

STUDIES IN EPHESIANS #49

ACCORDING TO THE PURPOSE OF THE AGES, WHICH PURPOSE HE MADE IN CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD. EPH. 3:11 (See note in Companion Bible).

In verse 10 we have seen a departure from the earlier revelations made concerning God's purposes. Israel was a nation that was to be a channel of blessing to the nations. She was to proclaim the name of their Jehovah over all the earth. But here we find that in the dispensation of the mystery, heavenly places are also in the plan of God. The church is to display to the principalities and powers of the heavens the manifold wisdom of God.

All this, including the purpose for Israel, was a part of the purpose of the ages. This purpose begins with Gen. 1:1 and ends with 1 Cor. 15:28.

It is needful that a child of God know something of the plan of the ages. Not that he is going to have all things of the future explained, but there is a general thread, at least, that runs thru it, all which gives confidence and hope. No difference what the evil one may try to do, all works out for good to them that love the Lord. But all do not understand this and so they are sometimes discouraged for it appears that truth is on the scaffold and wrong on the throne.

But what a great relief to see that there is a plan and purpose of the ages and that God will certainly accomplish all that which He set out to do. How comforting to know that some day sin and its consequent evils will be no more, not even remembered. How cheering to know that the usurper, the serpent, will be no more and that Christ shall rule. He made the ages. In Him was made the purpose of the ages. All that has been purposed will come to pass without fail. We only have to study prophecy that has been fulfilled and promises that have been made good in the past, to see that all goes on steadily to the goal.

Today the principalities and powers of the heavenly places have come to know that God is all wise. They see by what has already been accomplished that God's wisdom is manifold and without any flaw. On the other hand they see that the longer that Satan has been separated from God, the more his wisdom is corrupted. The time is coming when none will have any more confidence in him. His power to deceive will wane. He will be brot down to the dust and shall be no more. What an end for the most perfect and wise of God's creatures!

This secret church of verse 10 was chosen and its duties laid out before ever that Adam was formed from the dust of the ground. But none knew about it. Now, as we look back, it would seem that Gentiles received a setback at Gen. 11 when they were given up and a new nation chosen. But no, not all the Gentiles have part in the mystery. Most of them will have a place in the new earth.

It is hard to grasp the mystery without first getting an overall picture of the plan and purpose of the ages. There is a definite goal toward which all is moving.

SOME COMMON ERRORS

Some folks find a record of a body, even one body in 1 Cor. 12, and immediately assume that it is the joint-body of Eph. 3:6.

The one body in 1 Cor. was made up of both Jew and Gentile. They were all baptized by one Spirit into this one body. But it was far from being a joint-body. For of this body Paul asks the question in Rom. 3:1, What advantage then hath the Jew? And the answer; Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles (Word) of God. In this body the Jew was always first dispensationally, and that according to the flesh. To the Jew pertained the adoption, and the glory, and the servants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came. This is perfectly in keeping with the grafting in process as described in Rom. 11. The wild olive never bore fruit. Neither did the wild olive branch that was grafted in. No Gentiles were entrusted with the Word of God or its preaching during Acts. Titus and Trophemus and other Gentiles accompanied Paul and acted as messengers for the churches, but only Jews could proclaim the gospel. On the other hand, Timothy, a ½ Jew whom Paul had circumcised so that he might help with the ministry, could take charge of Pentecostal churches and minister the Word. After Acts Titus was also put in charge of church affairs (See epistle to Titus).

In Eph. 2 we find that again Jew and Gentile figure in a church or body. But in a much different way. The two are reconciled to each other by the middle wall being taken away (which was up all during Acts) and the two are made one new body which is then reconciled to God. There is no longer Jew and Gentile, for the Jew had to give up his identity as such. All are called Gentiles or nations now. In this body all the members are joint-heirs (no difference anywhere). All members of a joint-body, no difference anywhere. All joint-partakers of a promise -- and here is where another error has been made. So many have gone back to Pentecostal times for this and make out that this promise is the promise made to Abraham. This would put the Gentile right back under the Pentecostal administration, with the Jew first and the Gentile grafted in. Also it would rob all of all spiritual blessings in the heavenly places, for the promise to Abraham was an earthly one.

The Promise in Eph. 3:6 is not a promise to Abraham, but a promise IN CHRIST, a promise OF LIFE (2 Tim. 1:1), a promise of eternal life made BEFORE THE AGES BEGAN (Titus 1:2). This is in connection with the mystery and its time element. The kingdom, promises made to Abraham, and all that pertain to Israel have their times as since the overthrow (when the ages began).

Any church which began either at Acts 2 or 13 can have only Jews for ministers. It is a body in which the Jew must be first (no joint body possible). It must be a church with an earthly hope, seeing nothing beyond the promises made to Abraham.

SORROWS

The first time we find this word is when God speaks to the woman who was deceived; I WILL GREATLY MULTIPLY THY SORROW AND THY CONCEPTION; AND THY DESIRE SHALL BE TO THY HUSBAND, AND HE SHALL RULE OVER THEE.

Then God turned to the man; CURSED IS THE GROUND FOR THY SAKE; IN SORROW SHALT THOU EAT OF IT ALL THE DAYS OF THY LIFE; THORNS ALSO AND THISTLES SHALL IT BRING FORTH TO THEE; AND THOU SHALT EAT OF THE HERB OF THE FIELD; IN THE SWEAT OF THY FACE SHALT THOU EAT BREAD, TILL THOU RETURN UNTO THE GROUND; FOR OUT OF IT WAST THOU TAKEN: FOR DUST THOU ART, AND UNTO DUST SHALT THOU RETURN.

The wise man said; HE THAT BEGETTETH A FOOL DOETH IT TO HIS SORROW; AND THE FATHER OF A FOOL HATH NO JOY. The Preacher added; KNOWLEDGE INCREASETH SORROW.

This life is known as the vale of sorrows. It is because of this that our Lord became a man of sorrows, was acquainted with our griefs, and carried our sorrows, even to the cross.

Sin and death bring sorrow. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God, both the Jew and the Gentile. Seeing all this result of sin in the world, the preacher saw that all the labor and work of man was only vexation of spirit and vanity. How unfortunate it would be if there was no vanity or sorrow! Man would be so satisfied with this world that he would never wish for a better home. It is in the midst of war that man desires peace. It is in the midst of sorrows that he seeks for joy. Sorrows should bring us close to the One who bore our griefs.

In the Revelation, the woman says that she is now widow and knows no sorrows. But this great false religious system of the pre-millennial kingdom will one day find otherwise. Her end will be a sudden and sorrowful one.

Paul said that the sorrow of the world worketh death. How many have died of sorrow! Even Jacob was afraid that this would happen to him in the loss of Joseph.

The rich young man (who may have been Saul of Tarsus) turned away sorrowful when he found that eternal life would cost him the whole world. Later Paul testifies that he gladly suffered the loss of all things that he might know Christ.

Sorrows come into our lives. They may be the direct result of our own folly, or they may come for no apparent reason at all. But they do come. It is not always wise to ask why. How great are they? Can we bear them? Do they overwhelm us? Then we should look into the other side of the balance. Paul speaks of light affliction compared to weight of glory. Yet who would ever think of the afflictions of Paul being light?

But some day, both on earth and in the heavens, sorrow shall no longer be known. There shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying; neither shall there be any more pain. The Man of Sorrows shall be ruler of the universe. Those who suffer shall also reign with Him. We, too, should begin to realize how light all these sorrows are in comparison with the glory that shall be revealed to us some day.

NO REMEDY

There can be no argument about the fact that death is the result of sin. The Word declares this from beginning to end. The wages of sin is death. To be carnally minded is death. By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. The sting of death is sin. The soul that sinneth, it shall die.

Nature knows no remedy for this death which is the result of sin. Nature knows no remedy for the ruin which death brings about. In nature there is no example of life from death. That which dies stays dead. Some have thought that the metamorphosis of the insect is life from death, but if at any stage the insect dies, the circle is broken and there is no progress from there. It is dead.

Science, which after all is a study of nature and its laws, also knows no remedy for death. Neither can science produce life from that which is dead. There is then no hope in either nature or science. Both are powerless in the presence of death.

The Creator alone has the key, the remedy. It is resurrection. He has a new life to offer in the stead of the one that has been forfeited. He alone could say, I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE. He alone can rob gravedom (hades) of its victims and give to them eternal life.

How much does it cost to have this remedy? The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life thru His Son. It is free to all. The poor as well as the rich may receive the gift. God makes only one condition for immortality; that is belief on His Son whom He gave as a ransom for the guilt and condemnation of the whole world, that whosoever believeth on Him may not perish (without remedy) but have everlasting life. The heathen who gaze into the heavens and see God's handiwork and worship Him as Creator may have life as well as the most gifted Bible student. (Who is the Creator?)

There are millions who have no remedy for the death that is overtaking them. Even the Jew who had the promises and the hope of resurrection could die without remedy. He, that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.

Scripture knows nothing of a resurrection of the body; only the resurrection of the dead. The body must go back again to the dust from which it was made. There is no return. So the believer, the one who has the remedy, must have a new body or house from the heavens made without hands, a new creation to take the place of the old one which has been ruined by sin.

This life is a time of probation. God is testing man as to whether he will obey or no. This is the time of salvation. If man will accept the gift of life, then he has the remedy and a hope. If he does not receive the gift, then he has no remedy, no hope of resurrection.

The wicked wish no resurrection, except it were to enjoy sin. But that is impossible.

Believers have a hope of one day seeing the One who made life possible for them.

SELF APPRAISAL

Contact with the Word of God may produce various reactions in different individuals. But there are two main classes we would make note of at this time.

One class comes into only a superficial contact with the Word. It may be thru church membership or even in a modern theological seminary. In either case the goggles of tradition and man-made creeds are put on and all is seen thru their light. Truth is distorted and often denied.

This kind of contact with the Word tends to puff up, to give one a sense of importance all out of proportion. The result is a holier-than-thou attitude, class distinctions, and even racial hate. Such folks often put on a sanctimonious air, intone their prayers and sermons much like the prophets of Baal.

But those who really get into the Word and understand are not so. It has an opposite effect on them. Look at some of the testimonies of God's people who have had some knowledge of His Word;

Abraham; I am but dust and ashes.

Job; Behold I am vile...Mine eye seeth Thee, wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes.

David; There is no soundness in my flesh because of Thine anger, neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin, for mine iniquities are gone over my head; as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me.

Asaph; So foolish was I and ignorant: I was as a beast before Thee.

Isaiah; Woe is me for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips.

Daniel; There remained no strength in me, for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength.

Paul; Sinners, of whom I am chief.

The height of heathen philosophy could only give us the motto, "Know Thyself." This was the best they could do. But how can one know himself? By comparing himself with others he knows? Alas, that is too often done and who has not heard the miserable sinner say, "I am as good as so-and-so. I have as good a chance of being saved as he has." But the Word tells us that comparing ourselves with each other is wrong. It puffs up. It genders strife and emulation. It gives false hopes.

There is only one way to know one's self and that is first to know God. It was when the above witnesses knew God that they saw themselves in the true light. Today our goal is the measure of the stature of Christ. It is not trying to imitate and compare ourselves with some great outstanding Christians, no matter how good they may be.

It is not till one knows the holiness of God that he realizes his lost condition. Then he is willing to be saved and anxious that he be saved. But if one does not know he is lost and undone, he will resist all attempts to save him.

The Word is sharp, cuts deep and brings conviction. The real self, exposed, will admit he is black, vile, and undone.

BEGINNERS' CORNER #15

If the Jew has been set aside and we are no longer a part of their religious order, then what is our standing? Have we fallen with them, or do we now have a hope of our own?

To find the answers to this problem, we will have to retrace our study and examine the gospel that was given to the Gentiles. Does this give us a clue as to our future hope, or deal with the present age or dispensation?

First you will remember that Paul was the apostle who was sent to the Gentiles. First to the Jew and then to the Gentile, and as far as we know he was the only apostle who did so in recorded Scripture. If he then was the apostle to the Gentiles, it must be to his words that we turn if we secure further enlightenment.

In Gal. 2:7-9 it reads, BUT 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 BROUGHT 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 TO ME AND BARNABAS THE RIGHT HAND OF FELLOWSHIP; THAT WE SHOULD GO UNTO THE HEATHEN, AND THEY UNTO THE CIRCUMCISION. This confirms what I wrote concerning the apostleship of Peter and Paul. And again in 1 Tim. 2:7 Paul reaffirms his apostleship to the Gentiles, as he does also in Eph. 3:1, I PAUL THE PRISONER OF JESUS CHRIST FOR YOU GENTILES.

So even if Israel had not been set aside we still have no excuse for going back to the gospel of Peter for our doctrine today.

In Luke 24:45 and Acts 1:3 it tells how Christ taught the disciples during the 40 days, concerning the things pertaining to the kingdom of God, and opened their eyes as He expounded the Scriptures. Contrariwise, Paul, in Gal. 1:12 denies that the gospel he was preaching was taught him or that he received it from the apostles, but rather it was a revelation from Jesus Christ. In fact, in ch. 2:2 he testifies that 14 years after he received his commission to go to the Gentiles, he made a trip to Jerusalem to inform the apostles of this gospel that he preached among the Gentiles. So it must have been something new and not recorded in Scripture or the apostles before him would have been aware of it.

However, we must remember that the gospel Paul preached up until the end of Acts was the "grafting in of the Gentiles" (as noted in the former articles). This hope vanished with the setting aside of Israel at the end of Acts. The olive tree was cut down.

Now we must search the epistles of Paul to see if there is any word about this present time of mystery, for mystery it seems to be! The Lord was crucified and did not set up His kingdom. The Jewish nation did not repent so He could return and set up His kingdom. Israel has been set aside. We are without hope -- unless we can find another hope revealed which has been kept secret till this age. --DENTON C. ABBEY

WHERE ARE THE DEAD?

Somebody asks where one will be 10 minutes after death. That is not too hard to answer. In the first 10 minutes after death, not many folks are moved very far. So they are pretty near the spot where they died. But someone may persist and ask where they are some months or years after death. Again the question is not too hard. Unless they have been molested or there has been some upheaval, they are still right where they were buried. The dead do not move very much.

Then again some will ask what death is like. The Word of God uses the figure of sleep to describe it in both the Old and New Testaments. There is no reference that will indicate that they dream while in this sleep. It is not that kind of sleep. In fact, they are dead; but sleep is the figure, not the fact.

An old saying is that dead men tell no lies. Neither do they tell truth. Their tongues lie silent in the Grave (Psa. 6:5; 31:17).

There is no knowledge in the grave (Eccl. 9:10). At least the wicked are silent in the grave (Psa. 31:17). There is no memory in the grave (Psa. 6:5). No one gives thanks in the grave (ibid.). David trusted that God would redeem his soul from the power of the grave (Psa. 49:15). So the soul goes into the grave (hell). The dead sleep in the dust of the earth (Dan. 12:2). David is still in the grave (hell) (Acts 2:29,34; 13:36,37).

Plato was much more logical than his present day followers. He reasoned that if a soul was to exist forever in the future, then it must have existed thruout all time in the past; that it had no beginning and no ending. But modern theology admits that the soul has a beginning, but that once it comes into being, it is out of the control of the Creator and He cannot destroy it. All this in spite of the fact that our Lord said, FEAR HIM WHICH IS ABLE TO DESTROY BOTH SOUL AND BODY IN HELL (Matt. 10:28). The law had said, THE SOUL THAT SINNETH. IT SHALL DIE. But men still talk about never-dying souls! Religious leaders would not be able to get away with all this nonsense if people would read and study the Bible.

If any live forever, it is because they have received the gift of eternal life from God. And this life is in His Son; he that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not (the) life. But today all this truth is denied. Instead of life and immortality being the gift of God, men teach that we inherit them from our parents! Why? Because they still believe the lie, THOU SHALT NOT SURELY DIE.

And so today men say death is not death, but is life and life more abundantly. They say death is a friend; the Word says it is the last enemy that shall be destroyed.

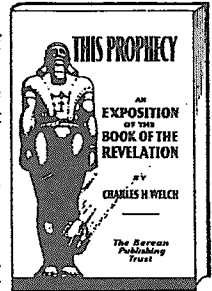
Most religious folks today have gotten their theology from the hymn books. They are totally ignorant of what God has said about death and the grave and immortality. Ignorance neither will save them nor excuse them.

Which have you chosen to believe, God's TRUTH or Satan's LIE?

THE EDITOR'S DESK

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