:14-18).

The enmity which stood between the Jew and the Gentile "in time past," that is, during the Mosaic dispensation, was "the law of commandments contained in ordinances" (:15).

These ordinances were blotted out and taken out of the way through the sacrificial work of Christ. "The handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us," He took out of the way, "nailing it to His cross" (Colossians 2:14).

This explains why Paul tells us as members of the Body of Christ that we are complete in our Savior without the observance of ordinances. He says,

Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (Touch not taste not; handle not; which all are to perish ►

with the using), after the commandments and doctrines of men? (Colossians 2:20-22).

The fellowship which we have in “the church, which is His Body,” is not based on carnal things, but spiritual. We are a company of heavenly citizens waiting for the coming of the Lord Jesus, the Head of the church (Philippians 3:20-21). Having been raised and seated with Him in the heavenlies (Ephesians 2:6), we are admonished to forget “those things which are behind,” and “reaching forth unto those things which are before,” we should,

Press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling [or calling on high] of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:13-14).

Since we are “risen with Christ,” we should “seek those things which are above,” and set our affections on “things above, not on things on the earth” (Colossians 3:1-2). The religious ordinances belong to Israel and the earthly kingdom and not to the body of Christ and the heavenlies.

The Body of Christ is built on,

The foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone (Ephesians 2:20).

Indeed, the foundation work of all of the building that God has ever done is the same. It is all resting on that foundation which Paul speaks of in I Corinthians 3:11.

For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

The Body, the church, is the dwelling place of “God through the Spirit” in this dispensation. He lives in the heart of each and every individual member (I Corinthians 3:16). This truth is borne out in :21-22 where we are told that we are a building “fitly framed together,” and that this building “groweth into an holy temple in the Lord.”

EPHESIANS 3:1-13

These thirteen verses make up a portion of this chapter which opens and closes with the fact that Paul was suffering for the cause he represented.

In :1 he refers to his imprisonment, and in :13 he speaks of his tribulations.

During his Acts period ministry, Paul was bound with a chain for “the hope of Israel” (Acts 28:20); but immediately following his proclamation to the Jews in Acts 28:28, he was in bonds for “the mystery of the gospel” (6:18-20). This means that from the beginning of Paul’s ministry (Acts 9:20) to the setting aside of



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national Israel (Acts 28:28), a period of about twenty-one years, he suffered for Israelites; but after he had delivered God's final appeal to Israel, as a nation, he became a prisoner for the "Gentiles" (3:1).

Even though Paul was in prison, he was always "the Lord's prisoner" (4:1). He was just as active and useful in the Lord's service while in prison as when out of prison (Acts 16:25-34; 28:30-31 with II Timothy 4:6-8).

In :2 Paul calls attention to the fact that the "dispensation of the grace of God" was given to him. The word "dispensation" means stewardship. He also emphasizes the fact that this particular dispensation leads him in service toward the Gentiles.

A short time before Paul wrote the book of Ephesians, he declared himself to be an able minister of the "new testament" (II Corinthians 3:6). The new testament is certainly a covenant which was promised to the house of Israel and the house of Judah in the days of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 31:31-34 with Hebrews 8:7-13). As a minister of the new covenant, Paul was not preaching a message "which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men" (Ephesians 3:5), but he was confirming "the promise which was made unto the fathers" (Acts 13:26-43).

However, he clearly sets forth in this third chapter of Ephesians that by a special revelation God made known to him the truth concerning "the mystery" (:2-7). Men of other ages were privileged to see that God would "justify the heathen through faith" (Galatians 3:6-9) and that they would be made to rejoice "with His people" (Romans 15:10), but no prophet of God, prior to the Apostle Paul, was permitted to see,

... that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same Body, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel (Ephesians 3:3-7).

The word "mystery," as used in this chapter, means "a sacred secret." The same word is used in connection with the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 13:10-11). Paul uses it again in Romans 11:25 in connection with the duration of Israel's blindness. The same word is used again and again in the Scriptures. However, this mystery which was revealed to Paul was different from all other sacred secrets in that it was "unsearchable" or untraceable in the writings of all of the inspired men

prior to the Apostle Paul (Ephesians 3:18). He was the first man whom God called,

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; to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord (:9-11).

"The churches of Asia" seemed to be standing with Paul when he wrote I Corinthians 16:19, but about seven years later he reminded Timothy that "all they which are in Asia" were turned away from him (II Timothy 1:15). It seems that the churches of Asia accepted Paul's message when he was an able minister of the new covenant, but turned away from him when he began to preach "the mystery."

Paul's experience along this line was no different than the present day preacher meets when he dares to preach the truth concerning the mystery without a mixture of works which were associated with the old and new covenants.

EPHESIANS 3:14-21

Here we have the second prayer of the Apostle Paul, which is related in this Epistle. The deep underlying cause that brought Paul to his knees before the "Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" is clearly set forth in the following verses:

That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God (:16-19).

The "inner man" alone can be strengthened with might by God's Spirit. The "outward man" must perish, but the "inward man is renewed day by day" (II Corinthians 4:16). As we "reckon" ourselves "to be dead indeed unto sin," the inner man grows stronger in the life of God which is imparted through Jesus ►

Christ our Lord (Romans 6:11).

It is the inner man whom God admonishes in Colossians 2:6-7, saying,

As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him: rooted and built up in Him, and established in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.

The outward man can never walk in Christ Jesus, neither can he be rooted and built up in Him. He can never be established in the faith, neither can he abound in Christ with thanksgiving.

The strengthening of the inner man is to be accomplished by the Holy Spirit (:16). As believers, we must meet a personal enemy who is too strong for the outward man, for,

We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places (6:12).

Wherefore, we must take unto ourselves,

The whole armor of God, that we may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand (:13).

Even "Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil" dared not to bring a railing accusation against him, but said, "The Lord rebuke thee" (Jude 9-10). If the archangel could not meet the enemy in his own strength, surely we cannot successfully contend with him without the strengthening power of the Holy Spirit in the inner man. However, through the power of the Holy Spirit the present day believer can confidently say with the Apostle Paul,

I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me (Philippians 4:13).

Just as the Lord spoke unto Zerubbabel, saying, "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts" (Zechariah 4:6), so God speaks through His Word to His present day church, urging them to lean on the Holy Spirit and not on the arm of flesh.

The Apostle is burdened for the believers at Ephesus, and elsewhere, that we may be,

able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge,

that we,

might be filled with all the fullness of God (Ephesians 3:18-19).

The breadth of God's love in Christ is boundless, the length of His love is endless, the depth of His love is fathomless, and the height of His love is measureless, says the author of the Companion Bible. Such love "passeth knowledge."

The love of God makes it possible for every believer to be,

Filled with all the fulness of God (:19).

The closing words of this prayer are heart strengthening.

Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen (:20-21).

EPHESIANS 4:1-3

Paul refers to Himself as "the prisoner of the Lord" (:1), and not the prisoner of the Roman Emperor. In the opening verse of the third chapter, Paul declared himself to be the prisoner of Jesus Christ for the "Gentiles," and in 6:19-20, he speaks of himself as an ambassador in bonds, because he was making known "the mystery of the gospel." It pleased the Lord to let Paul remain in prison after the revelation of the mystery.

These first three verses of this chapter make up the introduction to a deep and heart-searching message on the walk of the believer.

The same Holy Spirit that opened our eyes when we were "dead in trespasses and sins" (2:1), and let us behold the Lamb of God Who bore our sins in His Own

Body on the tree, and then baptized us into the Body of the risen Christ, thereby making us members of His church, has also told us to walk in the risen Lord. He said,

Walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

This is more than we can do in our own strength. Therefore, He has said to us,

As ye therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him: Rooted and built up in Him, and established in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving (Colossians 2:6-7).

We have no more strength within ourselves to make us walk in Christ than we had to make ourselves new creatures in Christ.

While it may be impossible for us to keep the unity of the Spirit with all of God's children, it is always possible to *endeavor* to keep it. It requires two or more saints to keep the unity of the Spirit in the "bond of peace," but every individual may *endeavor* to keep it. The word "endeavoring" of :3 has exactly the same meaning as the word "study" of II Timothy 2:15. We must "study" to show ourselves approved to God, workmen who need not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth. In like manner, we must study, or endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit among the brothers. If God's church would study the Bible and study each other, there would be more honest endeavor toward the keeping of the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

EPHESIANS 4:4-6

Here is set forth the sevenfold unity which believers must keep in order to have "the bond of peace" in the assembly and among the assemblies.

There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, Who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

God's order is just as strong for "one faith" and "one baptism" as it is for one Spirit, or one Lord, or one God and Father of all.

Christians are divided according to Catholic faith and Protestant faiths because of the "tradition of men" (Colossians 2:8). The Bible doesn't speak of a Presbyterian faith, a Methodist faith, a Baptist faith, a Church of Christ faith, a Pentecostal faith, an undenominational faith, a Bible church faith, an independent faith, or any other kind of a faith that divides the brothers. There is only one faith and that is "the faith of the Son of God" (Galatians 2:20).

Sincere believers are divided and set at variance one with another because of the contention that there is more than one baptism for the members of God's church. We read in I Corinthians 12:13 that "By one Spirit are we all baptized into one Body." In :27 of the same chapter, we are told that this one Body into which every believer is baptized is "the Body of Christ."

In Ephesians 1:22-23 we are told that Christ is the "Head over all things to the church, which is His body." Therefore, it is clear that the Holy Spirit baptism puts the believer into the one church which is the Body of Christ. It is also clear that 4:5 teaches that there is only "one baptism." Surely this one baptism is the Holy Spirit baptism that puts the believer into the Body of Christ, the church. To contend for more than one baptism for the church of this mystery dispensation is to invite division, strife and confusion among believers.

EPHESIANS 4:7-11

Paul sets forth the gift of "grace" to every individual member of the Body of Christ (:7), and the gifts of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers to the Body as a whole (:11).

Our gift of grace is "according to the measure of the gift of Christ," and Christ is God's "unspeakable gift" (II Corinthians 9:15).

The "gift of Christ" cannot be measured in the words of mortal men. Such a gift can be described only in the language of paradise, "the third heaven," where Paul "heard unspeakable words, which is not lawful for a man to utter" (II Corinthians 12:2-4).

The gift of grace is "according to the measure of ►

the gift of Christ” (Ephesians 4:7), therefore, it is also unspeakable, hence, impossible to describe. No mortal tongue can explain the grace of our God which is greater than all of our sins.

Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound (Romans 5:20).

No man ever has appreciated “the gift of Christ” who has not first seen that the gift included the darkness of Calvary and the glory of the resurrection. We must understand that the Father,

spared not His Own Son, but delivered Him up for us all (Romans 8:32).

He was,

Delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification (Romans 4:25).

He was delivered into the hands of wicked men to be “crucified and slain,” but God,

Hath raised Him up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that He should be holden of it (Acts 2:23-24).

He was bruised by man to physical death, and “it pleased the Lord to bruise Him,” and “put Him to grief” when He made “His soul an offering for sin.”

He was bruised by the Father and His soul was made an offering for our sin (Isaiah 53:10). Here the Father made the Son,

to be sin for us, Who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him (II Corinthians 5:21).

:8-10 reminds us of the words of our Lord to the Emmaus disciples (Luke 24:25-26):

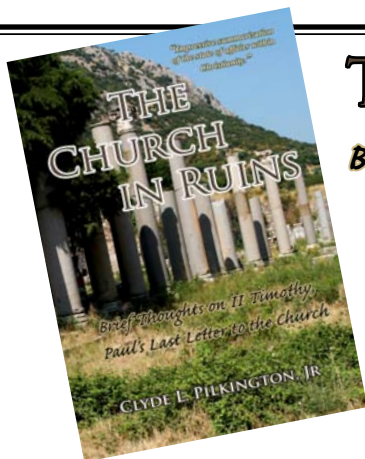
O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory?

On the morning of the resurrection, our Savior came forth from the heart of the earth in a body of flesh and bone. In that body He “ascended up on high,” where He triumphed over His enemies and “made a show of them openly” (Colossians 2:15).

The entire church, which is the Body of Christ, will be glorified with Christ our Head (Philippians 3:20-21). This is the blessed hope of every member of the body of Christ, because,

unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ (Ephesians 4:7).

(To be continued.)



THE CHURCH IN RUINS

Brief Thoughts on II Timothy, Paul's Last Letter to the Church

by – Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

This brief survey of Paul's last epistle will reveal that while almost 2000 years have transpired, the condition of the church has remained the same, and indeed has worsened in accordance with Paul's warning to Timothy.

This book is not a call for a re-awakening of “the church,” because it is apparent that this is not Father's plan. Rather, it is a call to individual men – men whose place in the Christian religious system has left them empty, stagnant, and restless – to awaken to Father's call to be His faithful servant and stand outside of that system to look for other faithful men as well.

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