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The Herald of His Grace

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

Volume XV
Issue 359

The Fellowship of the Mystery

A Study of the Book of Ephesians

Part 1 of 3

by — Ike T. Sidebottom (1899-1970)

INTRODUCTION

In the Book of Ephesians we find a wealth of instruction which is directed to the believers of the present day.

We remember that,

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works (II Timothy 3:16-17).

However, this does not mean that “*all Scripture*” is written to us, and for our instruction. It is all “*written for our learning*” (Romans 15:4) and it is all “*profitable for our doctrine,*” but it is not all directed to us, nor to our particular dispensation.

Therefore, we must study to show ourselves approved to God, workmen that need not to be ashamed, “*rightly dividing the Word of Truth*” (II Timothy 2:15).

The present dispensation, in which we find ourselves and during which God is calling out the church which is the Body of His Dear Son, was given to Paul, and is spoken of as,

The mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to His saints (Colossians 1:24-27).



Revelation concerning this mystery dispensation is not to be found in the Word except in the writings of Paul.

Paul is the one and only apostle spoken of as the apostle, preacher or teacher of the Gentiles. His ministry is definitely set forth as a minister to the Gentiles. This truth is made plain:

Whereunto I am appointed a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles (II Timothy 1:11).

For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify mine office (Romans 11:13).

Contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter: (For He that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles:) And when James, Cephas, and John who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship, that we should go unto the heathen and they unto the circumcision (Galatians 2:7-9).

(see *FELLOWSHIP*, page 3235) ↗

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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).

This publication is a joint effort of a few members of the body of Christ. It is a product of our individual lives and ministries together. We do not claim infallibility for its contents. 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."

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FELLOWSHIP (continued from front page)

The Book of Ephesians is directed to the saints of the parenthetical period fitting in between God's dealings with National Israel during the Acts period and His dealings with National Israel during the tribulation.

In other words, the message which God gave to National Israel from Calvary to Acts 28:28 will be given again to the same people during the period which falls between the catching up of the Body of Christ and the return of Christ with His Body, to set up the Kingdom.

The message given during these two periods has to do with the kingdom of heaven which is to be set up on earth when Christ returns. This kingdom dispensation is commonly referred to as the millennium. It is separate and distinct from the church which is the Body of Christ. The hope and calling of the kingdom saints is the heavenly reign of Christ on earth. The hope and calling of the Body saints is the catching away of the church into glory with Christ. This is clear to the Bible student who has observed that Israel is God's earthly people and the Body of Christ is God's heavenly people.

The hope of Israel and the setting up of the kingdom are the subjects of Old Testament prophecy, the Gospel accounts of Mathew, Mark, Luke and John, the epistles of Peter, James and John, and the Book of Revelation, but the hope of the Body of Christ is revealed through Paul's epistles only.

It is also helpful to note that Paul's epistles written during the Acts Period – Galatians, I and II Thesalonians, I and II Corinthians, and Romans – revealed his double ministry,

*To the Jew first, and also to the Greek [Gentile]
(Romans 1:16).*

During this period his marching orders are found in I Corinthians 9:19-22, where he was "made all things to all men" that he might "by all means save some." All of these epistles were written while God was still dealing with National Israel in the closing part of the Acts period.

Acts 28:25-28 marks the time of the setting aside of

National Israel, and from that time forth the Holy Spirit uses Paul to magnify the truth concerning the Body of Christ and the mystery dispensation.

Paul's epistles written after Acts 28:28 are Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, I and II Timothy, Titus and Philemon. In these epistles "the middle wall of partition" between the Jew and the Gentile is no longer standing (Ephesians 2:14-18). It was broken down by the cross, but was permitted to separate between the Jews and the Gentiles as long as God dealt with Israel as a nation, or up to Acts 28:28.

It is evident that the last appeal which the Holy Spirit made to National Israel was made through the apostle Paul, and is recorded in Acts 28:17-28. This message was given to "the chief of the Jews" (:17). At that time, Paul was bound with a chain for the "hope of Israel" (:20).

As Paul unburdened his heart before the Jewish brethren, he "testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening" (:23).

There was nothing in this last message to Israel concerning the Body of Christ, or the mystery dispensation. He could not have given them truth concerning the "mystery" out of the law of Moses and the prophets because the mystery had been hid "from ages and from generations" previous to its revelation to Paul (Colossians 1:25-28).

It was the "Kingdom of God" that Paul preached to these dispersed Jews of Rome. Therefore, he used the Scriptures given through the law of Moses and the prophets. When the Jews "agreed not among themselves" concerning Paul's message, he closed his message with a quotation from Isaiah chapter 6 saying,

Well spake the Holy Spirit by Isaiah the prophet unto our fathers, saying, go unto this people, and say, "Hearing ye shall hear and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see and not perceive: for the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand" ►

with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles and that they will hear it” (:25-28).

These verses mark the setting aside of National Israel until after the church, which is the Body of Christ, is completed and glorified.

With the nation of Israel set aside and the middle wall of partition between the Jew and the Gentile broken down, there was no more place for “*the law of commandments contained in ordinances.*” For full proof of this statement carefully and prayerfully study the following Scriptures:

For 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 (Ephesians 2:14-15).

You, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses; 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 (Colossians 2:13-14).

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).

With the nation of Israel set aside and the middle wall of partition broken down, there is no more place for “*the law of commandments contained in ordinances*” (Ephesians 2:15; Colossians 2:14, 20-23).

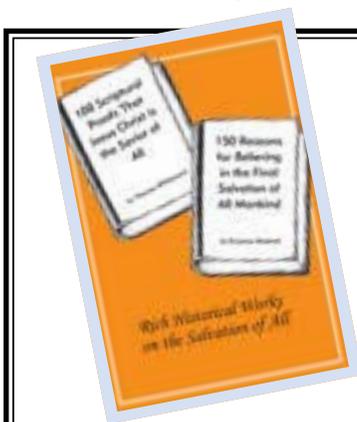
As we go into a study of the Book of Ephesians, we must remember that we are not in the “*shadow*” days of the Old Testament, nor in the “*Jew only*” and the “*Jew first*” days of the Book of Acts, but we are studying a book which has to do with the revelation of the very capstone of God’s entire building program, namely the building of the church which is Christ’s Body (Ephesians 1:22-23).

EPHESIANS 1:1-2

Paul salutes the saints at Ephesus and the “*faithful in Christ Jesus*” with the familiar salutation,

Grace be to you and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

These two words, “*grace*” and “*peace*,” are found in the opening verses of every one of Paul’s epistles.



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The order is always the same, grace, *then* peace; never peace and grace. There is no peace for the human heart until first the grace of God is manifested through His Son Jesus Christ.

“*We have peace with God*” because we have been “*justified by faith*” through our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1). Thus having been justified by faith, “*the peace of God, which passeth all understanding*” keeps our “*hearts and minds, through Christ Jesus*” (Philippians 4:7). Our present “*peace with God,*” the “*peace of God,*” and the future world-wide “*peace on earth*” are resting on the grace of God which is made known through our Lord Jesus Christ. This is why it always says “*grace and peace,*” and never, peace and grace.

This “*grace*” and “*peace*” flows out “*from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.*” The Son had glory with the Father “*before the world was*” (John 17:5). He left the glory world and,

Took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross (Philippians 2:7-8).

It was here that God

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

It was God’s unfailing love and grace that brought the Son from heaven’s glory to Calvary where He bore, “*our sins in His own body on the tree*” (I Peter 2:24).

EPHESIANS 1:3-14

We get a glimpse of the purpose and plan of God which is now being worked out through the Lord Jesus Christ. At the time Paul penned these verses he was suffering untold cruelties of earth, but he was enjoying unlimited visions of heaven. Though he was lodged in a Roman prison, he launches forth into the message of this epistle with the triumphant word “*blessed*” (:3).

The clause, “*blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*” reminds us of this testimony in II Corinthians 1:3-5.

Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.

Paul never seems to forget the blessing and praise that belongs to our God and Father and to our Lord and Savior.

We call attention to four things about the blessings of :3.

- (1) He “*hath blessed us with all ... blessings*”;
- (2) they are “*spiritual blessings*”;
- (3) they are blessings which belong to the “*heavenly places*”;
- (4) and they are blessings which are secured “*in Christ.*”

Seven of these blessings are dealt with in detail in these verses. They are as follows:

- (1) We were “*chosen*” in Christ “*before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love*” (:4);
- (2) God “*predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will*” (:5);
- (3) “*He hath made us accepted in the beloved*” (:6). That is, He hath made us acceptable to Himself by robing us in the righteousness of His Own Son;
- (4) He has redeemed us through the blood of His Son by which we have “*freedom from sins, according to the riches of His grace*” (:7); ▶

(5) He has instructed us *"having made known unto us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself"* (:9);

(6) *"He has sealed us with the Holy Spirit of promise"* until the day of the redemption of our bodies when the church is caught into glory (:13);

(7) finally, He has enriched us with a specified *"inheritance"* (:14) which will be given to us when we, *"the Body, the church"* meet our Lord and Head in glory.

As members of the *"church, which is the body of Christ,"* we are God's children, or sons (:5). This is true because we are in His Son. Our redemption and the freedom from sins is *"according to the riches of His grace"* and the riches of His grace are *"unsearchable"* (Ephesians 3:8). Therefore, the measure of forgiveness which we enjoy in Christ is the measure of the *"unsearchable riches of Christ."*

In Christ, we stand *"holy and without blame"* before God. God does not see us as we *were* in Adam, condemned; but He sees us as we *are* in Christ, justified (accounted righteous). This reminds us of Colossians 1:21-22.

You, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath He reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in His sight.

We are a new creation and we no longer belong to the race of Adam. Our citizenship is in heaven and our standing before the Heavenly Father is just as perfect as that of His dear Son, because we stand in Him and in His righteousness.

EPHESIANS 1:15-23

Here we find the recorded prayer of the Apostle Paul to *"the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory"* (:17) and for the *"saints"* of Ephesus and the *"faithful in Christ Jesus"* (:15-16 with :1). This prayer was prompted in the heart of the apostle by their

"faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints" (:15 to 16). Therefore, we may expect it to be a prayer of thanksgiving and praise; and one that petitions the favor of God on the saints.

The burden of the apostle's prayer, in the verses of our text, is that the saints might know four things. These four things are set forth as follows:

First, he prays that the *"Father of glory"* might give unto the saints *"the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him"* (:17). They knew Jesus Christ as their Savior, but his petition for the saints is that they may gain precise or further knowledge of Him.

Second, he prays that the saints might *"know what is the hope of His calling"* (:18). He wants us to know that we are called to sonship *"in the Beloved,"* and that we are not servants as under the Mosaic law (:4-6 with Galatians 3:4-7). Ours is a heavenly calling. Positionally, we are now seated *"in heavenly places in Christ Jesus"* (2:6).

Third, he prays that we as believers might know *"the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints"* (:18). We not only have an inheritance in Christ Jesus (:11), but He also has an inheritance in us. He

hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus (2:6-7).

We are told again in Titus 2:14 that He

gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

In these verses we are given the understanding that we are the inheritance of the Son, and that our relationship to Him will bring forth glory to His name because of His grace, mercy and love which were manifested at Calvary in our behalf.

As we compare Exodus 19:5 with Titus 2:14, we see that God has an inheritance in His earthly people, Israel, and He has also an inheritance in the mem-

bers of the church which is His Body, His heavenly people. We must be careful not to confuse the hope and calling of His earthly inheritance, “Israel,” with the hope and calling of His heavenly inheritance, the present-day believers, the Body of Christ.

We must also be careful not to confuse the earthly glory that awaits Israel with the heavenly glory that awaits the church which is Christ’s Body. The “*hope of Israel*” is the coming of Christ in glory to set up His earthly kingdom, but our “*hope of glory*” is the coming of Christ to catch us up into heaven and change us into the likeness of His “*glorious body*” (Philippians 3:21). Such Scriptures as Isaiah 2:1-4; 11:1-9; 35:1-10; Ezekiel 36:22-38; Joel 3:15-20; Matthew 5:5; 24:27-31; Revelation 1:7; 11:15-18; 19:11-21, and many others have to do with His second coming to the earth to set up His kingdom and fulfill the promises made to Israel and the nations that are to be blessed with Israel (Romans 15:8-10 with Genesis 12:1-3).

On the other hand, the following Scriptures will enlighten us concerning our position in Christ, and Christ in us our “*hope of glory*”: Colossians 3:1-4; Philippians 3:20-21; II Timothy 4:8.

Fourth, he prays that we who have been raised from the mire of sin in Christ Jesus might know

what is the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His Own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world but also in that which is to come (:19-21).

He is praying that we might realize that the same power which raised Christ from the tomb and placed Him at the right hand of Majesty on high has worked in our own hearts and raised us from the power of sin and from death in sin, and has made us to be citizens in glory in our risen Savior.

Notice the expression “*exceeding greatness of His power*” in :19. This means surpassing power or power that is beyond all other powers.

This chapter closes with the truth of “*all truth*” concerning Christ as the Head of His church, which is His Body (:22-23). In this position Christ occupies a seven-fold headship. He is above (1) all principality, (2) power, (3) might, (4) dominion, (5) every name, (6) all things, and (7) the church.

The wonderful thing for us, as members of Christ’s Body, is that we are given the position of power *with Him*.

EPHESIANS 2:1-3

Even though we were “*dead in trespasses and sins*,” we could walk. However, our walk was according to “*the course of this world*” and “*the prince of the power of the air*.” We could move about in the world, but we were absolutely powerless to make one move toward God.

EPHESIANS 2:4-10

The divine picture changes from our past condition to our present condition by grace. The expression “*but God*” (:4) brings to our attention the one and only possibility for so great a change. Here is where God undertook for us and did for us what we could not begin to do for ourselves.

We stand in amazement at the grace of God toward us. Through the power of His Spirit, God buried us with His Son,

by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life (Romans 6:3-4).

We have experienced this burial and resurrection; it was accomplished “*through the faith of the operation of God*” (Colossians 2:12), who raised His Son, the Lord Jesus, from the dead. Such a baptism cannot be performed by the hands of man.

Our salvation is by grace through faith, and that faith is not of ourselves; “*it is the gift of God*” (:8). The gift of faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God (Romans 10:17).



✦ God has a definite plan and He is working out that plan for His Own glory. We were included among His “vessels of mercy, which He had afore prepared unto glory” (Romans 9:23), and it is necessary that He prepares us for our place in His plan and program.

We are of the same “lump” as those vessels of dishonor. It is only by His grace and mercy that we are “vessels unto honor.” Such sovereign grace is beyond our human understanding, but it is clearly taught in the Word.

Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor? What if God, willing to show His wrath, and to make His power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had afore prepared unto glory, even us, whom He hath called, not of the Jews only, but also the Gentiles? (Romans 9:21-24).

Throughout “the ages to come,” God will be showing “the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness to us through Christ Jesus” to the principalities and powers of the heavenlies (:7).

God’s plan for the walk of the believer is just as perfect as His plan for their salvation.

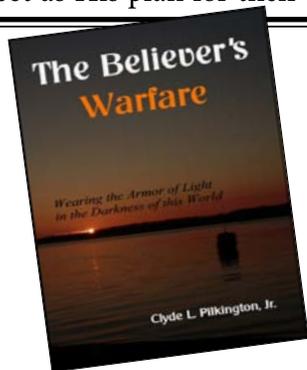
We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them (:10).

We are God’s workmanship before we are His workmen. God’s workmen must work according to the blueprint laid down in His Word. His entire plan is revealed through His Word. God’s Spirit leads the believer, but He never leads contrary to the Word.

As “workers together with God” (II Corinthians 6:1) in the building of His church (not ours), we should study His plan, revealed in His Word, just as carefully as the builder of a house would study the blueprint of an architect. The one reason for all of the different “churches” of organized Christendom is the fact that men have built contrary to God’s revealed plan. They have built and are still building for themselves and for their religious corporation instead of for God and His glory.

“God is not the author of confusion, but of peace” (I Corinthians 14:33); therefore, He could not be the originator of all the different denominational “churches.” If the organized church did not come from God, from what source did it come? See Colossians 2:8, 20-23.

(To be continued.)



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by – Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

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