

STUDIES IN EPHESIANS #99

5:3

BUT FORNICATION, AND ALL UNCLEANNESS, OR COVETOUSNESS, LET IT NOT BE ONCE NAMED AMONG YOU, AS BECOMETH SAINTS.

Fornication was prevalent among the Gentile nations of that time and still is. In Acts 15, one of the things enjoined upon Gentile believers was to abstain from fornication. Among the Canaanites, it was practiced in connection with their idolatrous worship.

Fornication makes the news headlines today. It is the theme of much of our literature. It is the basis for play plots much of the time. Even Christendom does not condemn it very much. It is so common in the schools that there are many who do not believe that there are any virgins among the girls graduating from our high schools. And it forms one of the common topics for gossips. But it is best to mention it as little as possible.

In this same category is included all uncleanness. That is both in conversation and deed. Again there are many things that are best not mentioned. They should not form a topic for conversation. They are better forgotten.

Then there is covetousness. This is the unclean side of it; it is a sensual greed that would rob others of their purity. In the commandment it specifies that one is not to covet his neighbor's wife. This is the unclean side of covetousness. It is also associated with idolatry. The first and last commandments are rather closely related.

Among those who are saints or holy ones, it is not right that these things should be mentioned or be the subjects of conversation. God is the All-Pure One and it is not fitting that His children should act in such a way. The conversation should be such as would edify or build up the body of Christ.

It is quite a problem these days to get away from the filthy conversation of the world. You will find it in the magazines and newspapers, on the radio and television, and at most any social or public gathering there is the danger of having to listen to such filth.

The children are exposed to it in the public schools and it is as deadly to spiritual growth as leprosy is to the body. We cannot creep away somewhere in a corner and get away from the world. We would have no witness if we were to do so. In the Lord's prayer in John 17, He prayed not that the Father should take the disciples out of the world, but that He should keep them from the evil. It develops strength of character to live in the world and give a deaf ear to all this evil that is going on. But many of God's saints are doing it and it is a powerful testimony to the truth.

Those who belong to Christ should stand for social purity wherever they may be. There should be a positive stand. The world respects such. It is a first requirement for a successful witness to the person of Christ and the dispensation of the mystery. Let us be very careful that we do not bring shame on the cause of Christ and the gospel by being careless in these things which are the fashion of the Gentile world.

THE GREAT COMMISSION

M't 28: 18-20

ALL POWER IS GIVEN UNTO ME IN HEAVEN AND IN EARTH. GO YE THEREFORE, AND TEACH ALL NATIONS, BAPTIZING THEM IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE SON, AND OF THE HOLY GHOST; TEACHING THEM TO OBSERVE ALL THINGS WHATSOEVER I HAVE COMMANDED YOU: AND LO, I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS, EVEN UNTO THE END OF THE WORLD.

First of all we would like for you to notice this passage as being a good example for practice in correct study of the Word. We cannot just run over it superficially and note a few words and then take it for granted that it means thus and so. Some attention must be paid to each and every word. Each one has a purpose.

1. All power is given. That is a truth. Yet we must note Heb 2:8 which tells us that not yet have all things been put under Him. That is evident on every hand. So there is an anticipation here that we may not have noticed.

2. Go ye therefore. What is the *therefore* there for? It is because of the foregoing statement that all power had been given Him. Now the question we have to face is this: Are they to go out immediately after this command, or are they to wait till all things have been put under His feet? Were they to do these things in this life or in the life to come? Did the Lord mean, *All power is given unto Me... Thereupon go ye?* What does it mean to you?

3. Baptizing them in the triune name. The apostles never did this. Did they understand that this mission was to be postponed until such a time when the Lord would take over His power and authority? Either they did, or they did not obey what the Lord said. This puts us in a pretty tight spot. Are we to be numbered with those who are always finding fault with the apostles? In every instance of baptism by these apostles during Acts, it was in the name of Jesus, not in the triune name. There is plenty of subterfuge in trying to explain this apparent discrepancy away, but it still remains.

4. Teaching them to observe. Observe what? The things that He had commanded them. Did they do that? You be the judge.

5. I am with you always, even unto the end of the age. Now here is a real puzzle. He tells them to go out and do something and that He is going to be with them, and the next thing we know He up and leaves them. Evidently their obedience to the command is based on the fact that He is going to be present with them when they do it. Yet He went away. Now what is the answer? If you look at M't 19:28 you will find the time for this commission to be carried out. It is in the time of regeneration, resurrection. The 12 will be given 12 posts of authority over the 12 tribes and will engage in a great missionary effort that will be worldwide. Christ will be sitting on the throne of David and will be with them till the end of the age, that is, the end of the Millennial rule.

Now look at M'k 16:15-20. It looks as if it were the same thing. Look again. There is a difference. Furthermore it says there that they went out and did what was commanded. So there were 2 commissions.

A NEGATIVE PHILOSOPHY

THE FUTURE HOME

The fashion of the world these days is to think and deal in negatives. You are classified by what you do not do, not by what you do.

In the field of labor it is a man's ambition to be placed where he can get paid for not doing something. That something is specified. The process is often called featherbedding. Where union folks perform, then they have union stand-ins to get paid for doing nothing, or rather for not doing what the other person does.

The same thing holds in the field of racketeering. A merchant or other business person pays the racketeer not to do certain things which would ruin business or property. So the shady character gets paid for something specific which he does not do.

And it has also crept into government and today the farmer is being paid for not raising so many acres of certain crops. He can get pay for not raising so many acres of wheat. So he is getting paid for not doing something and that something is specified.

So from the time the small child is paid for not crying till he gets on old age pension, he is being paid for not doing something.

And it might surprise you to know that this is the basis of most heathen religions. They make offerings to their gods and demons so that they will do no harm. The heathen are much occupied with keeping their gods appeased so they will not bring bad luck, disease, or poor crops. They think of their gods as being racketeers, gathering in the loot under threat of doing some harm.

But it is still more surprising when one considers how this negative idea has permeated Christendom. The average Christian has the idea that some day he will be rewarded for not doing certain things. If he can just keep from stealing, lying, adultery, murder, covetousness and the like, he feels that he should be rewarded or it. He bases his hope of reward on what he has not done rather than on what he has done. And so he follows the philosophy of the racketeers, modern government, and the unions. I have had drunks tell me that they were not so bad and then they would reel off all the things they did not do.

But God does not do business that way. A lot of folks are going to be disappointed. The servant who hid his talent did not get a reward or doing nothing. He was called wicked and slothful (lazy). Whenever the judgments of believers are mentioned, they are rewarded or *what they have done*. That is emphasized time after time and when you get to the great white throne judgment, the last of the judgments, it is still the same theme. They are judged and rewarded according to their deeds, not by what they have not done.

It is true that God has given man certain laws. But man is never told that he would be rewarded for not breaking those laws. Christianity is positive, not negative. It is time we get out of this negative frame of mind and do something constructive. It is required of a steward that he be faithful. That is God's way.

A few years ago a tract came to hand in which it was asserted that the earth was to be the future home of all the redeemed. A few days ago the tract turned up again in some papers and so we looked it over.

The author knew nothing of dispensations. The result was that it was assumed that all the saved from Adam till now constituted the church. And since Adam was created and given dominion in the earth, it would follow that all his descendants would also have earth as their home.

And of course if there were no dispensations or families of God, then the deductions that were made were only natural and logical. But it was soon seen that the author knew nothing of the dispensation of the mystery. The prison epistles of Paul did not figure in the argument at all. And it is true that they might just as well be left out of the Bible as far as most professing Christians are concerned. Nearly all Bible study today begins and ends with Matthew's gospel. Beyond that they cannot go.

It is true that you can read right thru from Genesis to Ephesians and not find a word about man ever having the hope of heaven. And the reason for that is that all included in that part of the Book is about the nations of the earth and Israel and their hope of the kingdom. That kingdom is to be here on the earth. You can find nothing in the prophets or even in the gospels about man having the hope of heaven in the future life. You cannot find it in any of the epistles written during the time covered by Acts except the last 2 years when Paul was in Rome.

And why does the Bible remain silent on this question? Why did not the prophets have something to say about people going to heaven in the resurrection? It was because God did not choose to tell it to anybody then. It was kept a secret from ages and generations in God. And He kept it secret so that the great enemy would not know about it. Also it was not made known till Israel had had her chance and rejected the King and the kingdom. They would have no excuse then for rejecting.

The enemy was not told anything about this because he is in the heavens. So God did not reveal the fact that He was going to renew the heavens and cast out all that offends just as He will the earth. Satan did not know that he was not going to hold his position forever. But his bishoprick is forfeited and some day it will pass into the hands of those who compose the church of the dispensation of the mystery.

Some time after the mystery was made known, it was also revealed in Revelation that Satan is to be cast out some day from heaven and into the earth. He knows it now. But he did not know it before Acts 28:28.

So as long as the mystery was not made known it was true that all the redeemed were to have their home on the earth in the future. But the special revelation given to Paul for us Gentiles has changed all that. Israel is to be blessed on the earth; the church is to be blessed in the heavenlies. Rightly dividing the Word brings out these hidden treasures.

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES #8

Tradition tells us that Acts was written as a history of the early church. But when one studies the times, when it was written, and by whom and to whom, it begins to appear the Acts was written right after Paul made known the dispensation of the mystery in his teaching at Rome and in his letters to the Ephesians and the Colossians. His companion, Luke, wrote the book of Acts to show how that Israel rejected the reoffer of the kingdom and in turn were rejected of God and the kingdom program set aside for a time in favor of another program.

So we have set forth a little chart of the events from Pentecost till the writing of the last book of the NT. All the books of the NT are included with the date of writing as near as can be ascertained. The dates may vary a bit, but the order is substantially correct.

NEW TESTAMENT CHRONOLOGY

- 29. Pentecost
- 35. Stephen killed. The dispersion of believers.
- 37. Paul's conversion
- 38. Cornelius' conversion. Gentiles added
- 41. Matthew
- 43. Mark
- 45. James
- 46. Jude. Paul & Barnabas set out from Antioch.
Gentiles added
- 52. Galatians
- 53. 1 & 2 Thessalonians Hebrews
- 55. 1, 2 & 3 John
- 57. 1 & 2 Corinthians
- 58. Luke Romans
- 60. 1 & 2 Peter
- 62. Ephesians Philippians Colossians Philemon
- 64. Acts
- 67. 1 Timothy Titus
- 68. 2 Timothy
- 70. Destruction of Jerusalem by Titus
- 78. John
- 96. Revelation

Altho Matthew writes concerning the King and His kingdom, the gospel is written after the revival was over at Jerusalem and the Christians dispersed. James wrote to these same dispersed persons, which were made up of all 12 tribes. Note that Peter wrote his epistles about the time Paul was leaving Caesarea for Rome. Peter abode at Caesarea for a while.

By noting the various books of the NT in this list and their time and occasion of writing, it is readily seen that the 12 were carrying on a witness to the coming King and kingdom in the land (with Gentiles added at Caesarea), and Paul witnessed to the same gospel outside the land (with Gentiles added wherever the Jews opposed themselves to the truth). Acts is the history of these 2 ministries. After Acts 28: 28 the witness of the 12 concerning the coming kingdom ceased. John wrote a gospel (to Gentile believers) and then his Revelation which is prophecy and still future.

You can see that Acts really belongs to the books concerning the mystery for it is an introduction to it and concludes with the beginning of the preaching of the mystery at Rome by Paul. Luke had a reason for writing Acts.

THE QUICK AND THE DEAD #28

DENTON C. ABBEY

We are not going to pursue the quest of the innumerable references concerning the end of man any further for the time being. This could well go on for months and we would never finish the articles on "The Quick and the Dead."

The next reference I had listed in article 15 was the question of Re 14:11, AND THE SMOKE OF THEIR TORMENT ASCENDED UP FOR EVER AND EVER. This was listed as one of those that might well prove that man lived on after death.

There is no question here that these people, if they were not thrown into the proverbial hell, came as close to it as is humanly possible. The questions that have to be answered are; concerning the ones eligible, the place, and the time period.

First, we must realize that this group of people are those who receive the mark of the beast and worshipped his image. In verse 6 we have the reference to the angel with the everlasting gospel which is preached to every kindred and tongue that dwell on the earth. Another angel proclaims that Babylon is fallen. And a third angel proclaims the punishment to those who fail to believe in God. Here is a final decision for humanity and a final judgment of God. Notwithstanding Billy Graham, this is a *time of decision*. The rewards are great; the punishment greater.

Next, they are to be punished with fire and brimstone. But it does not say they are thrown into the pit as the beast and false prophet are. This is something we must check carefully. It says, THE WRATH OF GOD WHICH IS POURED OUT WITHOUT MIXTURE, INTO THE CUP OF HIS INDIGNATION: AND HE (those above) SHALL BE TORMENTED WITH FIRE AND BRIMSTONE... This appears to be a quote from Isa 34:10. Here we have an explanation of the waste of the land in the day of the Lord. A careful scrutiny of this chapter will show it is a terrible day of vengeance, but not a lake of fire. Also we must not be deceived by the notion that the beast and the false prophet are thrown into the lake of fire with immunity. A glance at 20:10 will show that when the devil is eventually cast into the lake of fire, it does not say that the beast and the false prophet are still alive there. Notice that the word *are* is added. So we are left with no proof that they are still alive. However it does say that the devil is tormented day and nite for the duration of the age. We must not assume, that because he is tormented for a season that it naturally follows that the beast and false prophet are too. Neither dare we say that the fire and brimstone of 14:11 are the lake of fire.

So we may assume that these people in 14:11 are not cast into a literal lake of fire, but are punished almost unto death that they might repent, as we note in 16:2, etc. God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

This is probably God's last attempt to save a large segment of mankind before the final judgment of death is loosed. We need to read slowly and carefully, comparing Scripture with Scripture lest we go astray.

INTERROGATIONS

THE EDITOR'S DESK

40. *Did Moses have a dispensation in the sense that Paul did?*

Yes, and no. God gave Moses a special dispensation or responsibility to give the law to Israel. But the dispensation under which Israel lived and had their being had begun with the call of Abram from Ur of the Chaldees. It was a dispensation of a nation and kingdom with a future life on the earth. The King was proclaimed as early as Ge 49:10, and the fact that there was to be a great nation was foretold as early as Ge 12:2. The great foundation upon which that dispensation was founded was the promise, and that promise was made to Abraham. It was made 430 years before the law was given thru and by Moses. Yet in Gal 3:17 the dispersed Jews of Galatia are assured that the adding of the law in no way affected the validity of the promise. That dispensation which began with the call of Abram in Ge 12 was still going on during Acts and the first record we have of it being terminated for the time being is Acts 28:28 and the news that now all spiritual blessings are in the heavens in Christ, not on the earth in Abraham (Eph 1:3).

41. *Can it be that in the last day many will be raised who will not be given immortality?*

There have been instances in both the OT and NT that in the past some have been raised who would have to die again. But in every instance it was the body that was raised. None was given a new body. So it was not a true resurrection where there is no new body (2Co 5:1-4). When our Lord arose from the dead, the bodies of many of the saints came forth from the graves and were seen in Jerusalem. These had lately died and, like Lazarus, they were restored to their families and friends. But they are not here yet. They died, even as Lazarus and others whose bodies were raised. If there is to be any such thing happen in the future, the Scriptures are silent about it. And it could be asked, To what purpose?

42. *Were the uncircumcised, the Gentiles to whom Paul ministered during Acts, members of the ten tribes of Israel dispersed who had neglected the rite of circumcision? And were not the Galatians the ancestors of the Gauls, the Irish, the Scotch, and the Welsh?*

This seems to be a pet theme with many. But there has been a careless disregard of the words of the Scripture. In the first place Paul went to the circumcision outside the promised land. As Jerusalem did not all repent and Gentiles were grafted in by Peter at Caesarea (and these were Italians), even so when Paul did not get a response from the circumcision outside the land, he too grafted in Gentiles to bring Israel to jealousy so they would bear fruit. Israel did neglect the rite of circumcision in the wilderness, but there is no historical record or otherwise that they ever did it again. In fact that was one great rite they were zealous of. Je 32:21 tells us that these Gentiles are a people who are not a people. That cannot refer to the 10 tribes for they were a people and God's people. See Jas 1:1; Ac 26:7, etc.

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