

Study Notes



The Mystery

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Introduction

The apostle Paul used the words *mystery* and *mysteries* twenty times in his thirteen inspired epistles (Romans through Philemon). Each reference is associated with the body of truth that the risen and glorified Christ personally revealed to him from heaven that he might make it known to the church which is the body of Christ. By the grace of God, he preached this truth among the Gentiles and it was his burden **"to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God"** (Ephesians 3:9).

The mystery is a major Bible doctrine that all believers should understand and work to make known to others. Yet when is the last time that you either heard or read a Bible study on this great doctrine? There is a glaring absence of it in pulpits and Christian literature. Why is that? I think that many do not see this truth because they have not personally searched the scriptures to see whether it is so (Acts 17:11). Many others will just totally dismiss it without sincere consideration because it does not line up with their preconceived ideas and traditional (but wrong) interpretations.

The degree of light that the Lord will give us in his word depends upon what we do with the light that he has already given us. As we receive and walk in the light of God's word, he will give us more light. No one has mastered the Bible. There are deep things in it waiting to be brought to light for those who are willing to search it with a heart and mind that is wholly dependent upon the Spirit of God. Consider what Paul said in this regard:

6 Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought:

7 But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory:

8 Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

9 But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.

10 But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.

11 For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.

12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given us of God.

13 Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual things with spiritual.
(1 Corinthians 2:6-13)

While all scripture is certainly for us (Romans 15:4; 2 Timothy 3:16), it was not all written about us, or directly to us. God's word was given by progressive revelation. In other words, He did not reveal everything at once. As God dispensed new revelation to man, there were corresponding changes in the way that he dealt with man. God does not change in his person, principles, or promises (Hebrews 13:8), but he does change in the way that he deals with man.

For example, consider the issue of eating meat. In the beginning God told Adam that fruits and vegetables would be his meat (Genesis 1:29). About fifteen hundred years later, God told Noah that **"every living thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things. But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat"** (Genesis 9:3-4). A thousand years after that God revealed to Moses that the children of Israel were not to eat certain meats which He called unclean (Leviticus 11). Finally, about fifteen hundred years later, God revealed through Paul that the church is free to eat any meat (even if it is cooked rare) and that those who would command us to **"abstain from meats"** are teaching the **"doctrines of devils"** (1 Timothy 4:1-5). This illustrates progressive revelation and how God changes in his dealings with man according to what he has revealed.

In the only verse in which we are commanded to study the word of God we are also told why to do it and how to do it:

Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. (2 Timothy 2:15)

To rightly divide the word of truth is to recognize and consistently maintain the divisions that God put in the scripture. Right division does not diminish any part of the word because it is all **"the word of truth."** However, the mystery of the body of Christ is a distinct revelation that was made known through Paul's ministry (Ephesians 3:3), and we must consistently divide it from what was made known before him. Much of the doctrinal confusion and division that exists in the professing church is a result of the failure to rightly divide the scripture.

Five Keys to Bible Study

1. Believe the scriptures (1 Thessalonians 2:13)
2. Search the scriptures (Acts 17:11)
3. Compare scripture with scripture (1 Corinthians 2:13)
4. Consider the scriptures written by Paul (2 Timothy 2:7)
5. Rightly divide the scriptures (2 Timothy 2:15)

Chapter One - The Definition of the Mystery

The apostle Paul used the words *mystery* and *mysteries* twenty of the twenty-seven times that they are used in the scriptures. A few other writers refer to mysteries, but Paul clearly puts an emphasis on the mysteries which Christ revealed through him. What does the word "mystery" mean as it is used in the Bible?

The best way to define a Bible word is to: (1) check all the references to it in the Bible; (2) consider the context of the references; and (3) compare and contrast the references. By using this method, every word in the King James Bible (KJB) can be defined by the KJB text itself. The KJB is the inspired word of God for English-speaking people (2 Timothy 3:16; Psalm 12:6-7), and it must be our final authority in all matters of faith and practice.

Most people think that the mysteries referred to in the scripture are things that cannot be understood. However, by considering the twenty-seven references to the word in the Bible, we learn that a mystery in the scripture is a secret that was previously hidden but is now revealed. It is not something we cannot know, but rather something that God wants us to know! The mysteries of the Bible can be divided into two main categories: (1) those related to Israel; and (2) those related to the church which is the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22-23).

The Mysteries Related to Israel

10 And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables?

11 He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given.

12 For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath.

13 Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand.

14 And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive:

15 For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.

16 But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear.

17 For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them. (Matthew 13:10-17)

The kingdom of heaven, which is referred to thirty-two times in the Gospel of Matthew, is the literal and visible reign of Christ over the whole earth for a thousand years (Daniel 2:44; Revelation 20:4). God is an eternal King (1 Timothy 1:17) and his spiritual kingdom is everlasting (Psalm 145:13). But He has also purposed to set up his kingdom literally and visibly on the earth (Jeremiah 23:5; Matthew 6:10).

1. The kingdom of heaven was prepared from the foundation of the world.

34 Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: (Matthew 25:34)

God made a covenant with David concerning this kingdom. Jesus Christ will rule the earth (Jeremiah 23:5) from the throne of His father David.

12 And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom.

13 He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever. (2 Samuel 7:12-13)

30 And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God.

31 And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS.

32 He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David:

33 And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end. (Luke 1:30-33)

2. The kingdom of heaven was the subject of many Old Testament (OT) prophecies spoken to Israel.

21 Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.

24 Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days. (Acts 3:21, 24)

3. Jesus Christ confirmed the promises of the kingdom given to the Jewish fathers during His earthly ministry to Israel.

8 Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers: (Romans 15:8)

4. John the Baptist, Jesus Christ, and the twelve apostles all preached the gospel of the kingdom to the nation of Israel (Matthew 3:2; 4:17; 10:7).

By Matthew 13, it is evident that the King was being rejected by the leaders in Israel. In this chapter, Christ revealed mysteries about the kingdom of heaven which are not found written in the OT prophets. He spoke in parables in order to conceal this truth from those that rejected him and to reveal it to his disciples. These mysteries had been kept secret since the foundation of the world but were revealed by Christ. Christ was the great Prophet that Moses said would come to speak God's words to Israel (Deuteronomy 18:15-19). By teaching these mysteries, the Lord was beginning to prepare his disciples for his rejection and departure and the re-offer of the kingdom after his ascension. The doctrine of these mysteries concern the time period covered by the book of Acts, when the kingdom was re-offered to Israel, and the future tribulation period.

34 All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake he not unto them:

35 That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world. (Matthew 13:34-35)

The Mysteries Related to the Body of Christ

1 Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. (1 Corinthians 4:1)

Paul was a faithful steward of the mysteries that Christ committed unto him. The mysteries in Paul's epistles are distinct from the mysteries related to Israel. The mysteries revealed through Paul concern a body, not a kingdom.

1 For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles,

2 If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward:

3 How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words,

4 Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ)

5 Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit;

6 That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel:

7 Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power.

8 Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach

among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ;

9 And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ:

10 To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God,

11 According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord:

12 In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him.

(Ephesians 3:1-12)

That Gentiles would be saved was no mystery (Isaiah 49:6), but that believing Jews and Gentiles would be baptized by the Spirit into one body (1 Corinthians 12:13) was a mystery that was not revealed in the OT or Gospel records (Matthew through John). In the body of Christ, there is neither Jew nor Greek (Galatians 3:28), and it is one new man (Ephesians 2:15) with the risen and glorified Christ as its Head (Ephesians 1:22-23).

Let's contrast some basic truths about this mystery with the basic truths we considered about the mysteries related to Israel:

1. This mystery was ordained before the foundation of the world.

7 But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: (1 Corinthians 2:7)

2. This mystery was hid from the OT prophets.

26 Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: (Colossians 1:26)

3. The church does not know Christ after the flesh, but as the glorified Head of the body.

16 Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more.

17 Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. (2 Corinthians 5:16-17)

4. We become members of this body by believing the gospel of the grace of God which was revealed to Paul (Galatians 1:11-12), not the gospel of the kingdom.

1 Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand;

2 By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have

believed in vain.

3 For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;

4 And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: (1 Corinthians 15:1-4)

24 But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God. (Acts 20:24)

There are other mysteries associated with the mystery of the body of Christ such as the salvation of the Gentiles through the fall of Israel (Romans 11:12, 15, 25) and the rapture of the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:51). These mysteries will be considered in later chapters.

Chapter Two - The Disclosure of the Mystery

According to Webster's 1828 dictionary, a *disclosure* is (1) the act of disclosing; an uncovering and opening to view; discovery (2) the act of revealing; utterance of what was secret; a telling (3) the act of making known what was concealed.

The mystery was not an afterthought or "Plan B" of God for it was the **"eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord"** (Ephesians 3:11). However, God purposely kept it a secret for over four thousand years. The questions that naturally arise are:

1. Why did God keep it secret?
2. When did God reveal it?
3. Who did He reveal it to?

From Genesis 12 until Acts 8 God's revelation primarily concerns the nation of Israel. The Gentiles are only dealt with in relation to Israel. God chose Abraham and promised to make of him a great nation (Genesis 12:1-3). He gave Israel covenants (Romans 9:4) concerning a land (Genesis 17:8) and a kingdom (2 Samuel 7:12-16). The mystery concerns a spiritual body in which the distinction between Israel and the Gentiles does not exist. God did not reveal to Israel what did not concern them. How could Christ legitimately offer Himself as King to Israel if it was already revealed to them that they would be **"cast away"** while the body of Christ was being built (Romans 11:25)?

The suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ was prophesied to Israel (Psalm 22; Isaiah 53), but the full magnitude and understanding of what it would accomplish was not. That wasn't revealed until after the resurrection of Christ. Had the princes of the world known what Christ would accomplish by His cross, **"they would not have crucified the Lord of glory"** (1 Corinthians 2:8). It was Pharaoh's decree to kill the male babies of the Israelites that caused Moses to be brought up in his own house (Exodus 1:15 – 2:10). Pharaoh actually raised the man that God used to deliver His people out of Egypt. Likewise, God allowed Satan to have Christ crucified, but He used that very death to destroy the devil (Hebrews 2:14). Satan, that great deceiver, deceived himself when he had Jesus killed for it was by the cross that redemption was accomplished. The church which is the body of Christ is built upon the basis of the cross of Christ (Ephesians 2:11-22).

You will search in vain to find the mystery of the body of Christ in the OT scriptures. The prophets spoke of the **"sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow"** (1 Peter 1:11). The Jews had a difficult time trying to reconcile the prophecies that described a suffering Servant with those that described a glorious King. If the Jews did not understand that there would be two separate comings of Christ (Luke 24:21), they sure did not know anything about the parenthetical mystery age in between. The OT prophets did not see this present age

whatsoever! There are prophetic passages in which we read about both comings of Christ as though what He was going to accomplish would occur at the same time.

1 Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles.

2 He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street.

3 A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth [*first coming*].

4 He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law [*second coming*]. (Isaiah 42:1-4)

1 The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound;

2 To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD [*first coming*], and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; [*second coming*].” (Isaiah 61:1-2)

Another example is found in Hosea 3:4-5 where we read about both the judgment on Israel and her restoration.

4 For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim: [*the mystery is revealed during this time but not a word is said about it in this prophecy*] 5 Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the LORD their God, and David their king; and shall fear the LORD and his goodness in the latter days.”

You will also search in vain to find the mystery in the Gospel records. Consider these facts about the ministries of John the Baptist, Jesus, and the twelve apostles.

John the Baptist

1. The purpose of his prophesied ministry was to prepare the way for the King.

2 As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.

3 The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. (Mark 1:2-3)

2. He preached that the kingdom of heaven was at hand.

1 In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea,

2 And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. (Matthew 3:1-2)

3. He baptized with water in order to manifest Christ to Israel (John 1:31). His baptism was **“the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins”**. This baptism looked forward to the New Covenant which God will be make with Israel when Christ sets up His kingdom (Jeremiah 31:31-34). Israel, as a nation, does not receive remission of sins until the return of Christ (Acts 3:19).

31 And I knew him not: but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water. (John 1:31)

4 John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.

5 And there went out unto him all the land of Judaea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins. (Mark 1:4-5)

4. When he was in prison he doubted that Jesus was the Christ (Matthew 11:2-6) because he was expecting the kingdom to be set up shortly ("at hand" means very near). He did not understand why he, as the forerunner of the King, was in prison if the kingdom of heaven was at hand. At this point, the mysteries of the kingdom were not revealed. These would have answered John's doubts. Obviously, John the Baptist DID NOT preach the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

The Earthly Ministry of Jesus Christ

1. His earthly life and ministry were under the law.

4 But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, (Galatians 4:4)

17 Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. (Matthew 5:17)

2. In His earthly ministry He confirmed the promises made to the Jewish fathers.

8 Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers: (Romans 15:8)

3. He preached the gospel of the kingdom and worked the signs of the kingdom.

23 And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people. (Matthew 4:23)

4. He was not sent to the Gentiles. He did minister to a few Gentiles but the exceptions prove the rule. He certainly loves the world, but according to prophecy Israel is to be saved first and then the Gentiles are blessed through their rise.

24 But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. (Matthew 15:24)

5. Knowing of His rejection the Lord instructed His disciples in mysteries (Matthew 13) and began to prepare them for the tribulation period (see Matthew 24 for example). If the mystery was revealed at this point, why would Christ instruct His disciples in preparation for the tribulation period which will take place AFTER the Grace Age closes with the rapture?

The Twelve Apostles

1. They were sent to Israel to preach the gospel of the kingdom and to work the signs of the kingdom.

5 These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not:

6 But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

7 And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand.

8 Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give. (Matthew 10:5-8)

2. They are promised twelve thrones in the kingdom.

28 And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. (Matthew 19:28)

3. They did not understand the death of Christ nor did they believe in His resurrection (until Christ appeared to them after His resurrection and opened their understanding).

9 And returned from the sepulchre, and told all these things unto the eleven, and to all the rest.

10 It was Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and other women that were with them, which told these things unto the apostles.

11 And their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not. (Luke 24:9-11)

Carefully compare the following passages of scripture:

1 Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand;

2 By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.

3 For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;

4 And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:” (I Corinthians 15:1-4)

1 Then he called his twelve disciples together, and gave them power and authority over all devils, and to cure diseases.

2 And he sent them to preach the kingdom of God, and to heal the sick.

3 And he said unto them, Take nothing for your journey, neither staves, nor scrip, neither bread, neither money; neither have two coats apiece.

4 And whatsoever house ye enter into, there abide, and thence depart. 5 And whosoever will not receive you, when ye go out of that city, shake off the very dust from your feet for a testimony against them.

6 And they departed, and went through the towns, preaching the gospel, and healing every where. (Luke 9:1-6)

31 Then he took unto him the twelve, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished.

32 For he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on:

33 And they shall scourge him, and put him to death: and the third day he shall rise again.

34 And they understood none of these things: and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken. (Luke 18:31-34)

The twelve apostles did not preach the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ before it was accomplished. Jesus did not even begin to talk to them about this until the end of His ministry (Matthew 16:21-23). They preached the **“gospel of the kingdom”** (Matthew 4:23; 24:14) which was the good news (gospel basically means good news) that the prophesied kingdom was at hand. Even after the resurrection of Christ they did not preach the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ in the same way that Paul did. In Acts 2 and 3, Peter preaches the cross as BAD NEWS (he does not say that Christ died for our sins) telling ISRAEL that they killed their Messiah and that now they must repent of this awful deed. But with Paul the **“preaching of the cross”** (1 Corinthians 1:18) is GOOD NEWS because it is the power of God unto salvation. In the Gospels, the King offered Himself to Israel and they (as a nation) rejected Him. After He arose from the dead He appeared several times to His disciples over a period of forty days (Acts

1:1-11). He showed them that His suffering had to precede the glory of the kingdom and prepared them to RE-OFFER the kingdom to Israel. They had to replace Judas (Acts 1:13-26) before the offer could be made because there must be twelve apostles to sit on twelve thrones in the kingdom (Matthew 19:28). Now, with the great sign of the resurrection (Matthew 12:39-40) and the baptism with the Holy Ghost for greater signs and wonders (Acts 2) the leaders of Israel are without excuse to be ignorant that Jesus is the Christ (Luke 23:24, Acts 3:17). In Acts 2 Peter indicts Israel for killing the Messiah and calls on them to **“repent and be baptized for the remission of sins”** and exhorts them **“Save yourselves from this untoward generation”**. In Acts 3:19-21 Peter gives a bona-fide OFFER of the kingdom.

19 Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord;

20 And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you:

21 Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.

This offer was rejected by the leaders of Israel (Acts 4-7) and culminated with the stoning of Stephen. When they stoned Stephen (who they knew was filled with the Holy Ghost) they committed blasphemy against the Holy Ghost which Jesus warned would not be forgiven in this world or the world to come (Matthew 12:31-32). Israel rejected the Father (1 Samuel 8:7), the Son (Matthew 27:22), and now the Holy Spirit (Acts 7:51). Three strikes and you are OUT! At this point everything was in line for the tribulation period to begin. As the Jews **“gnashed”** on Stephen **“with their teeth”** he **“looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus STANDING on the right hand of God”**. Jesus was standing in preparation for judgment (Psalm 110:1; James 5:9). God could have begun to pour out His wrath but instead poured out His GRACE.

Instead of bringing in the tribulation period, God saved Saul of Tarsus (later called Paul, a Gentile name), who was a leader in Isarel's rebellion against Him, by **“exceeding abundant”** grace (1 Timothy 1:12-16) and sent him as the apostle of the Gentiles (Romans 11:13). Christ from heaven revealed the **“gospel of the grace of God”** (Galatians 1:11-12) and the mystery of the body of Christ (Ephesians 3:1-12; Colossians 1:21-29) directly to him. The other apostles and prophets had the mystery revealed to them by the Spirit through Paul's teaching.

Most believe that the body of Christ was started in Acts 2 on the basis that the disciples were baptized with the Holy Ghost. They assume that this was when the Spirit began to form the body of Christ. It is important to understand that the baptism with the Holy Ghost (Acts 1:5) is NOT the same thing as baptism by the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13). There are two different baptisms that involve the Holy Spirit. Consider these contrasts:

With the Holy Ghost

1. Outward manifestations (Acts 2:4)
2. For power (Luke 24:49)
3. According to prophecy (Joel 2:28)
4. Christ baptizing (Matt. 3:11)

By the Spirit

1. No outward manifestations (Rom. 6:3)
2. For salvation (Gal. 3:26-27)
3. According to the mystery (Eph. 4:4-5)
4. The Spirit baptizing (1 Cor. 12:13)

Chapter Three - The Dispensation of the Mystery

The word "dispensation" is used four times in the Bible (1 Corinthians 9:17; Ephesians 1:10; 3:2; Colossians 1:25). A dispensation is simply a dealing out or dispensing of something. God dispensed grace to Paul to make known the mystery. Just as the law was dispensed through Moses (John 1:17), so the mystery was dispensed through Paul. This mystery fulfilled or completed the word of God (Colossians 1:25). Although the book of Revelation is placed as the last book of the Bible it is the consummation of OT prophecy and was probably written much earlier than most teachers claim. We are not told to rightly divide the Bible (2 Timothy 2:15) until Paul fulfilled the word of God with his last inspired epistle which, chronologically, was *possibly* the last book of the Bible that was written.

The dispensation of the mystery was not given to John the Baptist, Jesus (in His earthly ministry), or the twelve apostles. One of the keys to understanding the Bible is to understand the distinctiveness of Paul's apostleship and message.

7 Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things. (2 Timothy 2:7)

God gave us three chapters about Paul's conversion (Acts 9; 22; 26) as well as several other passages (Galatians 1:13-23; Philippians 3:4-8; 1 Timothy 1:12-16). Paul referred to the importance of his ministry in nearly every epistle that he wrote.

Let me encourage you to carefully read the following references: Romans 11:13; 15:16; 16:25; 1 Corinthians 3:10; 4:16-17; 9:1,17; 11:1; 14:37; 2 Corinthians 12:1-4; 13:3; Galatians 1:1,11-12, 2:5-9; Ephesians 3:1-12; 6:18-20; Philippians 3:17; 4:9; Colossians 1:24-29; 1 Thessalonians 1:6; 2 Thessalonians 3:6; 1 Timothy 1:11-16; 2:7; 2 Timothy 1:11-13,15; 2:2,7; 3:10; Titus 1:3.

Paul was not an egomaniac (Ephesians 3:8)! He wrote by inspiration of God! Clearly, the Lord has placed an emphasis on the distinct apostleship and ministry of Paul because he is the spokesman for the body of Christ to follow in this age.

Most Bible students have never asked themselves the important question, "*Why Paul?*" The twelve apostles had already been commissioned by Christ to go "**into all the world**" (Mark 16:15). Well, they did not go, but Paul did! What brought about this change? It was the continued rejection of Christ by the leaders of Israel and the revelation of the mystery. In the kingdom commission the apostles were told to begin at Jerusalem (Luke 24:47, Acts 1:8). According to prophecy, the Gentiles are to be blessed through Israel and Jerusalem will be the capitol city in the Kingdom Age. Because Jerusalem did not repent there was no need for them to go "**into all the world.**" When Paul explained his ministry to the apostles in Jerusalem (Acts

15; Galatians 2:1-10), they agreed that he would go to the heathen with his gospel while they continued to go to the circumcision.

The commission given to the twelve apostles was postponed but will be fulfilled in the tribulation period.

14 And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come. (Matthew 24:14)

This verse also proves that the gospel of the kingdom is different than Paul's gospel. Paul said that his gospel went into all the world, yet the end did not come!

6 Which is come unto you, as it is in all the world; and bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you, since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth:

23 If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister; (Colossians 1:6, 23)

The apostle Paul plainly stated that he was not one of the twelve apostles:

5 And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve:

6 After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep.

7 After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles.

8 And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.

(1 Corinthians 15:5-8)

Paul said that Christ was seen of "**the twelve**," but when the twelve apostles saw the resurrected Christ, Judas was dead and Paul was not even saved yet. He must have considered Matthias to be one of the twelve apostles. Matthias was not officially chosen until Acts 1 but he saw the resurrected Christ with the eleven before Acts 1.

Some Bible teachers claim that Paul was God's choice to replace Judas Iscariot as the twelfth apostle and that Peter was acting "in the flesh" and out of God's will when he led in appointing Matthias as the replacement. I think the following points prove that Matthias was the divinely appointed replacement for Judas:

1. It was prophesied that another would take the place of Judas (Psalm 109:8) and Paul's special ministry was not prophesied.
2. There had to be twelve apostles in order for the kingdom to be offered to Israel (Matthew 19:28).

3. Peter and the other apostles had the authority to act in the place of Christ (Matthew 16:19; 18:18-19).
4. They prayed about it and were promised to receive what they asked for (Matthew 21:22).
5. They cast lots (Acts 1:26), which was scriptural way for the Jews to discern God's will (Proverbs 16:33).
6. Paul did not meet the qualifications (Acts 1:21-22).
7. The apostles were **“filled with the Holy Ghost”** just a few days later (Acts 2:4).
8. Matthias was **“numbered with the eleven apostles”**, and the Holy Spirit stated that Peter stood up **“with the eleven”** (Acts 2:14).
9. Paul was not appointed through men, but by God Himself (Galatians 1:1).

There are differences between the ministries of Paul and the twelve. Paul plainly and purposely distinguishes himself from them (Galatians 1:11-12,17; 2:2,9). While there were other apostles to the body of Christ (such as Barnabas; Acts 14:14), Paul was **"the apostle of the Gentiles"** (Romans 11:13).

1. The twelve were chosen by Christ on earth. Israel is God’s earthly people. Paul was chosen by Christ from heaven. The body of Christ is God’s heavenly people.

6 For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth. (Deuteronomy 7:6)

6 And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: (Ephesians 2:6)

2. The twelve were appointed to lead Israel. Paul was appointed to lead the body of Christ.

28 And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. (Matthew 19:28)

24 Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church:

25 Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God;

26 Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: (Colossians 1:24-26)

3. The twelve represent Israel (twelve tribes; Matthew 19:28). Paul represents the one body of Christ. He was a **"Hebrew of the Hebrews"**, and yet he was also a Roman citizen (Philippians

3:5; Acts 22:27-28). So, in a sense, we could say that he was a Jew and Gentile in one body!

4. The twelve only knew Christ on earth. Even when Christ ascended back to heaven, a cloud received Him out of their sight (Acts 1:9). Paul only knew Christ from heaven (Acts 26:16).

5. The twelve were sent to proclaim and offer the kingdom of heaven to Israel (Matthew 10:5-7; Acts 3:19-21). Paul was sent to preach the gospel of the grace of God (Acts 20:24).

6. The ministry of the twelve was based on covenants and prophecy (Acts 3:24-25). After Israel is blessed, the Gentiles receive blessings through them. The ministry of Paul was based on a mystery. The Gentiles are blessed through the fall of Israel (Romans 11:11) and there is neither Jew nor Gentile in the body (Galatians 3:27-28).

7. Under the kingdom commission water baptism was required and signs were the evidence of salvation. Under Paul's commission he was not sent to baptize and he said early in his ministry that signs would cease.

15 And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.

16 He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.

17 And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues;

18 They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover. (Mark 16:15-18)

17 For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. (1 Corinthians 1:17)

8 Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.

9 For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.

10 But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. (1 Corinthians 13:8-10)

There are other differences that we could point out but I think that these seven are sufficient to prove the distinctiveness of Paul's apostleship from that of the twelve. These distinctions do not mean that everything Paul preached and did in his ministry was different for there are also connections between them.

Chapter Four - The Distinction of the Mystery

15 Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. (2Timothy 2:15)

The major division in the word of God is between the prophecy of the kingdom and the mystery of the body of Christ. The burden and emphasis of the prophecy spoken to Israel is the King and His kingdom (2 Peter 1:16-21). Prophecy concerns that which was SPOKEN since the world began through all the prophets. The burden and emphasis of the mystery revealed through the apostle Paul is the spiritual organism, the body of Christ. The mystery concerns that which was kept SECRET since the world began. The things that were SPOKEN by the prophets since the world began cannot be the same things that were kept SECRET and hid from the prophets since the world began. Let's compare and contrast prophecy with the mystery.

<u>PROPHECY</u>	<u>MYSTERY</u>
Peter said to Israel, “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath <u>SPOKEN BY THE MOUTH OF ALL HIS HOLY PROPHETS SINCE THE WORLD BEGAN.</u>” (Acts 3:19-21)	Paul said to the body of Christ, “Now unto him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was <u>KEPT SECRET SINCE THE WORLD BEGAN, BUT NOW IS MADE MANIFEST</u>” (Rom. 16:25-26a)
Concerns a KINGDOM; a political ORGANIZATION (Dan. 2:44)	Concerns a BODY; a spiritual ORGANISM (1 Cor. 12:12-13)
The kingdom to be established ON EARTH (Jer. 23:5)	The body given a position in HEAVENLY places (Eph. 2:5-6)
The kingdom PROPHESED since the world began (Luke 1:67-75)	The body was chosen in Christ before the world began, but kept SECRET since the world began (Eph. 1:4; 3:9)
Israel to be given SUPREMACY over the nations (Isa. 61:6)	Jew and Gentile placed on the SAME LEVEL before God (Rom. 10:12; 11:32)

The Gentiles to be blessed through Israel's RISE & INSTRUMENTALITY (Zech. 8:13, 23)	The Gentiles blessed through Israel's FALL & DIMINISHING (Rom. 11:11-12, 15)
Prophecy mainly concerns NATIONS (Isa. 2:4)	The mystery concerns INDIVIDUALS (2 Cor. 5:17)
Prophecy concerns blessings, both MATERIAL and spiritual, on EARTH (Isa. 11:1-9)	The mystery concerns all SPIRITUAL blessings in HEAVENLY places (Eph. 1:3)
Christ comes to His people, Israel, ON EARTH (Rev. 1:7)	Christ comes for His body, the Church, meeting them in the AIR (1 Thess. 4:17)
Justification is by a man's faith and it must be a faith that WORKS (Jam. 2:24)	Justification is by the faith of Christ and is received through FAITH ALONE (Rom. 3:22, 28; 4:5)
The proclamation of the prophetic program committed to the TWELVE apostles (Acts 1:6-8)	The proclamation of the mystery committed to PAUL (Col. 1:24-29)

Chapter Five - The Dangers of the Mystery

The mystery is a wonderful doctrine that every believer should know and understand. Yet, we must realize there is a danger in people failing to respond to it properly.

The Danger of MISSING the Mystery

It is the will of God for every believer in this age to be enlightened spiritually that they might see the truth of the mystery.

8 Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ;

9 And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: (Ephesians 3:8-9)

Sadly, many believers never see it. Why is that? Some do not see it because they are carnal. Carnal believers are not interested in the deep things of God and cannot bear the MEAT of the word.

1 And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ.

2 I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. (1 Corinthians 3:1-2)

Paul said that he only spoke about the mystery among those that were perfect. The word “perfect” is used here in the sense of being spiritually strong (2 Corinthians 13:9).

6 Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought:

7 But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: (1 Corinthians 2:6-7)

Then there are those that have never been taught the mystery by their pastors and teachers and are therefore simply ignorant of this great doctrine. Every believer should study the word of God for himself. Yet, the average believer bases his doctrinal beliefs on what he has heard taught and preached at church. There are many sincere preachers that are simply ignorant about the mystery revealed through Paul. They, like Apollos, need to be shown the way of God more perfectly.

24 And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus.

25 This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John.

26 And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly. (Acts 18:24-26)

There are serious doctrinal consequences to missing the mystery. You will never really understand the word of God without recognizing the distinctiveness of Paul's message and ministry (2 Timothy 2:7, 15). At the root of all the doctrinal confusion today is a failure to see the mystery. The mystery is the answer to Pentecostalism, Catholicism, Legalism, and many other "isms" we could name.

There are also serious consequences practically speaking. If you do not understand what it means to be in the body of Christ, you will never live the Christian life the way God intends. Notice in the following verses that spiritual understanding precedes being fruitful in every good work.

9 For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;

10 That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; (Colossians 1:9-10)

The Danger of MISUNDERSTANDING the Mystery

The flesh is ever prone to extremes. There are those who after learning the truth of the mystery go to the extreme of believing that Paul did not receive the revelation of the mystery until after Acts 28:28. This extreme position is known as "Acts 28 Dispensationalism".

Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it. (Acts 28:28)

This extremism is the result of misunderstanding Paul's ministry in the Acts period. We must keep in mind that Acts is a historical record of the transition period in which God moved from the nation of Israel to the body of Christ; from the gospel of the kingdom (Acts 2:38) to the gospel of the grace of God (Acts 13:38-39); from the ministry of Peter (Acts 1-12) to that of Paul (Acts 13-28). Acts is rightly called a transition book because one dispensation is fading out (Law) and another is fading in (Grace). The traditional view of Acts is that from beginning to end it is primarily the record of the birth and growth of the church of this present age. But the correct view of Acts is that from beginning to end it is primarily the account of the fall of Israel. It explains step by step why the chosen people had to be set aside and salvation sent to the

Gentiles apart from them. We must understand that God did not set Israel aside overnight. He used Paul's ministry to call out a remnant of Israel by grace (Romans 11:1-6) before He set the nation aside in blindness. That is why Paul went **"to the Jew first"** (Romans 1:16) throughout his Acts ministry. The body of Christ began historically in the Acts period but there are some differences between Paul's ministry during the transition and afterward. For example, it is evident that he no longer had the spiritual gift of healing after the Acts period (Philippians 2:25-27; 2 Timothy 4:20).

The so-called "Acts 28ers" see the differences between Paul's ministry in Acts and afterwards and then jump to the faulty conclusion that the body of Christ had not yet been revealed. This is legitimate hyperdispensationalism (going beyond God's scriptural divisions and inventing your own) and leads to some serious doctrinal problems. It is possible to **WRONGLY DIVIDE** the word of truth.

We do not have the space here to examine and expose the Acts 28 position. It is easy to refute the claim that Paul received the revelation of the body of Christ after Acts 28:28 by simply reading what he said about the body of Christ in his epistles that were written **BEFORE** Acts 28:28! The following verses were all written before Acts 28.

5 So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. (Romans 12:5)

12 For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ.

13 For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:12-13)

27 For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:27-28)

There are also those who may not be "Acts 28ers" but go to the extreme of believing that only Paul's epistles contain doctrine for this age. They seem to forget that Paul himself said that **"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine"** (2 Timothy 3:16). To overemphasize Paul's epistles to the neglect of the rest of scripture is extremism. There are divisions in the Bible but it is still **ONE BOOK** that reveals one God, one set of moral principles, and one plan of redemption.

The Danger MISUSING of the Mystery

The apostle Paul clearly says that the body of Christ is not under the law but grace (Romans 6:14). This teaching is a part of the revelation of the mystery. You will not find it outside of Paul's epistles. Some misuse Romans 6:14 to teach that we do not need to take seriously the issues of separation and holiness. Yet in Romans 6:15-18 Paul teaches that grace makes us a servant of righteousness.

**14 For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.
15 What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid.
16 Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?
17 But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.
18 Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.
(Romans 6:14-18)**

Being under grace does not mean that we are without law! Though we are not under the law of Moses which required such things as keeping the sabbath and bringing sacrifices (Colossians 2:14-17), we are to live by the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.

2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. (Romans 8:2)

God sets a high standard of living for the body of Christ. The same grace that saves us also teaches us how to live for God.

**11 For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men,
12 Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;
13 Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; 14 Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.
(Titus 2:11-15)**

Though we cannot lose salvation (Romans 8:28-39) there are serious consequences to being carnal (1 Corinthians 3:1-3). For example, we can lose:

1. Joy and peace
2. Testimony
3. Rewards at the judgment seat of Christ

Chapter Six - The Doctrines of the Mystery

There is certainly doctrine found in Paul's epistles that was revealed before he began his ministry. In other words, not everything that he preached and taught was new revelation. However, with the revelation of the mystery came doctrines that were previously hid. Paul said that ministers are the **"stewards of the mysteries of God"** (1 Corinthians 4:1). The body of Christ itself is THE mystery, but there are also other mysteries that pertain to this present dispensation. Pastors and teachers must understand these mysteries and work to make them known to the body of Christ. We will give an account to Christ of our stewardship of His mysteries.

Let's consider some of the major doctrines revealed through Paul.

1. The body of Christ

The church which is the body of Christ is **"one new man"** in which there is neither Jew nor Gentile (Ephesians 2:11-22). There are many local churches, but there is only one body of Christ (Ephesians 4:4). The local church is a visible manifestation of the body of Christ in a community. It is possible to be in a local church and still be lost but only believers are members of the body of Christ.

2. The Gospel of the Grace of God

24 But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God. (Acts 20:24)

11 But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man.

12 For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ. (Galatians 1:11-12)

The word "gospel" simply means good news and there are various messages of good news in the Bible. But there is only one gospel to be preached in the present age (Galatians 1:6-12). It is true that God has shown grace in every dispensation. Yet, Paul speaks of grace over a hundred times and says more about it than all other writers of scripture COMBINED. There is a difference between grace in a dispensation (Genesis 6:8) and a dispensation of grace.

3. The baptism BY the Spirit

**4 There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;
5 One Lord, one faith, one baptism,
6 One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.
(Ephesians 4:4-6)**

There is only one baptism that matters in this age. There is only one baptism that makes us members of one body and it's not water baptism (1 Corinthians 12:13). Water baptism cannot put us into a spiritual body. Also, as I pointed out at the end of chapter two, there is a difference between the baptism WITH the Holy Ghost and baptism BY the Spirit.

4. The temporary setting aside of Israel

25 For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.

26 And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob:

27 For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins.

(Romans 11:25-27)

That Israel was going to be blinded was prophesied (Isaiah 6:9-10) but that Israel would be blinded WHILE God is building the body of Christ during this age was a mystery not revealed to the prophets. The setting aside of Israel is called a “fall”, “diminishing”, and “casting away” in Romans 11. This judicial blindness is in PART (there was a remnant that believed and there will yet be a future restoration). This process started in Acts 7 and culminated in Acts 28:27-28 (around 65 AD and Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 AD). During this transition there were signs and Paul went to the Jew first. After Acts 28 the signs of the kingdom ceased and the gospel was sent to all men alike without any preference.

5. The heavenly position of the body of Christ

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: (Ephesians 1:3)

6 And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: (Ephesians 2:6)

20 For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: (Philippians 3:20)

Israel's position concerned the earth. They were promised a land, nation, and kingdom on the earth. They are promised earthly blessings. The body of Christ is NOT promised earthly blessings (Colossians 3:1-4) but we have a position in heavenly places and we are blessed with all spiritual blessings (Ephesians 1:3). Dr. Scofield said, "In his [Paul's] writings alone, we find the doctrine, position, walk, and destiny of the church" (Old Scofield Reference Bible, pg. 1252).

6. The secret coming of Christ

**51 Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,
52 In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.
(1 Corinthians 15:51-52)**

15 For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.

16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

17 Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

(1 Thessalonians 4:15-17)

The rapture of the body of Christ is a mystery that Paul received "by the word of the Lord". This coming of Christ takes place secretly BEFORE the tribulation period. Paul tells us to look for Christ from heaven, NOT the Antichrist from earth (1 Thessalonians 1:10). We are not going through the tribulation period because we are not appointed to wrath (1 Thessalonians 5:9). Before God declares war on this world He will bring His ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5:20) home to heaven. We must not confuse the rapture (from a Latin word which means to be "caught up") with the second coming of Christ at the end of the tribulation.

7. The judgment seat of Christ

9 Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him.

10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.

11 Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences.

(2 Corinthians 5:9-11)

Upon the rapture, the body of Christ will be judged for our service (not sin which was judged on the cross). Some will receive rewards; others will suffer loss (1 Corinthians 3:10-15). Rewards

will not be given for such things as record Sunday School attendance, large offerings, and big buildings. We will be judged for our work, what SORT it is and not what size it is. In other words, God cares more about quality than quantity. With revelation comes responsibility. We are held responsible for knowing what God revealed for this age and living accordingly. We must not confuse this with the judgment on Israel (Ezekiel 20:37), the nations (Matthew 25:31-46), the angels (Jude 6), or the dead (Revelation 20:11-15). These judgments are different as to time, place, basis, reason, and results.

Chapter Seven - The Duties of the Mystery

In this final chapter we will consider some practical applications of the doctrinal and dispensational teaching that we have set forth in this booklet. When God gives revelation there is always corresponding responsibility. God has given us the scripture that we might be **“perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works”** (2 Timothy 3:17). As we consider our responsibilities in light of the mystery, we may sum it up with three main headings.

1. To Have a Full Assurance of Understanding

1 For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh;

2 That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ;

3 In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

4 And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words.

5 For though I be absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the stedfastness of your faith in Christ.

6 As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him:

7 Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.

8 Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.

9 For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.

10 And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power:

11 In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ:

12 Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. (Colossians 2:1-12)

Colossians is a letter of correction. False teaching crept into the church of Colossae that denied the supremacy and all sufficiency of Christ as the Head of the Church. This teaching was a combination of mysticism and legalism (2:18-23). Paul taught these believers about the mystery (1:19-29). He had a great burden as he labored in prayer for them to have a **“full assurance of understanding”** of this spiritual truth. Only the Holy Spirit can give us spiritual understanding (1 Corinthians 2:10), but it is our responsibility to study the word of God (2 Timothy 2:15) and let Him be our teacher. These believers were on the right track but they needed to be warned

against false teaching and exhorted to grow in the faith. Understanding the mystery will cause us to be:

“Rooted”

If we have deep roots like a tree, we will not be so easily blown over by the storms of life. We must be rooted down with a strong foundation.

“Built up”

Having a firm and deep foundation allows us to be built up in Christ (Ephesians 4:11-16).

“Stablished”

When we are rooted and built up then we are stablished. The mature saint will not be “tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine” (Ephesians 4:14).

“Abounding therein”

We are not to be barely living the Christian life, but ABOUNDING in it by the grace of God.

“With thanksgiving”

Understanding the spiritual riches in Christ will cause us to have gratitude in our heart.

2. To Walk Worthy of our Standing in Christ

9 For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;

10 That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God;

11 Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness;

12 Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light:

13 Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son:

14 In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins:

15 Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature:

16 For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him:

17 And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.

18 And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence. (Colossians 1:9-18)

Every believer has a wonderful position in Christ. God has given us this position and has made it known through the Pauline epistles that we might walk according to it. Christian growth is about getting our state (our practical experience) to line up with our standing (unchanging position in Christ). You cannot walk in truth that you do not know or understand. God sets a high standard of living for the believer under grace (Romans 6:1-2). We can live in victory over the world, flesh, and devil because we are “strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power”.

After explaining the believer’s position in Christ in Ephesians 1-3, Paul ends that great doctrinal section with joyful praise (3:20-21).

**20 Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us,
21 Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.**

God is more than able to perform in our lives every word of the amazing truth found in Ephesians 1-3! God performs the Christian life through us (Philippians 1:6) yet it is our responsibility to walk in faith and obedience.

1 I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, (Ephesians 4:1)

Let’s consider a few specific examples of how the knowledge of the mystery will affect our daily walk.

It will bring heavenly affections. Our standing is in heaven because it is there that we are seated with the Head of the body (Ephesians 2:6). The knowledge of the mystery will cause us to understand that our blessings are spiritual and heavenly (Ephesians 1:3) and NOT physical and earthly.

1 If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.

2 Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.

3 For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.

4 When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory. (Colossians 3:1-4)

It will help us understand the Bible. In fact, without the knowledge of the mystery we cannot understand much of the Bible.

**7 Consider what I [Paul] say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things.
(2 Timothy 2:7)**

It will give us the right perspective about prayer. Instead of claiming prayer promises given to the twelve apostles (Matthew 21:22) and struggling with the reality of unanswered prayer we will rest in the prayer promises given to the body of Christ.

26 Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

27 And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:26-28)

6 Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.

7 And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-7)

You will not live in frustration and defeat as you wait for the baptism WITH the Holy Ghost and the signs of the kingdom. You will understand that we are baptized BY the Spirit upon salvation and that the signs of the kingdom have CEASED.

8 Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.

9 For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.

10 But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.

11 When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

12 For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

13 And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity. (1 Corinthians 13:8-13)

You will not let false teachers bring you under the bondage of the law.

1 Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. (Galatians 5:1)

It will give you the right view of personal finances and giving. You will not think you have to sell all your possessions and practice communal living (Acts 2:44-45). You will understand that it is

God's will for you to WORK in order to lack nothing and so that you might provide for your OWN. You will understand that we are not required to tithe lest we get cursed as was the case under the law (Malachi 3:8-9). Giving is a grace and we are to give as we purpose in our heart and in proportion to what we have (2 Corinthians 8-9).

11 And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you;

12 That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing. (1 Thessalonians 4:11-12)

8 But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel. (1 Timothy 5:8)

3. Work to Make the Mystery Known to Others

2 Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving;

3 Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds:

4 That I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak. (Colossians 4:2-4)

Paul had a special calling and ministry as the apostle to the Gentiles. God dispensed grace to him to make known the mystery (Ephesians 3:8-9). He strived to make it known (Colossians 1:25-29) and requested that believers strive in prayer for him to continue to boldly make it known. In spite of all the opposition that he faced, Paul was faithful to the end (2 Timothy 4:7). We need to follow his example (Philippians 4:9). I believe it is every believer's responsibility to give out the gospel of the grace of God and tell other believers about the revelation of the mystery (Acts 18:24-26). We need to preach and teach the whole Bible. However, we must place emphasis on the specific revelation for the age in which we are living! We do not have Paul with us but we have his writings which are inspired scripture. We who understand the revelation of the mystery have the responsibility to make it known to as many as we can. God wants the gospel of grace and the revelation of the mystery to be made known to all nations.

25 Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began,

26 But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith:

27) To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen. (Romans 16:25-27)