

-STUDIES IN EPHESIANS- #34

BUT NOW. These words follow the admonition to REMEMBER certain things. The Gentiles were to remember that in times past, as Gentiles they had certain dispensational disabilities. But now does away with all those things and introduces a new dispensational position. Eph. 2:13.

BUT NOW is the beginning of the dispensation of the mystery. Before this time Gentile believers were merely grafted into the olive tree, the Israelites, and partook of their blessings. There was no intimation that there ever were to be blessings that would be peculiarly their own. Whatever they had, depended on the one nation, the chosen people, Israel. At that time the wall of partition was still up. Circumcision was the main item in the dispensational wall. That made the Gentiles aliens, strangers, and without Christ or God in the world.

BUT NOW is followed by 3 words that make all the difference in the world. They are IN CHRIST JESUS. Before, in times past, Gentiles could become children of faithful Abraham by faith, and so partake of the promises. BUT NOW IN CHRIST JESUS the Gentile has something of his own that is not related in any way to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, or the children of Israel. It is not the subject of a promise or a covenant. BUT NOW is a part of God's grace; not of law or of covenant.

BUT NOW the far off Gentile is made nigh. For many centuries Israel had the unique position of being nigh, of being a favored people, of being the children of God. BUT NOW the salvation of God is sent to the Gentiles and they will hear HIM.

BUT NOW, not only has the Gentile redemption and forgiveness thru the blood, but they also are made nigh by it. It does not say that they were saved by it, for these particular Gentiles had already been saved and grafted into the olive tree. But the olive tree has disappeared with the setting aside of Israel, and the Gentile (as well as the Jew) has no more part in promises and covenants to Israel. BUT NOW introduces a plan (not a period of time) that had been hid from ages and generations. It was not to be found in any of the prophecies, nor even in any of the writings and teachings of the apostles during the time of Acts.

BUT NOW introduces something that gives hope. For what hope had been left when the Jew was set aside? At the end of Acts, to all appearances, Satan was the victor. The people that had been chosen as a special channel of blessing to the nations had failed. There was no channel, as far as revelation was concerned, left for the nations. BUT NOW IN CHRIST JESUS introduces the new order. The nations are dealt with direct thru Christ Jesus. More than that; it is the beginning of the working out of the plans and provisions for the heavenly places which up till now had been secret.

BUT NOW then is a double turning point. A change on the earth from Israel to nations. A change in the heavens which is to culminate in the manifestation of Christ with the members of His body of the dispensation of the mystery.

BUT NOW marks the point when the nations that had been GIVEN UP are again given opportunity of access in CHRIST JESUS.

-THE FRONTIER IN JOHN-

A great many folks do not realize that the great dispensational frontier of Acts 28:28 also is evident in the gospel by John, but it is there.

Look at John 1:11. He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. He came unto His own possessions, His inheritance in the land and the throne of David, but His own people received Him not. This was not fully true till the end of Acts, for the Lord had prayed for their forgiveness at Calvary, and the ministry of Acts was their second chance. The refusal at Acts 28:28 was final till that day when after much trouble and tribulation they will mourn for Him Whom they rejected and murdered.

Now look at the next verse. But as many as received Him, to them gave He the privilege of becoming the children of God, to them that believe on His name. Now do not jump to conclusions too quickly. This is not the dispensation of the mystery. John did not have any such ministry for his name is written in the foundations of the New Jerusalem and also in the Millennium he is to judge one of the tribes of the nation Israel. John is talking about everlasting life with the new earth as its goal. This is the goal of all believers before Abraham, also of all believers from Abraham to Acts 28:28 who were not of the nation Israel, and it is also of all believers since Acts 28:28 who have not become a part of the church of the dispensation of the mystery.

If you will notice the first 18 verses of this gospel, you will note that they are what John has to say from the viewpoint of about 90 A.D. Then at verse 19 he jumps back to the time of our Lord and tells some of the story.

Again in chapter 3 he leaves the narrative at verse 13 and give truth for today down thru verse 21. Again after some of the narrative he comes down to present times at verse 31 till the end of the chapter.

It is important that one rightly divides that chapter 3. The first 12 verses concern the conversation between the Lord and Nicodemus. What the Lord has to say to Nicodemus applies to Nicodemus and his people Israel. They do not apply to you and me today. They were things that Nicodemus should have known, being a teacher in Israel and knowing the Scriptures, the OT. Notice that Nicodemus begins with the plural WE. The Lord finishes the argument with the plural YE, referring to Israel. Between these expressions, the singular MAN is used twice. Note the structure. Nicodemus was very rightly interested in the kingdom. So the Lord gave instructions concerning the kingdom.

But when John speaks at verse 13 and brings us up to date, the subject is no longer kingdom, but life. The requirement for entering the kingdom was being born from above. The requirement for life is FAITH. Both of these cannot be true of the same people at the same time. Any attempt to make both truth for today ends in confusion. Read and study this chapter carefully with this in mind and you will enjoy it ever so much more than you did before.

Verily it is a part of our duty today to proclaim John 3:16 to those who are lost. Out in the highways and byways are plenty for us to be occupied with, giving them the good news. Let us not shirk what is our responsibility.

-THE FORM OF SOUND WORDS-

Quite often it happens that while writing we are stopped short in trying to find terms or expressions that will say exactly what we want said. Much rewriting could be avoided if we were only a little more careful. Then sometimes we say something with one thing in mind and the reader peruses it with something entirely different in his mind. What we meant to say is not understood at all.

For an example, suppose that I were going to write on the subject of where the truth which is for today began. I might think of a title, such as *The Historical Beginning of the Church Which is His Body*. That sounds fine until somebody says, Which body? The fact is that there was a church during Acts which was called **THE CHURCH WHICH IS HIS BODY**. But nowhere is it stated that He was the Head of that church. On the contrary, we find that some of the members are spoken of as ears and eyes and some as feet. Also members are unequal, some being more comely than others and some having better gifts than others. While after Acts we have a church called **THE BODY OF CHRIST** which has Him for Head, all members being equal, none being specified. So that title is out right now, unless I should qualify the church as being the one of which Christ is the Head.

Then maybe I should call my pamphlet *The Historical Beginning of the Dispensation of the Grace of God*. But only a short study of that subject brings up such dates as before age times, the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, and ages to come. These expressions just do not fit the subject in mind. There was a special dispensation of grace given to Paul during the Acts period which he was to preach to Gentiles only and this grace was in contradistinction to the law that was in force with Israel at the same time. John also speaks of grace a great deal and yet John knew nothing of the mystery which had been hid in God from ages and generations. Also, Paul in his epistles after Acts, speaks of grace. So it is evident that the dispensation of grace and the dispensation of the mystery are not exactly contemporary. So maybe the title should be *The Historical Beginning of the Dispensation of the Mystery*. That will more nearly fill the requirements. We must be careful in our terminology. We even might be a little more specific and make the title of our work, *The Historical Beginning of the Church of the Dispensation of the Mystery*. That is long, but it is exact, and if our investigations are to bear the marks of being scientific, we will have to be that careful in selecting words.

We should be careful also to note that the church from Acts 10 to 28 was made up of both Jew and Gentile, but the middle wall was up. Dispensationally the Jew was first, and he yet had every advantage. Sure, the Gentile could enjoy the blessings just as well as the Jew did. There was no difference on that score. But the Gentiles were grafted in and made to understand that the blessings were really the property of the Jew in the first place.

Not so after Acts 28:28. The middle wall had disappeared. There was no longer Jew and Gentile. All blessings were in Christ Jesus with no reference to Abraham or Israel. If we keep these in mind, confusion will be cleared.

-THE TRANSFORMATION OF SAUL-

Saul of Tarsus was a proud Pharisee before that noteworthy trip to Damascus one day. He had been well-trained in the Scriptures. He knew much of them by memory. He was well-versed in the arguments of the doctors of the law. He came of a good family. He could afford to be proud of his accomplishments and birth.

His training, however, was more of the letter of the law. At that time very few were at all interested in the character of Jehovah, the covenant God of the nation Israel. He was too far off. He was too austere.

But after the vision on the Damascus road all this attitude on the part of Saul changed. This Jesus Whom he had been persecuting was a real person Whom Saul learned to love. Saul had been very zealous of the law, but without love. Now love blazed in his heart more than zeal ever had. It was love that made it possible for him to overcome in the worst trials that men could devise. It gave him courage to brave the wilderness and the mountain fastness. He could stand before heathen idolators and proclaim Christ. He could brave the deep. He also could face a mob.

But more than that, he the once proud Pharisee, could stoop to be an apostle to the hated Gentiles. His Lord and Savior was so great in his mind and affections that he willingly bore all the ostracism and shame connected with such a mission.

It is not surprising then that to such a man was entrusted the preaching of the dispensation of the mystery, the unsearchable riches of God among the Gentiles. Like Abraham, he left and gave up all human ties that he might gain Christ. His one consuming desire was to know Christ and have fellowship with His sufferings. He was speaking from example and not only from precept when he said to the saints at Philippi, Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.

One of the greatest burdens that he had to bear was the continual lying-in-wait of his brethren, the Jews. Those whom he loved so much that he would go to most any length that some of them might be saved, were the very ones who persecuted him and gave him trouble. But his love for Christ never wavered.

With love also goes obedience. He was not disobedient to the heavenly vision. He went wherever the Lord told him to go. The rivers were never too deep or the mountains too high. He went to Jerusalem knowing that bonds and afflictions awaited him there.

Paul talked much with his Lord and Savior. Such fellowship made him like the One he loved so much. He could say, Follow me, or follow my example.

Love for Christ made Paul love his fellow men. All that Christ loved, Paul could love. He was kind, loving, gentle; in short he could show by example the fruits of the Spirit.

How we need to think on these things today! We, too, need to know Christ and long for the fellowship of His sufferings. If we only knew Christ, all the petty strifes, jealousies, anger, and other works of the flesh would not loom up so prominent in our lives. Our ministry would be more fruitful and our friends (and maybe our enemies) would love us more. Paul is still a good example for us today.

-THE JUST AND UNJUST-

Acts 24:15 seems to be a stumbling block to many as they seek to find the hope of man and of Israel in particular. As is usually the case, the context is not given proper consideration. In addition, words are given meanings that are not warranted by other Scriptures.

In the first place, Paul as a prisoner is doing the speaking. Paul had been unjustly accused by Jews of Asia, Jews of the same nationality as those that stoned Stephen.

Paul speaks to Felix. Felix had been a slave at one time, but now was a king. His wife was a Jewess. Therefore he would have some idea of what the charge was and would also understand something of Paul's defense.

In his defense Paul tore down the argument of the prosecution in a few words. He had been in the city but a few days. He was not leading any sect or ring there. He was found in the temple peacefully minding his own business. He reminded Felix that the Jews could not in any way prove their charges against him.

Paul emphasizes the fact that he worships the God of his fathers, believing all things which were written in the law and the prophets. There is ample evidence in this one statement that he was not yet at that time preaching the dispensation of the mystery. For that was something that was not in the law and the prophets, having been hidden from ages and generations.

Then Paul says that he has HOPE TOWARD GOD, something which the Jews that accuse him look for. This hope of Paul and the Jews is RESURRECTION. It is a resurrection of dead ones, not a resurrection of the body as so many refer to it. This resurrection does not include Gentiles. It is the hope of Paul, a Jew, and his people Israel. It includes those that have been just and those that have been unjust. In the margin you might find the words righteous and unrighteous. It does not mean the justified and unjustified. Justification is not the subject here. It is not a question of salvation as we think of it, for it is the hope of a covenant people. Up till the end of Acts, the Gentiles were a people without a hope. See Eph. 2:12. As nations, they had been given up. But individuals might have life as Peter himself had to allow in Acts 10:34, 35. But strange as it may seem, those that have everlasting life do not seem to have a calling or hope. That does not mean that they are hopeless in the way we usually use the word. The dying malefactor had no calling or hope, but nevertheless he will have resurrection some day, but not along with Israel. Therefore he will not be in the Millennium, but he will be found in the new earth.

But getting back to the subject, we must go back to Acts 23:6 where Paul says when he is before the council, Of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question.

He repeats this in Acts 24:21 where he says, Touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question this day. This was no subterfuge as some would allege. But the sad fact was that many of the Jews, especially the Sadducees had been drawn by Greek philosophy so that they denied the resurrection of the dead.

Then we must conclude that this resurrection of the just and unjust has no place in truth for today. Other articles on this will follow.

-THE DISPENSATION OF GRACE-

It is almost useless even to try to surmise when this great dispensation of God began and when it will end. It has been the object of much speculation, and what we have to add may not help very much. But if we can be a stimulus to anybody to make any stop and think on the things of God, we shall not have written in vain,

Anything of good that man has ever received at the hand of God has been because of the grace of God. It is grace because man has never deserved anything that is good.

In Eph. 3:6 we have mention of HIS PROMISE IN CHRIST. Just the bare mention as we have it here makes us begin to wonder. What promise? When made? To whom made in the first place? And we might add more questions. It is not the promise made to Abraham, we are pretty sure of that.

Paul refers to it again in 2 Tim. 1:1. Here it is spoken of as THE PROMISE OF LIFE WHICH IS IN CHRIST JESUS. If it is a promise of life, then death must be in view. Can this refer back to the scene in the garden when man fell? Or does it date back farther than that? We go on till we find another and final reference to it.

In Titus 1:2 we find that we seek. There it is ETERNAL LIFE. It was promised BEFORE THE WORLD BEGAN (or before the ages).

Now we have something to work on. We have the character of the promise and a time given. But first we must realize that before man ever entered this earth death already was in God's creation. In Romans 5:12 we read that by one man sin entered (not began) into the world, and death by sin. So sin and death entered, but had a prior existence. How they came about in the first place can be read in Ezekiel 28. It is all connected with the fall of Lucifer. Death is anything that opposes the will of God. Death is anything that would dim the glory of God. It is the opposite of life.

So the grace of God began way back before age times. It began with a promise. Its first action in the life of man was in the shedding of blood and making a covering for our parents in the garden. This was a foreshadowing of the greater sacrifice that would have to do with sin. It was the beginning of the actual working out of the promise which would give eternal life.

From that time on we see God dispensing grace, grace upon grace, and ever fresh grace as the times and circumstances had need. His grace was manifest in the giving of the law. It was given that men might obey and continue to live. It was given also that men might see their own weaknesses and shortcomings and turn to the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.

The grace of God culminated in the sacrifice made on Calvary. All thru the centuries men had been taught that life came thru death. Here it was, finally enacted before their very eyes.

It was by grace that the Jew was forgiven and had another chance during Acts. It was grace that sent the gospel to the Gentiles after Acts.

This dispensation of grace which began before age times has not ended yet. But in Paul's epistle to the Ephesians we are assured that in the ages to come, grace will still be dispensed (Eph. 2:7). Our part in it all is that we might be to the praise of the glory of His grace.

-DO YOU KNOW?-

1. Q. When did the gifts of the Spirit cease?
 - A. They began at Pentecost, Acts 2, and continued thruout Acts to the very last chapter, 28:1-10. They are nowhere in evidence after that. No laying on of hands or handkerchiefs used for healing after Acts 28:28. See Phil. 2:25-30; 1 Tim. 5:23; 2 Tim. 4:20.
2. Q. When did Paul cease to be bound for the hope of Israel and become a prisoner of the Lord for us Gentiles?
 - A. When before Felix, Paul said that he was holding to the hope which the Jews also looked for (Acts 24:15). Before the council, Acts 23:6, he said that he was called in question for the hope of the resurrection of the dead. Also note Acts 24:21. In Acts 28:20 he is still in bonds for the hope of Israel. In Eph. 3:1 he is the prisoner of Jesus Christ for us Gentiles; probably the same imprisonment, but with a different meaning and purpose.
3. Q. When was the mystery, which had been hid from ages and generations, first preached by Paul?
 - A. Altho Paul mentioned several mysteries during his ministry, the unique mystery, the dispensation of the mystery which had been hid from ages and generations was never preached till after Acts 28:28. See Eph. 3:1-12. Col. 1:21-29.
4. Q. When did Paul cease to speak "none other things" and begin giving a message about which Moses and the prophets knew nothing?
 - A. When Paul was before king Agrippa in Acts 26:22 making his defense after two years in prison at Caesarea, he said that up to that time he had said none other things than those which Moses and the prophets did say should come. This was shortly before Acts 28:28. See also answer on question 3 above.
5. Q. When did Paul cease to look for the "rapture" and become resigned to die?
 - A. It is a little difficult to make a distinct division here, but we do know that the hope of Israel was the coming of the Lord and resurrection and the setting up of the Davidic kingdom. Paul was still in chains for the hope of Israel at Acts 28:20. He had included himself in the hope expressed in 1 Cor. 15 and 1 Thess. 4. But at the very first of Eph. he looks for the "all blessings in the heavenlies." In 2 Tim. he is ready to be offered, knowing that his departure is at hand.
6. Q. When did Paul cease to preach the New covenant?
 - A. Now there are some who claim that Paul never had anything to do with the New Covenant, preaching only a gospel that was different from that of the 12. This is only a part truth. Paul and Timothy were able ministers of the new testament (covenant), 2 Cor. 3:6. Altho it was never in operation, nevertheless they proclaimed it, the refusal to repent being the only obstacle for its operation. This new covenant was for Israel only (Jer. 31:31).
(to be continued)



THE HOME OF TRUTH FOR TODAY

This is where your editor lives, where TFT is written up and printed, and where the Bible Class, Truth for Today meets each Tue. nite at 7:30. This is 4 miles south of Atwood on the Harrison Center Rd. It is 6 miles west and a little south of Warsaw. Anybody who wishes to know more about the Bible is welcome to the class. Currently we are studying the book of Acts.

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