



Bible Student's Notebook™

The Herald of His Grace

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

Volume 321
Issue 779

"The Mystery" Ministry of Paul

Part 6 of 7¹

by — Russell H. Schaefer (1919-1999)

THE ORIGIN OF EVIL

I am the LORD, and there is none else, there is no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me: that they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside Me. I am the LORD, and there is none else. I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things (Isaiah 45:5-7).

There are not other gods, there is no God besides Jehovah. If evil exists it is not because there is another god. There is only one sole Lord and Ruler of and in all of the Universe. All belongs to Him, He is responsible for everything in the Universe, darkness or light, good or evil.

THE PANOPLY OF GOD

Be empowering yourselves in the Lord (Ephesians 6:10, REB).

God does not choose to eradicate evil now, either in us, the world, or Satan. We put on the complete armor (*panoply*, 6:11) of God, with a view to our having power to stand against the strategies of the Adversary.

Of course, the "Devil" of Hollywood films and of Christendom is a myth, but the Satan of Scripture is an awesome being; tremendous in his power, posi-

tion, and influence. We speak condescendingly and glibly of him, but Michael, the Archangel, did not do so; Michael dared not bring an accusation against Satan (see Jude 9).

He comes as an "Angel of Light," and his ministers, as ministers of righteousness (*cf.* II Corinthians 11:14-15). If Satan came to us in the horrors of debasement then no one is deceived, and from such a one all would turn away. No, it is in the realm of the spiritual that Satan has to operate, it is in that realm that we have a conflict, and if the *panoply* of God's providing is not used then for that moment Satan will have gained an advantage and the glory of Christ will have been less than our "all in all."

THE STRATEGIES OF THE ADVERSARY

Stand against the strategies of the Adversary (Ephesians 6:11, REB).

The word "wiles" (*AV*) and "strategies" (*REB*) is the Greek word *methodeias*, *i.e.*, methodized, doing something after a certain orderly and systematic way. This is the "cunning craftiness" of Ephesians 4:14 whereby deception is brought to bear upon believers to stunt their spiritual growth. Spiritual growth in this context is the perfecting or adjustment of the

1. [Editor:] Part 1 of this series is found in *Bible Student's Notebook* #724; part 2 in #734, part 3 in #743, part 4 in #745, part 5 in #771. For a short biographical sketch of Russ Schaefer see #723.

"The Mystery" Ministry of Paul (part 6 of 7)	6649
Reader's Question Box #30: Two Different Gods? One of the Old Testament and One of the New?	6654



saints; the adjustment *from* the Book of Acts program with its signs, miracles and wonders – and its hope of Israel: the New Covenant, the New Jerusalem, the coming King. There would be the adjustment *to* the Mystery of Ephesians with its leaving behind of all of the kindergarten of Israel's religion and forward to that which is spiritual, in the heavenlies, in Christ.

The Colossian letter deals more specifically with the stratagems deployed against those to whom the Mystery is addressed.

Human tradition had nullified the effectiveness of the Word of God during the time of the prophets as well as during the days of our Lord's earthly ministry (Mark 7:13). During the Acts period there was a subordinate place and portion afforded those of the nations to the "Israel of God." While the non-Jewish believers were not the peers of the favored nation, still by God's grace they were given a family status "in Abraham," as the Epistle to the Galatians so fully testifies. Then there was a danger of invalidating the great doctrines of justification by faith, and the closely related standing of the believer in the grace of God. Romans 3-6 are an exposé of these threats.

In the current Mystery Dispensation, not only would elements of the former strategies be perpetuated, but additional quasi-religious claims would be hurled against those embracing the Mystery. The continued propagation of the tenets of the earthly ministry of Christ, as well as the Acts ministries, cannot help but seriously detract from the Ephesian Mystery ministry of Paul. No part of The Word of God can be neglected without a corresponding loss, but how much more so when we fail to heed or believe God's last and final revelation. The Ephesian Mystery has made many of the former programs inoperative. Our calling is so high that it ill behooves us to perpetuate the shadows of Israel's religion; the water, the washings, the days, the rituals, the types, the emblematic, the earthly wonders, the signs, the miracles, the buildings, the externals – in Christ we are above all of that. It is apparent on every side that the *panoply* of God cannot be neglected, for Satan by religion has gained an advantage already.

It is tragic that Paul's Ephesian Mystery ministry that called forth these warnings is hardly known today, and in its place is the "religion" against which Paul warned.

Bible Student's Notebook™

Paul Our Guide – Christ Our Goal

ISSN: 1936-9360

Volume 32, No. 779 – July 22, 2019

Scripture education in a weekly format!

This free electronic publication is dedicated to:

- the absolute sovereignty and deity of God (Romans 11:36);
- the proclamation of the riches of God's abundant, exceeding grace (Romans 5:20; 11:6; Ephesians 1:7);
- the affirmation that God will save all 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 in ages past" (Romans 16:25);
- true freedom and liberty apart from law (Galatians 5:1);
- the organic nature of the Body of Christ (Ephesians 3:1-3);
- the Secret Administration, being the operational revelation for today (Ephesians 3:9);
- the unprophesied, Celestial hope and calling of the Body of Christ (Colossians 3:4);
- the distinct message and ministry of Paul, the apostle to the nations (Ephesians 3:1-3);
- 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);

- union in His death, burial and resurrection (Romans 6);
- adult sonship position (Galatians 4).

This publication is the product of humble efforts of ordinary men intended to stimulate the earnest study of Scripture. We do not claim infallibility for the contents of this publication; thus they are not meant to imply finality on any subject discussed, or that further research would not add further light from the Word of God. God's storehouse of truth is inexhaustible, so draw on its wealth by prayerful study. Our readers are asked to be as the Bereans and search the Scriptures (Acts 17:10-11; I Thessalonians 5:21).

This publication is not connected with any "church," "denomination," "movement," "organization," "mission," "creed," "meeting," "school," "conference" or "fellowship."

Bible Student's Notebook™

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For definitions of abbreviations/acronyms, see index after the order form.

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Judaism and Legalism

Judaism, with its kindred spirit of legalism, has its Sabbaths, holy days, and dietary laws – of which Paul so earnestly warned in Colossians 2:16-21 – is looked upon as an adjunct of spiritual Christianity today. The abolishment of all ordinances in the death of our Lord should be an unceasing cause of rejoicing.

God happily accepts us in the Beloved (Ephesians 1:6) and in Him gives us an irrevocable life, place and position. Legalism gives the man something to do so that he can feel some merit, for it does not seem fit that Christ's work in our behalf should be a work of infinite perfections and that it is in solid union with Him that God is forever free to relate to us on the merits of Christ and not ourselves.

We should recognize that religion will try every means to usurp the completeness that God has given us in Christ. It calls attention to itself by negatives, *i.e.*, “do not touch, handle, or taste” (Colossians 2:21), as well as by positives, *i.e.*, the doing of certain things. Instead of resting in God's grace, religion will have us come to God with Christ in the role of a *helper*, all the while with *something* in our hands.

Mysticism

The Mysticism of which Colossians 2:8, 18 warns is that type of mysticism that looks to some sort of *intermediate being or thing* as steps toward God. Its name and mode may change from generation to generation, but its inner pattern remains the same. Paul cautions about intruding into the realm of the unseen: worshipping of angels, seeking after the old “*elements [or rudiments] of the cosmos.*” The mysti-

cism of ritual, magic formulas, paths of enlightenment, trances, etc., all find expression when Christ's Headship (:19) is not given its rightful place.

The way to God is wide open equally for everyone, and there is no need for intermediation by any being – whether angel, saint, seer, priest, pastor or friend. Nor do we need to search among the rudimentary or elementary powers of the universe to have a full and free access to the Father. All of the fullness of Deity resides in Christ, and having Him we need nothing else (:9). To use a weak term, when we found Christ, we found God. He is the “*Image*” (*i.e.*, Icon, εἰκών, *eikōn*) of God (1:15), in Whom God is revealed to us. He is not merely a “step” toward God, but the whole ladder.

Philosophy

An effective stratagem used of Satan is a certain type of philosophy (2:8, *cf.* :4). This has no reference to the legitimate love and intelligent pursuit of wisdom, or to the investigation of causes and laws underlying reality. All of God's handiwork bears the very closest scrutiny, and to trace out the laws of the mind or the Universe is but to reach out and touch the infinite intelligence and power of God. None need fear honest investigation in any realm, but the type of philosophy the Scriptures speak of in a derogatory way is that which is a direct enemy to all that is freely given to us by the grace of God.

This philosophy is a spirit of intellectual exclusiveness. Just as Judaism produced a spirit of religious exclusiveness by way of its formalism, so this claim to a superior wisdom hidden from others produces a caste system in which degrees of knowledge becomes



“Also”

by — E.W. Bullinger

This work consists of a listing and explanations of 378 New Testament passages where the word “also” may be ambiguous or misleading to the English reader.

85 pp, BK See order form.

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the criteria of spirituality. Some sort of initiation rite before or after impartation of special knowledge is usual with this type of philosophy. However, Paul boldly declares that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are included in the knowledge of God in Christ. All God's true wisdom has been hidden away in Christ.

In Whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden away (2:3, REB).

One need not go to ancient Cabalistic writings or to modern authors to discover more spiritual wisdom in reference to God. The Mystery of the Ephesian-Colossian Letters completes the revelation of God and His purposes.

Of which, I, have become minister – according to the Administration of God which hath been given unto me to you-ward, to fill up the Word of God (Colossians 1:25, REB).

God has been pleased to close the Canon of Scripture with the dispensational message of the Ephesian-Colossian Mystery through an inspired Apostle, not through some other source claiming some hidden wisdom. Paul's statement would be without meaning if other portions of Scripture were still to be revealed and written or if other writings at a later date were to be on par with Scripture.

In Ephesians 5:27 Christ is to "present" the Church to Himself (i.e., "set it beside Him"); in Colossians

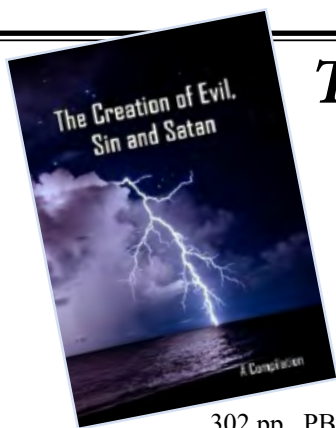
1:27-28 the riches of the glory of this Mystery (the Christ set forth in the Colossian letter) is to be the means used to "present [set beside] every man **perfect in Christ Jesus.**" It is "EVERY MAN," not an exclusive few. It is universal. "Every man **mature in Christ Jesus**" (CV) – what a presentation!

The Gnostic-Philosophic system taught and teaches that evil is inherent in matter or physical things. It had and has a great deal to say about reaching the fullness of God. However, the Colossian letter again answers this desire:

Because in Him dwelleth [is completely at home] all the fullness of the Godhead [Deity] bodily [substantially], and ye are in Him filled full – Who is the Head of all principality and authority (2:9-10, REB).

The Deity is resident in Christ, and in Him it is exhausted (resident fullness). In Him abides the plentitude (the fullness, the *pleroma*) of God. In Him and through Him it is communicated to us. He is not subservient to any other power but is their Head. In possessing Him as our Lord there is no room, nor need, for any other power or authority. The "fullness" that we seek is found only in Christ Jesus our Lord. Not in spiritual gifts, nor experiences, nor anything else.

Each of these adversarial stratagems merge to produce some wall of exclusiveness, some barrier that can be the property of only a few. In the Dispensa-



302 pp., PB

See order form.

The Creation of Evil, Sin and Satan ***(A Compilation)***

The truth laid forth in this work should help us greatly in our dealings with others, especially those who have failed in some way which may bring dishonor on His Name, or cannot accept His truth, or even oppose it and us, especially mature teachings such as is put forth in the pages of this book. It contains 19 authors, 49 works, spanning 150 years. Authors include: Arthur P. Adams, E.W. Bullinger, Alan Burns, Edward Clayton, John Essex, H.W. Fry, Vladimir Gelesnoff, Norman P. Grubb, Donald G. Hayter, A.E. Knoch, William Mealand, André Piet, Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr., Ray Van Dyke, William H. Walker, and James Webb.

tion of the Grace of God all exclusiveness brings the love and grace of God in contempt. How much more so when they are held forth as a condition of blessing and acceptance with God! Anything that engenders spiritual pride, that creates a caste system about itself, is at variance with pure grace.

Wherein there cannot be Greek and Jew, Circumcision and Uncircumcision, foreigner, Scythian, bond, free, but, all things, and in all, Christ (3:11, REB).

Christ is in all alike. He reaches to the lowest without distinction, and, equally without distinction, raises all to the highest.

Asceticism

An effective and attractive stratagem of Satan that is most damaging to the concepts of grace, and the completeness of the believer in Christ, is that of asceticism. This could be called a *super-holiness of the flesh*. From age to age its dress varies but it is occupied with a self-imposed humility, harsh treatment of the body, and a lot of prohibitive rules.

Extreme groups look down upon marriage, eat only special foods, and have oath-bound societies. All of this is alien to that grace of God that is more than sufficient to the trials and pressures found in the mainstream of life. Paul is certain and definite with his instruction to the Body of Christ that spiritual growth

comes only from giving the Headship of Christ its rightful place. If this is done there is a growth that is from God. Both Ephesians 4:13-16 and Colossians 2:19 insist that growth is a product of a living relationship to Christ our Head, not in a substitutionary means.

It is a harsh lesson to learn – that religion cannot produce spiritual life. The religion of Israel consisted largely in “carnal,” (i.e., *soulish*) ordinances, well described in Colossians 2:18-23, and summed up in the words, “*Touch not, taste not, handle not ...*” Whatever obtains our attention gets to us. If this is the “flesh” in a negative way, then it will further stimulate the very passions and appetites that the ascetic seeks to subdue.

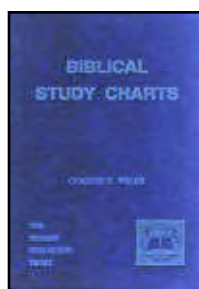
Asceticism that looks at austerities as the fullness of life in Christ is truly deceived, and Satan has gained an advantage. God's grace and love are to be the governing factors in our lives – not religion with its laws, rules and ordinances! Let us rather always be rejoicing in the perfections of the Christ and the completeness that God has given to us in Him. The unfolding of the fullness of God in Christ, and we in Him, is compensation enough to justify its embrace by grace through faith without seeking to interpose something self-generated, however good.

(to be continued)

TOPICS:

Major: Mystery; Pleroma; Religion

Minor: Asceticism; Legalism; Philosophy



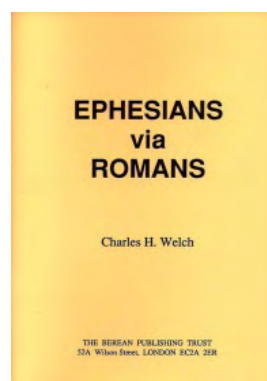
Biblical Study Charts

by — Charles Welch (1880-1967)

523 pages, HB
(See order form.)

This is a collection of 418 actual hand-made color teaching charts.

These “wall charts,” most of which were originally 3’x5’, were designed by Charles Welch to accompany his teaching of the Scriptures. They were preserved and are here presented in color photography on glossy paper, making this an invaluable study resource. All of the charts are believed to have been made before 1953.



Ephesians via Romans

by — Charles H. Welch
(1880-1967)

In the style of a two-way conversation, this work illustrates that the unique blessings of Ephesians are based on the blessings that all believers have received, as detailed in the book of Romans.

38 pp., PB

See order form.



Reader's Question Box #30

Two Different Gods?

One of the Old Testament and One of the New?

by — Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

Q: I have been a faithful reader of the bible for 50 years, and right now I have 3 Bibles going at the same time including the *Companion Bible*. In the last year since my retirement I have been saturating myself with God's Word in all forms including many of your books. Of recent, though, a question has arisen that I can't find a comfortable answer for. Maybe you can add some insight that I am missing.

If indeed God is "*the same yesterday, today and forever*" ... how do I reconcile the God of the Old Testament wherein He killed thousands of His own people for minor infractions, to the God of the New Testament wherein ALL of my sins past, present and future are forgiven?

Yes, I know the simple answer is Jesus – but if I didn't know the Old and New Testaments were of the same source, I would never believe we were talking about the same God. What am I missing? – PA

A: I appreciate hearing of your studies, now that you are in retirement. This is such a common theme from many of our contacts. I commend you for your hunger for truth and for your honesty with yourself and the Scriptures. These are quite rare, and of course thankfully, all of God.

Thank you also for sharing your study concerns with me. It is not surprising that Hebrews 13:8 has proven to be of some difficulty for you, as it has long been misused by religious teachers to deny progressive revelation as well as the right division of Scripture.

Jesus Christ, yesterday and today, is the Same One for the eons also (Concordant).

This verse is often misinterpreted. The subject, as you have well pointed out, is "*Jesus Christ*" and *not* God, and it speaks to the consistency of His *person*,

and not to the mistaken idea that He somehow never changes in *any* way. For surely, we know that Christ was ever-changing "*yesterday and today ...*" and will be "*for the eons also.*"

Jesus Christ was conceived in Mary's womb; however, He is not now an embryo. He was born a babe, which of course He is not today. As a child He "*grew*" (Luke 2:40), increasing in "*wisdom and stature*" (:52), yet He is not now a growing child. He died, yet He is not now dead, for He arose from the dead to die no more.

At this point we are assisted by the able comments of A.E. Knoch (1874-1965) on this verse in his *Concordant Commentary on the New Testament*¹ (a work which I highly recommend and consider a priceless part of my own library.)

It should be remembered that "*the Same*" is a pronoun, and has reference to His personality, not to His administrations or assumptions. The same One pours out grace upon us and indignation on the nations in the Lord's Day. The same One Who was weary at Sychar's well is now all-powerful. He Who was once lowly is now exalted, Who healed hundreds when on Earth, refused to remove Paul's thorn in the flesh, Who hung on Calvary's cross and lay lifeless in the tomb is now alive and has ascended to God's right hand. His person, service and dispensations change to accord with God's purpose, but He Himself remains the Same.

Now, hopefully having a better sense of the actual meaning of the verse, we would certainly *not* be off-base to say, of God Himself, that *He* is also – in like manner – "*the Same,*" "*yesterday and today... and for the eons also,*" if we refer to His *essence*. Yet, at the same time, God has progressively changed in the way

1. See our order form, or visit our Knoch webpage: <http://www.studyshef.com/knoch.htm>.



He has *revealed* Himself to mankind and related to them – sometimes quite drastically.

Three indispensable principles come to play in answer to your dilemma. These principles, if missed, wreak havoc on how one reads and studies Scripture, not to mention how one understands God Himself. These are the principles of “Contrast,” “Progressive Revelation” and “Condescension.”

CONTRAST

As for *contrast*, this is the means by which God has determined that we learn and grow. After all, it was God Himself Who planted in Eden’s garden the contrasting “*tree of the knowledge of good and evil*.” This was His doing – Genesis starts off with the abundant principle of contrasts: Heaven and Earth, night and day, land and sea, male and female, good and evil, etc. As a means of introduction to this vital principle I suggest you read “The Divinely Appointed Contrasts of Life,” in *Bible Student’s Notebook #288*.

Without this first principle of *Contrast*, it would indeed appear that the God of the Old and New Testaments were two different gods entirely.

PROGRESSIVE REVELATION

However, another essential principle comes into play: that of *Progressive Revelation*.

For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little (Isaiah 28:10).

It is paramount that we embrace the fact that revelation in Scripture is ever progressive. God’s revelation of Himself to mankind involved a progressive unfolding of divine truth. As time passed, God gave increasing light concerning Himself and His purpose of the ages. In some cases this revelation (1) advanced previously given revelation, while in other instances it (2) superseded prior revelation. God revealed more of Himself and His plan to Abraham than He had to Adam; more to Moses than to Abraham; more to David than to Moses; more to Peter than to David; with Paul being the summit of God’s revelation. In the Scriptures God’s revelation of Himself goes from that

of Creator to Father, from Almighty to Abba, from Subjector to Lover, from Mt. Sinai to Mt. Calvary, from legislation to grace, from alienation to reconciliation.

For an introduction to this subject I encourage you to read “Progressive Revelation,” in *Bible Student’s Notebook #720*.

Without the principle of *progressive revelation*, it could easily seem that the God of the Old and New Testaments were two totally different gods.

CONDESCENSION

The last principle that comes into play here is *condescension*.

For as the Heavens are higher than the Earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts (Isaiah 55:9).

With God being the Sovereign Creator, and we being His finite creatures, it is impossible for us to grasp even the most basics of His essence without divine education. A key way in which this instruction develops is through a revelatory, illustrative means known as “condescension.”² God relates to us in very human ways – in methods that we can understand. This condescension is progressive – from elementary to the many transitional intermediate stages, then from these transitional stages to those which are advanced. Thus, as we learn the foundational elements, we then move on, bit-by-bit, to greater and greater divine figures. This principle has been displayed in the past through “*many portions and many modes*” (Hebrews 1:1, *Concordant*).

Condescension (or *Anthropopatheia* as it is also known) is the figure of speech used in the Scriptures where purely human qualities are attributed to God. E.W. Bullinger, in one of his most monumental works, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*, catalogued in detail over 200 distinct figures, several having 30

2. While the word “condescension” today has taken on a meaning of arrogant or patronizing behavior towards someone who is deemed “inferior,” older definitions relate it as, “Voluntary descent from rank, dignity or just claims; relinquishment of strict right; submission to inferiors in granting requests or performing acts which strict justice does not require. Hence, courtesy. It forbids pride and commands humility, modesty and condescension to others” (Webster, *American Dictionary of the English Language*, 1828). This is a very apt description of God’s approach to His creatures.

or 40 varieties; condescension is one of the more important figures of speech he defines (he also deals with this in his *Companion Bible* – Appendix 6.). A.E. Knoch wrote concerning condescension,

When God is spoken of as if He were human, or were a part of His creation, this is done in His Condescension, so that He may reveal Himself in terms within the range of human perception. — *Concordant Literal New Testament*, Appendix A: Figures of Speech, page 358

God condescends and speaks in human timeframes, in human terms, and with the human perspectives. This is how He progressively relates to us. The basics of *condescension* is briefly addressed in the following articles: “Back to Basics: God 101” (part 1; page 2344: God Is Not A Man), Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr., *Bible Student’s Notebook* #250; “God Regrets,” A.E. Knoch, *Bible Student’s Notebook* #683.

Without the principle of *condescension*, one might think that the God of the Old and New Testaments were two completely different gods.

DIVINE DRAMA

We must bear in mind that all of Heaven and Earth are the grand stage where God is directing the greatest drama of all time. All are actors in the play He has meticulously written and is flawlessly producing. All is staged according to His master script, with Him being the great Story-teller. As in human theatrical productions, which have great lessons to teach (“the moral to

the story is ...”), His story (History) is the greatest of them all: skillfully teaching divine lessons, as only He can do, with precise proficiency. However, it is God Himself Who is the Leading Actor of His own story.

A fuller look at God’s methods, which may especially be helpful as related to your specific question, can be found in “The Greatest Actor of All Time,” *Bible Student’s Notebook* #751. In this we look at God *acting* out roles in order to progressively teach us about Himself.

A Fatherly Illustration

Before closing, perhaps I could refer you to *Bible Student’s Notebook* #764. There in my “Editor’s Desk” I ran a personal piece entitled *Knowing Father* where I used my coming to know my own earthly father better over time as a way to illustrate our growth in coming to know our Heavenly Father as well.

I have not always had the knowledge of God that I do today. My current understanding is far different from what my paradigm would have allowed in the past. The advancement in the realization of God is a lifelong process, one that will only really culminate in resurrection.

I trust that the survey of these three basic principles, along with your consideration and study of them, will provide you with what you have been “missing.” Let me know how you progress, and feel free to stay in touch with additional questions. **BSN**

TOPICS:

Major: Hebrews 13:8; Reader’s Question Box

Minor: Condescension; Contrast; Progressive Revelation

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66 pp., PB

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Mars’ Hill: A Study on Acts 17

by — Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

Even among those who place a great emphasis on Paul, with his unique apostleship and message, there is an amazing neglect of one of his most outstanding messages found in the Book of Acts: his message given on Mars’ Hill. The content of his message to this group of unbelieving pagans has been overlooked for far too long. These words of Paul contain a very rich message. Preserved in the Scriptures, we know that, not only was it a challenge to the pagans of Athens, but it will prove to be a challenge to the members of Christ’s Body as well.