-STUDIES IN EPHESIANS- 42

The parenthesis of Eph. 3:2-13 is taken up with the discussion of two mysteries (secrets).

These two secrets are inseparable. One cannot be fully made known without the other. One of them is being made known for the first time. The other has been known in past ages, but now is more fully made known. So one was a complete secret and the other only a partial secret. Now let us see what these secrets may be.

1. THE MYSTERY, verse 3. It was made known to Paul. It was made known by revelation. It has to do with a promise. This has no reference to the promise made to Abraham. It is a promise of life (2 Tim. 1:1). It has to do with eternal life. It was promised (in Christ) before the ages began (Titus 1:2). So it was a promise antedating all the promises to Israel and the kingdom. It was also concerning the unsearchable riches of Christ among the Gentiles. In verse 9 it is the fellowship (dispensation) of the mystery. It had been hid in God from the beginning of the World. It has to do with principalities and powers in the heavenly places, not with this earth alone. The purpose is to display the manifold wisdom of God. For Paul's claim as being the sole recipient and apostle of this secret, read Col. 1:21-29.

2. THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST, verse 4. Here is just a reference to the subject. It is not here explained except that it was not made known before as fully as it is now. So we must presume that it was something that was known in part. We have to look at other references to see just what this mystery of Christ really was. Prophecy concerning Christ begins at Gen. 3:15. From there on a little is added from time to time until at last He came to this earthly scene in person. After a brief time He was gone. During the period covered by the Acts of the Apostles He was preached. But nowhere was there any advance beyond His being the prophesied Messiah and King of Israel. Not until after His rejection at Acts 28:28 was He ever proclaimed as the Head of a church which was His body. This is the cap-sheaf of all the revelation concerning Christ. That is why that Paul could claim that it was given to him to complete the Word of God (Col. 1:25). It is the completion of the revelation of Christ. John's revelation was nothing more than what had been revealed in the prophets and gospels. Paul goes far beyond that.

Now you may see why that these two secrets are inseparable; the mystery of Christ is concerning Him as Head; the mystery is concerning the members which make up His body.

The purpose of this parenthesis in Eph. is now plain. It lays a foundation of truth for the prayer which follows. It is in view of all these wonderful things that the prayer is made. Also this passage further explains our last month's topic, THE DISPENSATION OF THE GRACE OF GOD TO THE GENTILES. It is marvelous grace! It is a subject for eternal praise!

We pray that you, with the enlightened eyes which alone come from the gift of wisdom and understanding, may comprehend these mysteries. We cannot teach you the Mystery. Only the Holy Spirit can do that.

-THERE IS A DIFFERENCE-

Several years ago a discussion came up in a Sunday School class about the difference between Jew and Gentile. One member of the class had been brot up on the old traditions of the church, and so, at the end of the discussion she remarked, ''What is good enough for the Jew is good enough for me!''

Now she hoped that some day she would go to heaven. She expected blessings in heavenly places. Yet she was ignorant of the fact that her statement above was in absolute contradiction to what she professed to believe.

She had never realized that the hope of the Jew was to be in the land that was promised to their father, Abraham. She simply did not know that up till Paul began to expound the mystery to us Gentiles, heaven had never been the hope of any dispensation.

Many have never noticed the words in the sermon on the mount which say, ''Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth.'' Kingdom and the church are the same thing to most folks. They have never noticed that to enter the kingdom, righteousness is required, yea, righteousness that will exceed that of the Pharisees and scribes.

So many claim the sermon on the mount for today, but do they refrain from resisting evil? Do they give to any one who asks of them? Do they lend to any that would borrow?

What about the tribulation prayer in Matt. 6:9-13? Do they think that God's will is being done in heaven where Satan is? Would they for a minute want to be dependent from day to day for their bread instead of having opportunity to provide for the future?

Do they think that if they will seek first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, that all these things, such as food and drink and clothing will be furnished? Does it work that way today? Are they willing to take no thot for the morrow? But what about those who do not provide for their families being worse than infidels? Which is truth for today?

Which is true today; a man is forgiven even as he forgives others, or is he exhorted to forgive others even as he has been forgiven? Can you give Scripture for your answer?

Now here is where you need a concordance and need it badly. You must look these things up and see for yourself. You dare not take anybody's word for it, not even mine. Join God's nobility and search the Scriptures daily to see if these things be so.

Many do not know that Peter and Paul had different gospels. Peter had the gospel of the Circumcision. His message was for Jews, not Gentiles. He preached just once in his life to Gentiles, so far as we know from the Word. Paul had the gospel of the Uncircumcision. It was a different gospel in that it was a gospel of, not the law, but grace. He made it a practice to preach to the Jew first. His message to the Jew was the same as that of Peter. Did you know all this? If not, it is high time you learned it! It's all in THE BOOK. Read it.

-LOST SHEEP, COIN, SON-

Luke 15 relates 3 parables of our Lord. It has been a problem with many to find the meaning of these parables. They are closely related and each helps to explain the others.

But the real key may be found in the first 2 verses of the chapter. The publicans and sinners came to hear the Lord teach. When the Pharisees and the scribes saw this they found fault. They criticized Him for eating with sinners. Now why should there be such a fuss about that? What do we know about the setting of the picture so that we may know the occasion of the parables?

As we read the history of the times, we find that sinners were simply outcasts as far as the Pharisees and scribes were concerned. Those who broke the law and became sinners were excommunicated. They could not mingle with the other people. They could not buy nor sell. About their only hope of survival was to hire out to the Romans to collect taxes.

Also the scribes and Pharisees had no plan of repentance and return for the sinners. They were definitely out. Once a sinner, always a sinner!

So our Lord had a definite lesson to teach to these hard-hearted religious bigots. His Father was not as they were. There was a way of return to His Father. So these three parables show the lesson forth.

A sheep is lost. But 99 are not lost (or do not think they are, at least). So the 99 are left in the wilderness (of unbelief?) and the shepherd goes out into the dark night to find the lost one. When it is found, he rejoices and calls in the neighbors to rejoice with him (where are the 99 all this time?).

A coin, as helpless as the lost sheep, is lost. There is a search. It is found. There is great rejoicing.

Then comes the story of the prodigal son. He is again a picture of the sinner and publican. He has forfeited his inheritance by taking his portion and spending it in riotous living. To the older son (the scribes and Pharisees) this was absolutely unforgiveable. So when the lost son returns to the father and is accepted, the older son would not even go in!

The Lord has completely justified His actions in going to the publicans and sinners, He has also set forth the character of the Father as One willing to receive the publican and sinner.

This was certainly good news to the sinners. There was hope for them, a hope which the religious folks had denied them. How they must have rejoiced. This might be applied today.

But the Scribes and Pharisees understood that they were being rebuked. This, and other incidents made them so angry that they got together and counseled how that they might kill Him. This new theology was not to their liking at all. They would show Him!

Now read this chapter (Luke 15) again. Do it slowly and thotfully. I am certain you will get the drift of the argument.

This is written with the hope that every reader will be more careful in his study.

-CRITICS AND CRITICISM-

A man who pronounces the books of the Bible forgeries, its history fictitious, its miracles impossible, its predictions fraudulent, its morality evil and its doctrine untrue, is none the less an infidel, because he writes ''Reverend Professor'' before his name and ''Doctor of Divinity'' after it, and draws his salary regularly from the funds, sacredly devoted to the diffusion of Biblical knowledge by men to whom the books which he assails were more precious than thousands of silver and gold. An error is no better when uttered in courtly phrases by a cultured agnostic in a professor's chair, than when howled out amid curses by a bomb-throwing anarchist while marching under a red flag. An ''evil heart of unbelief,'' ''departing from the living God'' is none the less sinful because; the unbeliever styles himself a ''critic'' and dignifies his unbelief as ''criticism.''

The fact that a man is employed by a government or corporation to expound a Bible which he neither understands nor believes, a faith which he neither experienced or practiced, no more invests his false utterances with authority than the apostleship of Judas guaranteed the correctness of his cash account.

The foregoing is quoted from H. L. Hastings. Altho written many years ago, it is still true. It should be read and reread many times till the full import sinks into the mind.

Since the days in which this was written, there has been progress (?). The pastors that were trained in these seminaries and universities of unbelief have been preaching the same thing from the pulpits of the land for several decades, and the results can be seen on every hand. Unbelief in the churches!

Christianity is on the decrease, but churchianity on the increase. Faith as a means of salvation is on the decrease, but works on the increase. Spiritual worship is on the decrease, but ritual and all fleshly means are on the increase. Belief in the Word of God is on the decrease, but following some man as a leader is on the increase. Christ has been robbed of His deity, and man has been deified. God has been dethroned and reason has taken His place. Man disregards the will of God and does as he pleases. Self and Satan are the main objects of man's worship.

We are not surprised. we are not even too much disturbed. We are told in God's Word, THE TIME WILL COME WHEN THEY WILL NOT ENDURE SOUND DOCTRINE; BUT AFTER THEIR OWN LUSTS SHALL THEY HEAP TO THEMSELVES TEACHERS, HAVING ITCHING EARS; AND THEY SHALL TURN AWAY THEIR EARS FROM THE TRUTH, AND SHALL BE TURNED UNTO FABLES. THEY PROFESS THAT THEY KNOW GOD; BUT IN WORKS THEY DENY HIM, BEING ABOMINABLE, AND DISOBEDIENT, AND UNTO EVERY GOOD WORK REPROBATE.

Paul has given us ample warning to which we do well to take heed. BEWARE LEST ANY MAN SPOIL YOU THROUGH PHILOSOPHY AND VAIN DECEIT, AFTER THE RUDIMENTS OF THE WORLD, AND NOT AFTER CHRIST.

Remember, these words were written by the apostle to us Gentiles, and they verily are truth for today.

-THE JEW FIRST-

As a usual thing we think of these words as found in Rom. 1:16 and referring to the gospel. But there is also another occurance in the epistle to the Romans which should be considered. It is in 2:9. There it is something quite different from the gospel.

The scope of the first chapter in which it is found for the first time is Paul's gospel to all the nations (v. 5). He is speaking specifically to the Gentile believers at Rome (v. 13). He is obliged to preach the gospel, not only to the cultured Greeks, but also even to the barbarians (v. 14). Then in verse 16, he makes it plain, as an apostle to the Gentiles it was still his duty to preach to the Jew first. We have heard of folks arguing that Romans was written after Ephesians, but this, and many other similar points, make that impossible.

While speaking of this scope, we might remind ourselves that when Paul finally did come to Rome, he did not go to these Gentile believers at all, but rather called on the leaders of the Jews and had a conference with them (Acts 28:17-29). It was to the Jew FIRST.

The scope of chapter one also takes in the great truth of the just living by faith and the revealing of the wrath of God from heaven against the unrighteous. The history of this unrighteous condition is given in verses 21-32.

Judgment of God is mentioned then in chapter 2. It is in connection with the day of wrath. It is a specific time and day. It is a day when men will be dealt with in reference to their deeds. No mention of a resurrection, but rather a time when He comes to judge Israel (the Jew first) and then the nations that will be on the earth at that time (Matt. 25).

Now with this setting in mind, we can the better understand what is meant by 2:7. This has been a stumbling block to many. Does it mean that unsaved folks, or heathen that have never heard the gospel will be saved simply by their patient continuance in well doing? Is it possible for a man still in the flesh and unsaved to be occupied in well doing? Nowhere do the Scriptures teach any such thing. Even the great saint, Isaiah, when speaking of himself and the people of Israel denied that such was possible for even God's people in the flesh. We think too much as the world thinks. We do not realize that in this flesh dwells no good thing. There can be no well doing except there be a new nature implanted which can do no sin. No man can do good till he has a nature that can do so.

Why the Jew first here in chapter 2? It is the simple fact that the unrighteous Jew had more light than the Gentile, so he will have a much harsher sentence. The bowls of wrath will be poured out especially on the kingdom of the beast and such as have received the mark of the beast. If the beast is a Jew and his followers apostate Jews, then this verse begins to make sense. But that is a separate study in itself.

The lesson is, that in the giving of rewards, there is no respect of persons. Park your traditions outside and read Rom. 1 & 2 again.

-BEGINNERS' CORNER- 8

One of my readers has suggested that I have been too harsh in my views that the Gentile was an outcast between Gen. 12 and Pentecost, and for his proof cites several quotations from both the old and New Testaments.

I am grateful for these suggestions for it serves to point out what we have always maintained in TFT, that; unless you rightly divide the truth and keep the text in its dispensational setting, one can be led into all sorts of blind alleys.

The first quotation we have given is Matt. 21:43, where Christ, in rebuking the Pharisees said, THEREFORE I SAY UNTO YOU, THE KINGDOM OF GOD SHALL BE TAKEN FROM YOU, AND GIVEN TO A NATION BRINGING FORTH THE FRUITS THEREOF. My reader assumes, as have countless others, that another nation must of necessity be Gentile. Unless we can support this by Scripture, it will have to be discarded.

Matt. 21:43 is a reference from Isa. 66:7-14. I will leave it entirely for the reader to pursue, but the Lord is speaking and He says in part, SHALL THE EARTH BE MADE TO BRING FORTH IN A DAY? OR SHALL A NATION BE BORN AT ONCE? FOR AS ZION TRAVAILED, SHE BROUGHT FORTH HER CHILDREN. Then going back to Isa. 26:1-2 we read, IN THAT DAY SHALL THIS SONG BE SUNG IN THE LAND OF JUDAH---OPEN YE THE GATES, THAT THE RIGHTEOUS NATION WHICH KEEPETH THE TRUTH CAN ENTER IN. In Isa. 1:27 it informs us, ZION SHALL BE REDEEMED WITH JUDGMENTS AND HER CONVERTS WITH RIGHTEOUSNESS. In Isa. 11:10 we find the well-known verse AND IN THAT DAY THERE SHALL BE A ROOT OF JESSE, WHICH SHALL STAND FOR AN ENSIGN OF THE PEOPLE; TO IT SHALL THE GENTILES SEEK: AND HIS REST SHALL BE GLORIOUS. But if we continue to verse 11, AND IT SHALL COME TO PASS IN THAT DAY, THAT THE LORD SHALL SET HIS HAND AGAIN THE SECOND TIME TO RECOVER THE REMNANT OF HIS PEOPLE FROM THE--ISLANDS OF THE SEA.

Now in all these references it is the remnant of Israel that is to be recovered, and set up as the Lord's nation, not Gentiles.

In Isa. 49:6 the reference is to Christ, that He is to be a light unto the Gentiles, which none of us would deny; but that they are the righteous nation is another blind alley.

Isa. 66:19 probably is more specific on this point, AND I WILL SET A SIGN (Christ) AMONG THEM (Gentiles, as noted above) AND THEY (Israel, the righteous nation) SHALL DECLARE MY GLORY AMONG THE GENTILES.

Even Deut. 30:3-5 tells us, THAT THEN THE LORD THY GOD WILL TURN THY CAPTIVITY AND HAVE COMPASSION ON THEE, AND WILL RETURN AND GATHER THE FROM ALL THE NATIONS....

It is helpful for the student to be conversant with the prophecy of Hosea and the Lo-Ammi condition of Israel, for in this book we have recorded the scattering and gathering of Israel, much of which still is future.

Before taking up the place of the Gentile in God's plan, I am trying to point out that the blessing is to the Jew first. This is a very important step in rightly dividing the Word.

--DENTON C. ABBEY.

-THE EDITOR'S DESK-

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