

-STUDIES IN EPHESIANS- #48

-THE SCRIPTURES-

In Eph. 3:10 we read the words, TO THE INTENT THAT NOW UNTO THE PRINCIPALITIES AND POWERS IN HEAVENLY PLACES MIGHT BE KNOWN BY THE CHURCH THE MANIFOLD WISDOM OF GOD.

There is nothing in this verse about angels. They are messengers of God. They are ministering spirits to the heirs of salvation (Israel). Men of the dispensation of the mystery are far above all such. They are even above the aristocracy of heaven, principalities and powers.

But some principalities and powers are unfriendly. With such we have our conflict. They oppose our taking our inheritance in the heavenly places.

We have a great unseen audience. We are not to preach to them. But BY our lives and our high calling we make known unto them the manifold wisdom of God.

One of the darkest hours in the history of mankind was the little meeting of Paul with the elders of the Jews in Rome. This was the last chance for Israel of the dispersion to accept their Messiah. The Israel of the land had made their rejection at the stoning of Stephen.

It was a dark hour because that up to that time no other way out for mankind had been revealed except that Israel should be a channel of blessing to the nations. But Israel failed. They were set aside with a last quote of Isa. 6:10 at the last of Acts. The world was left without a witness and a channel of blessing and a way to God. Satan had effectually frustrated the plan of salvation for the Gentiles.

Angels and principalities and powers must have wept! The evil one seemed to have won the conflict. Here was a turning point, a great critical time in the history of the world. No battle nor treaty of peace has been more decisive and critical than this point in history.

But God had a hidden plan by which to accomplish His will in case Israel should fail. It had been hid in God from ages and generations. A man had been picked and trained to be the special minister of this secret purpose. Immediately this man begins to make known the secret. He begins in his own hired house in Rome. He writes letters to Ephesus, Colossae, Philippi, and to his fellow worker, Timothy, in which the secret and the things that accompany it are set forth.

Principalities and powers have rejoiced in the heavenlies at this master stroke of the God of the universe, the Father of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The well laid plans of the evil one were again brot to nought.

So the Church is a great display sample of the manifold wisdom of God. This great work of God is to His glory and honor. We, too, should praise Him along with the principalities and powers of the heavenlies. With our citizenship already there, seated with Christ in His Father's throne, we await the time when we shall actually take our place there. If so be that we have suffered, we shall reign with Him there.

Let us walk worthy of such an high calling, remembering our great audience to whom we are to show forth the manifold wisdom of God.

Who gave us the Bible? Rome says that the church gave us the Bible (meaning their church, of course). Many modern churches are giving the same answer to this question. But what does the Word itself say? ALL SCRIPTURE IS GIVEN BY INSPIRATION OF GOD. Any other answer is a lie.

Is the Bible like other books, or is there something special about it? ALL SCRIPTURE IS GIVEN BY INSPIRATION OF GOD. God is the Author, not man. Man was merely the amanuensis who took down the words as they were given by the Holy Spirit. The unity of the Scriptures testify to the fact of one author.

Just what is the Bible good for? It was given by God to man for teaching him the truth, in contrast to the lie of Satan. It was given to man to reprove him whenever he is wrong. It was given to man to correct him in his ways. It was given to man to instruct him in righteousness. Man never has and never will write a book that will give such high and lofty instruction. It is beyond the ability and also the desire of man to so do. To think that such a corrupt church as Rome could or ever would give us such a book is not only absurd, but even ridiculous!

Is the Bible to be taken as an authority? It certainly is. NOT AS THE WORD OF MEN. BUT AS IT IS IN TRUTH, THE WORD OF GOD. That puts the authority of the Bible over and above any commands that any self-constituted ecclesiastics may try to impose on the laity. No pope, priest, preacher, bishop or other man who takes honor to himself has any right to tell me what to do or in any way to dictate to my conscience. EVERY ONE OF US SHALL GIVE ACCOUNT OF HIMSELF TO GOD. No church can lay down any course of conduct for the believer. The Bible is the only authority for that.

Is there any special way in which the Bible is to be used as an authority? There certainly is. Unless the Scriptures are rightly divided, there is bound to be confusion such as we have on every hand today. I have found that what God commanded Abraham to do is not my course of conduct for today. Nor do I find that my future hope is at all like that of Abraham. The church must not be confused with the kingdom. Doctrine and practice must be carefully distinguished. One must be sure that state and standing are not confused. One must be sure that dispensational privileges are not mixed up with salvation itself. One could go on and on. So rightly dividing involves putting each passage in its dispensational setting so that one passage will not in any way contradict another.

What is meant by "dispensational?" This word has to do with the stewardship of a family or a household. God has had different families and His way of dealing with them may differ. God dealt with Israel by giving them law. But to us Gentiles He has given a dispensation of grace. A part of this dispensation of grace is called the dispensation of the mystery. This is far different from the kingdom. It is not subject to laws and ordinances. It does not have the same hope as the kingdom folks. A dispensation has a beginning and an end. We need to know these.

-TIME ALL MIXED UP-

Many people in this country will know what I mean if they are in the process of trying to figure out their daily schedules by the various times called standard, daylight saving, fast, slow, etc. But most of them would be greatly surprised if they knew that almost 2,000 years ago folks were plagued with about the same situation. There is nothing new under the sun.

As we read concerning the arrest, trial, and crucifixion of our Lord, we do run into a time problem. The arrest was at night after the last supper. The rest of the night was spent in the illegal trial with the Lord being shuttled back and forth as each official sought to avoid the responsibility. Finally Pilate is worn down and gives in at the sixth hour (John 19:14). The Lord is led away. Preparation is made and the journey is made to Golgotha. We would guess that all that would take 2 or 3 hours.

But we turn to Mark 15:25 and find the exact hour of the crucifixion, and it is the third hour. That would be 3 hours then before Pilate gave the decision and surrendered the Lord over to the mob to be executed. Surely there is something wrong here.

Then we turn to Matthew 27:45-50 and learn that from the sixth to the ninth hours there was darkness (this while the Lord was on the cross) and at the ninth hour He died.

Now the record of Mark and Matthew hang together all right. The third hour of the Jewish day was about 9 o'clock our time. Then He was crucified. At the sixth hour, or 12 noon our time, there was darkness lasting until the ninth hour or our three in the afternoon. It is the record in John that throws the whole thing awry. Is there any solution? Yes, there is, and a simple one.

The gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke were written primarily to and for the Jews. Therefore they used Jewish time reckoning. That is why their records hold together.

But, as we have said so often in these columns, John's gospel was written to Gentiles. When he spoke of Jewish customs and days, he always explained them so that Gentiles would understand. But when it came to the question of time, he used the Roman or Gentile way of reckoning. If that is understood, then there is no discrepancy in the accounts whatsoever.

The Jews reckoned time from sunset and sunrise. The third hour was 9 o'clock, night or morning; the sixth, midnight or noon.

The Romans reckoned time from midnight and noon, as we do today. The sixth hour in John 19:14 was 6 in the morning our time. That fits in with the rest of the accounts.

There is one other place in John's gospel where the hour is mentioned and it is Roman time too. In 4:6 the Lord was resting at the well at the sixth hour. This was in the evening after a day's journey, not at noon as so many have supposed. This was the usual hour for the women to carry water. Also it would be a time when the shops would be open so the disciples could get food. Nothing unusual here as to the setting, but Gentile time is used.

-OUR MARCHING ORDERS-

It is not our desire or purpose to please men. Seeing that we are redeemed with the precious blood of Christ, bought with a price, we owe service to no man. Our message is primarily the gospel of the dispensation of the mystery. Seeing then that we have such a hope, we use great plainness of speech. But this gives us no license to be unkind or rude to others. In the practical section of our doctrine, we are to have forbearance and love when teaching.

It is true that the feelings of some are bound to be wounded when the truth is given out. There is no way escaping that. But needlessly wounding the feelings of others is not a sport to be indulged in by the Christian.

We are not bound to observe the advice of others, no matter how well-intentioned it may be. Continually we are warned about tendencies toward this and toward that. All doctrines are catalogued and classified by Christendom and so it is very baffling to them if they cannot immediately card index and classify each and every one who makes any profession.

There are some who think that rightly dividing the Word means that we discard part of it. But nothing is farther from the truth. It is the ones who do not rightly divide who pick a little here and a little there that they choose and the rest they throw into the discard.

For an example of the latter, look at page 702 in the Scofield Bible and read the footnote there. Divine revelation is contradicted and the lie of Satan in Gen. 3 is upheld as truth. The author of the footnote was even unwilling to search and see what the Word, as a whole, had to say about the subject. If this verse 10 of Eccl. 9 is to be cut out of the Bible, then there are many more of the same vein that will have to be taken out too. In fact, if one begins to take this truth and related truth out the Book, there is danger of ending up with nothing but the covers left.

One man warns us against the Companion Bible saying it teaches soul-sleep. But search the book thru and you will not find it so. That is a plain hatched-up lie to keep people from finding out the truth. If you have a mind of your own and can make decisions, be a true Berean and search it out for yourself.

Another says we are on dangerous ground because we question the heathen doctrine of the immortality of the soul. Do we have to believe the heathen philosophers Plato and Aristotle rather than God? THE SOUL THAT SINNETH, IT SHALL DIE. What are we going to do with that?

Did you know that there is nothing more destructive to sectarianism and denominationalism than preaching Christ? If we seem to be against churches, it is simply because we seek to lift up Christ so that all men might be drawn unto Him. If such procedure offends those who worship a church instead of Christ, we cannot help it. If our ministry is not Christo-centric, then it is no ministry at all in the Bible sense of the word. Remember this; no one is saved by being in a church or denomination. Only those IN Christ are saved! Is that plain enough?

-THE WORDS OF JESUS-

-BEGINNERS' CORNER- #14

Many times we hear the expression "I prefer the words of Jesus," "I am satisfied with what Jesus says," and the like. Many folks prefer a red letter edition of the Bible and then proceed to reject all except what they find printed in red letters. This is just another way of taking away from the Word of God.

Their immaturity is revealed by the name which they apply to the Lord. His disciples called Him Lord and He commended them for it. Demons called Him Jesus because they could not own His lordship. His enemies called Him Jesus because they would not own Him as God manifest in flesh. The Holy Spirit called Him Jesus because He was His equal. Let us be careful that we give Him due respect.

Many say they prefer the words of Jesus because they do not trust the opinions of Paul, James, Jude, and other writers of the NT. But the question we are to face is, Are the letters in red all the words of Christ? Are they all that He had to say to His own? In connection with these is another important question. Did Christ write any of the Bible Himself? If not, then why could not the quoted words in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John be the opinions of the writers of those books?

But if those four writers were inspired and guided in the writing of the words of Christ by the Spirit of Truth, could not others have been guided by the same Spirit? How about the Lord telling the disciples in John 14:26 that the Holy Ghost would come and teach them all things and bring to their remembrance what He had said to them?

In addition, we find in John 16 that the Lord told them that He had many things yet to say to them but that they were not ready now to receive them. He adds that the Spirit of Truth should come and that He would not speak of Himself, but what He should hear (from the Lord) that He would speak. He was to glorify Christ and give to them the words of Christ.

Therefore one does not have ALL TRUTH unless he does have what the Spirit told the apostles at a later date, and what they wrote for our learning. That there was a later truth to be revealed is very strongly implied in the words, I HAVE MANY THINGS TO SAY UNTO YOU, BUT YOU CANNOT BEAR THEM NOW. No one then can say that he has all the truth unless he searches and finds what the Lord later revealed thru NT writers.

Therefore whatever writings contain this later revealed truth are equally inspired along with the 4 gospels. The epistles cannot be ignored. They are our Lord's latest words to His people. If we limit ourselves to the 4 gospels, we are turning our backs on part of what the Lord has to say to us. We are deliberately refusing to consider all His commands and wishes, all of which amounts to wilful disobedience. One can suffer great loss by such unbelief and dishonor to our Lord.

Who are we, that we should set ourselves up as critics of God's Word? Are we capable of instructing God? How evident are the pride and sinfulness of the human heart!

The first objection we would hear from orthodox concerning our last article is whether the citizenship of the Jew was set aside. If it was set aside, then our reasoning is logical and should be accepted. If not, we have wrongly divided the Word. It is right at this division that we as a people saddle our horses and gallop off in all directions.

The first objective argument is that there never was any difference between Jew and Gentile, therefore the Jew could not be set aside. Second, that there was a difference but the NT rescinded all that and we have been one ever since. Third, that nothing really happened till Pentecost and the start of the church, etc., and ad infinitum.

This line of reasoning is prevalent among our thinking today because too few make any effort to rightly divide the gospel of Peter and the 12, or if you wish, of John the Baptist and Jesus. These people feel they must somehow obtain those blessings pertaining to the kingdom, and to do so, must of necessity go to the gospels and Peter.

Now if we have those among us today who are going back to this gospel he preached (he was speaking of Israel and the kingdom), then these people are preaching an empty gospel, if Israel were set aside.

Now I ask, Would you as a sincere believing Christian like to have an empty gospel given to you? Do you think it is right that you should be asked to live by its precepts, provide for its means, adhere to its doctrines, only to find on your death-bed that it was built upon sand? It could very well happen. 2 Tim. 3.

If the Jew was not set aside, then it would appear that both history and Scripture are in the wrong. For history tells us that in the year 70 the Romans under Titus took the city of Jerusalem and completely destroyed it with the exception of 3 towers. History also tells us that for the past 1887 years the Jew has been without a city, a country, or a place of worship; and only recently has become a (nation?).

The Scripture, as recorded in Dan. 9, tells us that at that time 490 years were determined upon Israel to finish the transgressions, and to make an end to sin and make atonement for iniquity...and to anoint the Most High. The prophecy continues,...and after 434 years the Messiah shall be cut off and to the end desolations are determined. This prophecy brings us right up to the time of Titus.

Both Zech. 13 and Psa. 22 foretell that in the day of the Lord the inhabitants of Jerusalem will look upon Him whom they pierced and mourn for Him, and confess the Lord Jesus as their God. All Scripture records the fact that the Jews looked for a Messiah. We are told that SOME DAY they will acknowledge Him as Lord.

Now if they were not Lo-Ammi (not My people) as God said, then why has there been this long interval of 2,000 years? What have they been doing all this time? Strange, isn't it? Could it be that blindness in part has come upon some Gentiles as well as Israel? ..DENTON C. ABBEY

-HARD TO BE UNDERSTOOD-

-THE EDITOR'S DESK-

To many, this indeed is true of the gospel of Paul to us Gentiles today. They find it hard to understand. But if one considers the background of most folks, it is no wonder that they find it difficult. They do not know the gospel for today and how it differs from any other.

Now when Peter was speaking of the ministry of Paul (2 Pet. 3:15,16) he was speaking of the gospel of the uncircumcision which was delivered to Paul as was the gospel of the circumcision to Peter and the 12. This gospel of Paul, which he called MY GOSPEL, was to Gentiles. But at the same time Paul also preached a gospel to the Jew, differing in no way from that of Peter.

Paul's gospel to the Gentiles was a gospel of grace. He preached the good news of salvation in which Gentiles would not have to come under the law and become Jews. So when Peter wrote to Jewish Christians, he might well say that Paul's gospel was hard to be understood. The Jew had been under law for many generations. It would be hard for him to understand anything else.

It was hard for the church at Jerusalem to believe that Gentiles could be saved as such. Peter was called to account for his preaching at the house of Cornelius. Up to this time the law had been that a Gentile had to become a Jew (be circumcised) to find favor with God.

All during the time of Acts Paul was plagued by Jews who sought to undermine his gospel of grace because they wished to uphold the law and make all men subject to it. Paul warned against these and their bondage under another gospel (Gal. 1:6-9. He used strong words.

But if the gospel Paul preached during Acts was hard to be understood, the gospel he had after Acts was much more so. We have no record that Peter was ever introduced to that gospel or ever knew what it was. Peter had dropped from the scene before that time.

Because of the traditions of the church of the dark ages, few people today know anything of the gospel of the grace of God. All is law! They have to do this and they have to do that to be saved. After salvation they are loaded down with do's and don't's. Each church or denomination has its list of taste not and touch not's. Seldom is the grace of God given a place.

The believer today is created unto good works, not saved by works (Eph. 2:5,8-10). It is small wonder that those who have never gotten farther than Matthew and its stress on law, cannot comprehend grace.

Nearly all of Christendom today is in bondage to precepts, laws, rituals, ordinances, &c. So busy are they working FOR their salvation, that they never live long enough to work OUT their salvation, and be of use to the Lord.

It was the Bereans who laid aside the traditions of men and searched the Scriptures daily to find the truth. We need folks like that today. They should make their calling and election sure. They should praise Him for saving them by grace.

But above all, each one should make an effort to know the mystery with its unsearchable riches among us Gentiles. Do not miss it!



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