
The Unity of the Spirit

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"In the Bond of Peace"

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Dear Fellow-believers,

What a week! For those of us who have just experienced the fury of hurricane Fran it is instructive to remember the apostle Paul's life of commitment in the face of adversity - not only from natural disasters whose hardships are common to all, but especially from persecution for his life-long commitment to Christ. In Acts 26 we read the dramatic description Paul gave to King Agrippa of his Damascus road conversion.

About noon, O king, as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions. We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads. Then I asked, "Who are you Lord?" "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting" (Acts 26:13-15).

There is a "light from heaven, brighter than the sun" and a heavenly voice. To what office was Paul being called in such spectacular fashion? Bishop? Chairman of the Board? Pope?

"Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open

their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me" (Acts 26: 15-18).

Here Paul is receiving his job description as an apostle of Jesus Christ. Did he suspect what was in store for him? Perhaps there is a hint in the phrase "I will rescue you from ..." Look at II Corinthians:

Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, in hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything (II Cor. 6: 4-10).

Would Paul have accepted his calling if he had known what price he would have to pay? God asks each of us to make an absolute commitment to Him, even though none of us knows what trials await us in this life. There is no turning back for the true believer in Christ. Look again at Paul's example:

Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this). I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and

been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles, in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea, and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn? (II Corinthians 11: 23-29)

Wait a minute! Didn't God love Paul? Wasn't Paul working for the Lord? Why did God permit all these catastrophes, any one of which might shake the faith of one of us? It doesn't seem **fair**. As mature believers, we must abandon the romantic notion that this life is somehow fair. We don't see Paul complaining to God about how he is being taken care of. How did Paul view his own life's experiences?

"I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service. Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus" (I Tim. 1:12).

What a fantastic attitude! Recall the mind numbing list of terrors and tortures which Paul endured in the service of the Lord! Here he speaks of being strengthened by the Lord. In Philippians 2:5-8, Paul writes of Jesus as having "made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness, and being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death - even death on a cross".

The Lord who called Paul had himself demonstrated the life of a servant. Endurance is an important quality for the believer to cultivate. Jesus cultivated endurance (Heb. 12:1,2). So did Paul, and he also exhorted Timothy to do the same (I Tim. 1:18,19; 6:11,12; II Tim. 2:3,4; 4:5-8).

How could Jesus face the shame and pain of the cross? How could Paul say "the grace of the Lord was poured out on me abundantly" as he bounced from perils and pressures to prison and from sleepless nights and shipwreck to stoning? Jesus did it for the "joy that was set before him". He trusted his life to God who "exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name" (Phil. 2:9). Paul also saw a future destiny for himself and all believers beyond the troubles of this life.

"Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal" (II Cor. 4:16-18).

Here is Paul's great secret to commitment and endurance, which he undoubtedly learned from Jesus. Seen through human eyes, the events of his life hardly seem "light" or "momentary". All of our life experiences, positive or negative, fair or unfair, pleasurable or painful, must be seen in the light of the eternal, unseen realities. Our hope, the "eternal glory" for which our Father and His Son Jesus Christ have prepared us, makes a life of self sacrificing service possible. When we realize that "no eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him - but God has revealed it to us by his spirit" (I Cor. 2:9,10), the only conceivable response is to commit ourselves unreservedly to serving Him.

Nelson Coffey

Paul's Perspective on Life: Testifying to The Gospel of God's Grace

by Scot Hahn

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A biblical perspective on life is of key importance for anyone whose desire is to truly live for God. Where else should we find such a perspective if not from the Bible itself? Let us take for an example the apostle Paul. Anyone who has read the book of Acts can attest that Paul was devoted to truly living for God. What was his perspective on life? Where did his motivation come from? How could he live with such self-sacrificing love, denying himself of many of the world's riches and pleasures? Did he consider his way of life worthy to be imitated by other believers? Hopefully we will be able to look to the Bible to answer these questions and in so doing help each of us to better live for God.

Paul, while speaking to the leaders of the Ephesian church says,

I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given to me - the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace (Acts 20:24).

Few statements in the Bible could sum up for us so well the proper biblical perspective for the Christian believer. Simply put, nothing in Paul's life was more important for him than serving the Lord.

There are many examples of this same attitude throughout the letters of Paul. While writing to the Thessalonians Paul sums up the actions and attitude of his ministry which he had previously carried out in Thessalonica in these words:

For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts. You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed - God is our

witness. We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else.

As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you, but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. We loved you so much that we delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God, but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us. Surely you remember, brothers our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you.

You are our witnesses and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory (I Thess. 2:3-12).

Paul's perspective toward life was that he was "approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel." Therefore, he never focused any aspect of his life on pleasing men but "God who tests the heart." His "holy, righteous and blameless" way of life was the fruit of this perspective. Paul was so consumed with living for God that he could write to the Philippian believers,

Even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith I am glad and rejoice with all of you. So you too should be glad and rejoice with me (Phil. 2:17-18).

It is easy to see that for Paul *all* of life was to be lived in service to God.

But where did Paul get such motivation to devote his life to God? Two of the principles which inspired or rather drove Paul to live his life with such devotion were his complete confidence in God and his absolute certainty of Christ's return. Both of these principles were rooted in his own experience. Paul was so confident in God's ability "to work all things together for good to those who love him" (Rom. 8:28) that he even viewed the sufferings he endured as opportunities to learn to trust God's strength rather than his own. We see clearly how he

gained such confidence in God in one of his letters to the Corinthians:

We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us as you help us by your prayers (II Cor. 1:8-10).

Paul also writes to Timothy encouraging him to take a firm stand on the gospel through which Christ had brought "life and immortality to light" (II Tim. 1:10). He reminds Timothy of the sufferings he faced as a result of being "a herald, apostle and a teacher" of the gospel. "Yet," says Paul, "I am not ashamed because I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day" (II Tim. 1:11-12). Paul could entrust his whole life to God and encourage others to do the same because he knew that "our present sufferings are not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18).

Even in his letters where he has to grapple with the greatest foe of all humanity, death, Paul's outlook is bright. He readily admits the fact that death is awaiting all who live, but rather than concluding that life is not worth living because of this grim reality, he remembers his risen Lord and reminds his fellow believers to do the same. Paul writes to the believers in Ephesus that,

... having believed [in Christ] you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession - to the praise of His glory (Eph. 1:13b-14).

Paul knew that all who believed the good news about Christ had the guarantee of eternal life by way of the gift of the Spirit of God. That Spirit was the "deposit" or "firstfruits" of the final inheritance of God's kingdom to come (II Cor. 5:5; Rom. 8:23).

Those who have this guarantee of life forever with God need not fear what others fear.

In I Thessalonians Paul deals directly with this issue at hand:

Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever (I Thess. 4:13-17).

So, for Paul not even the prospect of death caused him to shrink back from living his whole life for God. Because of his belief in Christ's return he could live his life wholly devoted to serving God - even until his very last breath - because he knew that his labor was "not in vain" (I Cor. 15:58). The God in whom he trusted and for whom he lived would surely reward him - and all who longed for Christ's appearing - "on that day" (II Tim. 4:7-8)!

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Kingdom Power and Kingdom Joy

In Your Life Today!

by Tracy Savage

St. Petersburg, Russia

God has given us his spirit as a deposit until we reap the full extent of His grace in the Kingdom of God (Eph. 1:13-14). Therefore, we have kingdom power in our lives today! As the Book of Romans states:

The kingdom of God ... is [a matter] of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:17-18).

Upon receiving the spirit of God, we receive also that which is *of* His spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23). When we possess His spirit, we possess all these qualities of His spirit. This fruit of His spirit is just that - *of* His spirit. They are not a result of anything we did or can do. Through faith we receive His spirit and through that same faith we receive these blessings.

So then, why do so many Christians, those possessing God's spirit, lack one or more of these qualities in their lives? Since God has been teaching me about joy, I will focus on it in this article. But what is true of joy is also true of all the fruit of the spirit listed in Galatians 5:22-23.

As believers we receive and we possess joy. It doesn't have to and shouldn't leave us. It isn't dependent on outer circumstances or even inner feelings or emotions. Joy is also not the same as happiness, which is dependent on outer circumstances. The only time we lack joy, or don't have joy, is when we choose to give it away. At times we give up our inheritance of joy for sorrow, pain, frustration, anger or hatred.

Imagine a steep rock plateaued and surrounded by an ocean. Waves of fear, sorrow, anger, etc. are present and do touch our lives. But they need not reign on our rock. Jesus is our rock on which we stand, but we are responsible for what sits on that rock with us. When frustration begins to climb up there we must acknowledge it and kick it off. We

must not even let the fingers of negative thoughts or feelings pull themselves up onto our pedestals. When we see them we must sweep them right back over the edge with the broom of joy. Visualizing this helps us realize and acknowledge what is happening and that something must be done. Seeing yourself do this also helps you claim the victory that is yours.

We are entitled to joy. We are given joy. It is ours to possess. God Himself gave it to us. The joy He gives is greater than any other joy. And as I said, it isn't dependent on another person, on circumstances or on possessions, or the lack of them. Therefore, people, things or circumstances have no power over the joy that we have been given. We believe in Him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy (I Peter 1:8-9). God fills us with a greater joy than anything created can give us (Psalm 4:7). His joy in us is our strength and we need not grieve (Nehemiah 8:10). If we want to be strong, we need to have joy.

Jesus desires that we have joy and that our lives would be full and complete. He tells us that when we follow His commands and remain in His love, our joy is complete. He says that He expresses His love for us so that His joy could be in us so that our joy would be complete (John 15:9-11). If Jesus is concerned that we would have complete joy, we ought to be concerned as well. He tells us to ask for what we lack and He will give it and our joy will be complete (John 16:24).

As I searched for more of God's understanding of joy in the Word three important things were revealed to me. First of all, our joy increases as we digest the Word of God. As Jeremiah said,

When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight (Jer. 15:16).

God's words are joy to us. Why? Because they bring us His salvation, His healing and His hope. He speaks to us and reveals Himself, His love and His faithfulness to us by His words. Therefore, the Bible is one place we find joy. There, it is available to us.

Secondly, and most predominately in Scripture, joy abounds in praise and worship of God. In the Old Testament we see the magnitude of worship and it's importance not only for God, but also for the worshipper as well. We aren't merely to worship to find joy, but also to express joy. Look at Nehemiah:

On that day they offered great sacrifices, rejoicing because God had given them great joy. The women and children also rejoiced. The sound of rejoicing in Jerusalem could be heard far away (Nehemiah 12:43).

In this verse (and many in the Book of Psalms) we see that praise and worship is not silent taking place only in the heart. It is expressed outwardly and with one's heart, mind, body and with all one's might. Their praises were heard even far away. WOW! What rejoicing! What Joy! In another example of praise Nehemiah (Neh. 8:17) records that the Israelites had not celebrated like this for a long time, and their joy was very great. We must reflect; when was the last time our joy was "very great?" When was the last time we "celebrated?"

God's joy is found in His presence, in his dwelling place.

O Lord, surely you have granted him eternal blessings and made him glad with the joy of your presence" (Psalm 21:6).

You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, (Psalm 16:11).

Splendor and majesty are before Him, strength and joy in His dwelling place" (I Chronicles 16:27).

If you desire strength or joy, go into His dwelling place. There you will be strengthened, revived and restored.

"Clap your hands all you nations; shout to God with cries of joy. God has ascended amid shouts of joy, the Lord amid the sounding of trumpets. Sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praises to our King, sing praises (Psalms 47:1,5,6).

Again we see the connection between praise and joy. They are reciprocal. We praise and are filled with joy. And we have joy and therefore we praise.

Thirdly, the Scriptures reinforced my conviction that sharing the Word brings one of the greatest joys one can attain. What greater joy is there above praising God and revealing that God and His Messiah to others?! Sharing the hope of His coming kingdom gives us that inexpressible and glorious joy. Throughout Paul's writings we see that much of

his joy lies in his children, his converts, his brothers and sisters in Christ.

For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy" (I Thess. 2:19-20).

Indeed, people saved are God's joy. They ought to be ours as well!

If we want to keep joy and experience it more fully in our lives daily, we must not allow negative thoughts or feelings a place in our minds. Joy must remain on top of our rock, even though in the world there are struggles, heartaches and pain. What has been helping me attain this domination of joy and find victory in this spiritual battle is, as I shared earlier, visualizing the plateau and myself defending it, not allowing any thought or feeling to invade or overcome my joy. I see myself sweeping or kicking any negative thought or feeling back over the edge from where it came. Then at the same time I focus on the Lord and immediately come into His presence with a song of praise. Singing "hallelujah, hallelujah ..." is the quickest and most effective for me. I keep repeating it and giving Him praise until His joy is victorious in my heart and mind over whatever thought or person or situation invaded His territory.

At this point, recalling His Word also encourages and gives strength. This also helps us to not give the Devil a foothold in our hearts and minds. Victory is ours, if we claim it. Our joy will be restored and we will have even more reason to rejoice and praise God.

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the holy spirit (Romans 15:13).

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The Book of Daniel

A message for the 21st Century

by Adam Kleczkowski

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Although the Book of Daniel is one of the best known books of the Old Testament, it is not one of the easiest to understand. Because of this, it is often misunderstood and misinterpreted. The book is full of strange visions that sometimes seem to appeal more to the imagination than to reason. Therefore it is easy to concentrate on its dramatic events or on the details of its prophecies and in this way lose the overall picture. Yet the Book of Daniel is even more applicable today than it has ever been. However, its practical teaching and example are perhaps more important than its description of miracles and prophecies.

The Book of Daniel shows us how to live in a multi-national, multi-cultural and multi-religious society. It tells us that - like Daniel - we are part of God's family. Accordingly, we need to consider ourselves foreigners living in a foreign country, no matter where we actually abide. The guidance for such a life is phrased best in Heb. 11:6:

And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him (Heb. 11:6).

God exists and rewards those who earnestly seek Him.

We need to believe that God exists even when everything suggests that He does not. Moreover, He - and He only - is the Rewarder, but only of those who truly and earnestly seek Him.

God exists ...

The Bible clearly says that God was, God is, and that God will be:

*Holy, holy, holy
is the Lord God Almighty,*

who was, and is, and is to come (Rev. 4:8).

... even when everything suggests that He does not.

Like Daniel we are living in times of great changes and shifts of power. The dominions of man are in a constant conflict with each other and with those who believe in God (Dan. 2,7,8). The dominions change from one to another, but all of them are either without God or against God (Dan. 7: 20-21,25). The world moves towards a culminating point - the coming of a universal kingdom of Antichrist (Dan. 7:20-21,8.9-12, 23-25). The Saints (meaning here both Israel and Church) have been, are and will be persecuted (Dan. 7).

In the latter part of their reign, when rebels have become completely wicked, a stern-faced king, a master of intrigue, will arise. He will become very strong, but not by his own power. He will cause astounding devastation and will succeed in whatever he does. He will destroy the mighty men and the holy people. He will cause deceit to prosper, and he will consider himself superior. When they feel secure, he will destroy many and take his stand against the Prince of princes. Yet he will be destroyed, but not by human power (Dan. 8:23-25).

Some people call our times a post-Christian era, having already declared that God is dead (Rom. 1:18-3:20). They often turn to other gods or people (1 Tim 4:1-6). However, mankind's - and Satan's - dominion on the Earth is limited in scope and in time. God will put all earthly powers to an end (Rom. 14:11, 1 Cor. 15:51-58, Phil. 2:9-11) and will ultimately destroy all opposition (Dan. 8:25, Ps. 2:8-12, 46:8-10, Rev. 11:15-18). He will restore the Saints to their right position (Eph. 1:9-14). Thus, the focus of history from God's perspective is neither the culmination of man's power nor the rise of the Antichrist, but the Coming of the Messiah.

It is written: " 'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.' (Rom. 14:11).

Even if the earthly powers appear at their height nowadays, God is still in control. He gives signs both to His believers and followers (Dan. 1-12) and

to His enemies (Dan. 2, 5), works miracles (Dan. 1,3,5,6) and gives visions (Dan. 7-12). He reveals His plans (Dan. 7-12) to His people and thus strengthens their faith (Heb. 12:1-2). God assures us that we are not left alone, but that our struggle is a part of a bigger, supernatural war (Dan. 9-12, Eph. 6: 10-18). He also issues clear warnings and chastises those who ignore them (Dan. 4).

God can shield those who seek Him, by His power through faith (Heb. 11:33B-34, 1 Pet. 1:5), not from danger but in danger (Ps. 34:19). Faith in the face of persecutions comes from a knowledge of Him and His Word (compare Dan. 3 with Isa. 43:1-4).

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade - kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith--of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire--may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls (1 Pet. 1:3-9).

God rewards ...

God rewards (1Cor. 15:58), even if His reward is not seen yet (Heb. 11:1) and other so-called rewarders are nearby. Daniel always believed that God existed and followed God's path for his whole long life in a hostile environment in the exile. For more than 70 years of his active life he resisted the temptation of being converted by the Babylonian and Medo-Persian empires. He followed God's

commands even when faced with persecutions (Dan. 1-4 and 6, Dan. 5, see Heb. 10:32-38).

Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain (1 Cor. 15:58).

Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. ... So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised (Heb. 10:32, 35-36).

Daniel did his best to work for the powers of this world as long as they did not contradict God's commandments (Dan. 3:16-18, Acts 4:19, Rom. 13:1-8, 1 Pet. 2:13-17, 1 Thess. 4:11-12). He was rewarded by the earthly powers and received the highest honors, but the earthly rewarders gave and took back (like in Dan. 6). Daniel was, however, looking for the better reward (Dan. 3:16-18, Heb. 11:6, 13-16, Rev. 22:12).

Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody (1 Thess. 4:11-12).

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men. Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God. Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honour the king (1 Pet. 2:13-17).

But Peter and John replied, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God" (Acts 4:19).

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up" (Dan. 3:16-18).

... those who seek Him

God does not reward everybody, but only those who really and continuously seek Him (Jer. 26:13, Rom. 2:5-8, Col. 3:1).

You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart (Jer. 26:13).

... the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. God "will give to each person according to what he has done." To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honour and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger (Rom. 2:5-8).

The words "to seek" correspond to the Greek word 'ekzeteo', meaning to search out; (fig) investigate; crave; demand; (by Hebr.) worship (*Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*), and comes from the word 'zeteo', to seek (implying a search for something hidden).

"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened" (Matt. 7:7).

Living in God's country

Daniel lived as a foreigner in a foreign country (Heb. 11:13-16), because he had chosen the life of a foreigner.

All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country--a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them (Heb. 11:13-16).

We are also called to live the life of foreigners (Phil. 3:20). Like Daniel, we are living in a foreign land (Ps. 137:4, Jn. 17:14-16), as strangers (1 Pet. 1:1,17), surrounded by enemies (1 Pet. 5:8-9), and like Daniel we are to be God's ambassadors (2 Cor. 5:18-20, Dan. 2,4,6).

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body (Phil 3:20-21).

I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it (Jn. 17:14-16).

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to God's elect, strangers in the world ... Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear (1 Pet. 1:1, 17).

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ,

not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:18-20).

Daniel sought God: by a constant faith; by prayer alone (Dan. 2:20-23, 6:10, 9:2-19) and with others (Dan. 2:16-18); by studying God's Word (Dan. 9:2); by being meek when necessary (Dan. 1:12-13) and bold when necessary (Dan. 5:17-28). In this Daniel was a prototype of Jesus (Col. 3:12, Phil. 2:5-12, John 2:14-17) and is an example to us today (Col. 3:12-17).

In the first year of Darius son of Xerxes (a Mede by descent), who was made ruler over the Babylonian kingdom-- in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the LORD given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years. So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes. I prayed to the LORD my God and confessed: (Dan. 9:2-4).

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him (Col. 3:12-17).

Like Daniel we should not exclude ourselves from earthly life (Jn. 17:15). Instead we are to be vigilant and should not conform to earthly standards of: education and nourishment (Dan. 1); religion and objects of worship (Dan. 3, 6); desires (Dan. 2 and 4). Like Daniel we must carry out our daily responsibilities (Dan. 8:27, 2 Pet. 3:11); we must not be falsely secure (Dan. 8:25, 1 Cor. 10:12, Gal. 6:1); must trust that God is in control (Dan 7,9); that He will finish whatever He started in our lives (Dan. 12:13); and fellowship with others in prayer (Dan. 2:17-18, 6:10, 9:3, 10:2-3, 12).

Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour (1 Pet 5:8-9).

Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen (2 Pet. 3:17).

Two examples

Regardless whether there are miracles in our lives or not, we are called to seek God with our whole heart. This is especially difficult if after a period of miracles and wonders we are back in our everyday life with its difficulties and temptations. The Letter to the Hebrews addresses this issue in detail, especially in chapters 10-12. The Book of Daniel also gives us a good lesson in this matter. King Nebuchadnezzar had at least three opportunities to see and experience God's mighty wonders (Dan. 2, 3 and 4). His dream about the tree and Daniel's explanation that followed provided him with clear warnings and guidance. Three times the king acknowledged God's power (Dan 2:47, 3:28-33, 4:31-34), but the conversions did not last long. Nebuchadnezzar experienced not only God's blessings but also God's wrath during his life (Dan.4), and became like chaff that the wind blows away (Ps. 1:4). The empire that he had brought to the heights of power did not last long after his death.

In contrast, Daniel kept his faith for many years. God worked miracles in response to Daniel's faith -

not because He wanted Daniel to be convinced or converted. He was already highly esteemed in the Heavens (Dan. 9:23). As a result, Daniel lived a long and fruitful life and saw its fulfillment, like a tree planted by streams of water (Ps. 1:3).

Daniel as a "Man of God"

The life of Daniel can be summarized in the words of Psalm 1:

Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers. Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away. Therefore, the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous but the way of the wicked will perish (Psalm 1).

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The Danielic Background of the New Testament Word "Mystery"

The New Testament word "mystery" (Gr. *musterion*) finds its background in the Old Testament Book of Daniel. Here the sovereign "God of heaven" is shown to be a "revealer of mysteries" (Dan. 2:18-19, 27-30, 47) in regards to his divine plan of salvation. New Testament scholar J.D.G. Dunn explains the implications and meaning of this

word "mystery" while commenting on Col. 1:26 "... the mystery hidden from the ages and generations."

The term *musterion* [mystery] heightens still further the already eschatological and apocalyptic sense of being privileged to see the whole sweep of human history from God's standpoint. For here it is clearly dependent on Jewish apocalyptic usage, where "mystery" refers not so much to undisclosed secrets (as it is used in regard to the rituals of contemporary Hellenistic mystery cults) as to secrets of the divine purpose now revealed by divine agency. This usage begins with the first classic Jewish apocalypse, Daniel ... It is indeed at the heart of the apocalyptic rationale: what has been "revealed" to the apocalyptist is precisely the "mystery" of how the cosmos functions and particularly of how God's purpose will achieve its predetermined end.

What is claimed here, then, is the basic Jewish apocalyptic credo, which goes beyond the Platonic-Stoic axiom that the cosmos is rationally ordered (Col. 1:15-20) and claims further that not only the three dimensions of spatial existence but also the fourth dimension of time is firmly under divine control. The movement of world history is a linear progression which has also been directed by a secret purpose determined from the beginning by God. It is a secret purpose, hitherto "hidden" by divine intention (as in Luke 10:21; I Cor. 2:7; Eph. 3:9). But "now" (the eschatological Gr. *nun*, similar to Col. 1:22), as that purpose nears or reaches its climax ... it has been revealed. This is what gives apocalypticism its character: the claim to be privileged "now" with an insight into God's purpose for creation not [previously] given to others.

[*The NIGTC The Epistles to the Col. and Philemon.*, Eerdmans, p. 119-120].

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Tapes in Review *Gnosticism and the NT* and *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the NT*

by Mark Mattison

Speaking of things "mysterious", Mark Mattison has produced two excellent tapes on the subjects of *Gnosticism* and *The Dead Sea Scrolls*. Each of these subjects is surrounded by controversy and each has an important bearing to play on the correct understanding of the Bible as well as on the post New Testament "development" of Christian doctrines. Mark has made each of these subjects understandable by giving the historical background of each, showing their importance to biblical studies and washing away the sensationalism that so often surrounds them - both in the popular press as well as in certain "scholarly" circles.

Both of these tapes are extremely informative so if you're interested in knowing something about these topics but don't have the time or interest to wade through the many books on the subjects, these tapes provide a quick, accurate and simple way to gain a basic familiarity with them. I highly recommend them both. They may both be ordered free of charge from: *Christian Perspectives*, 3324-36 Pheasant Ridge SE, Kentwood, MI 49508.

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"Holy Spirit," "holy Spirit" or "holy spirit"

Which is Biblically Accurate?

Bible translators and scholars are not of one mind when it comes to how to write in English the Greek words *pneuma hagion*. Most write "Holy Spirit" but an ever increasing number are writing "holy Spirit" and some even "holy spirit." This comes from a growing awareness that the Greek words *pneuma hagion* are not used in the Bible to speak of a separate "person" of the Godhead as in the post-biblical Trinitarian sense - but rather as the power and presence of God himself. NT scholar Joseph Fitzmeyer explains:

In speaking of *to pneuma*, "the Spirit," Paul tends to treat it as it appears in the OT. There it is a mode

of expressing God's outgoing activity and presence to the world and his people in a creative, prophetic, quickening, or renovating way ... This is also the basic meaning Paul attributes to *to (hagion) pneuma* [the holy Spirit] which is not understood yet as a personal being, distinct from the Father and the Son, as it was to become in later Christian trinitarian theology of the patristic period ... He may, indeed, personify the Spirit, that is to say, personify the activity and presence of the OT sense, but it is not yet conceived of as a person in his theology. It is for Paul a way of expressing the dynamic influence of God's presence to justified Christians, the manifestation of his love for them, and the powerful source of their new life in Christ (*The Anchor Bible Series, Romans*, p. 480).

Paul, of course, did not have the problem of capitalization since early Greek manuscripts were all written in letters of the same size. But the use of a capital "H" or "S" in English does not necessarily suggest that the Holy Spirit is a person any more than does the term Holy Scriptures. It can simply be a way of revering that which is "of God" or distinguishing the Spirit of God from the spirit of man.

Though some verses with the definite article may appear to speak of the Spirit as a person, or even to be a name for God himself, this is unlikely. Instead, the Spirit can be personified, just as the Word or Wisdom of God, and portrayed as God's agent in relating to his creation. As Raymond Brown states, the addition of the definite article,

should not lead the Christian reader to assume that either Matthew or Luke has developed a theology of the Spirit as a person, much less the Third Person of the Trinity (*The Birth of the Messiah*, p.125).

It is meaning that matters - not capitalization - so this need not be a dogmatic issue. Let each use their own preference. Brown wisely concludes:

As for capitalization I follow recent Bible custom, without implying that a passage conveys either personality or a Trinitarian concept of divinity. Early English Protestant Bibles capitalized neither "holy" nor "spirit"; the Rheims Catholic edition capitalized both; the Authorized (King James) Version capitalized only "Spirit" until the eighteenth century (*ibid.*).

Books in Review

The Grace of God and the Will of Man

General Editor, Clark Pinnock

Although the Bible clearly teaches the sovereignty (governance) of God over his creation, it also just as clearly teaches the God-given free will of man and the responsibility of man for his own decisions and actions. It is precisely because of these two truths that God will one day be able to judge the world in righteousness and truth. Unfortunately, God's sovereignty and man's free will have often been misunderstood resulting in skewed systems of theological thought. Chief among these skewed systems of thought are the Augustinian (4th cent.) or Calvinistic (16th cent.) beliefs regarding the biblical concepts of foreknowledge, election and predestination which still hold great influence in the thinking of many today. Simply stated these beliefs portray God as foreordaining (predestining) each *individual* person - apart from that person's own free will choice - to a pre-determined final destiny of either salvation or damnation.

An excellent book, *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, edited by Clark Pinnock (Bethany House Pub., 1995), challenges these views on biblical grounds. It deals extensively with the biblical subjects of God's sovereignty and man's free will along with the corresponding concepts of foreknowledge, election and predestination. The book is a collection of articles by fifteen different biblical scholars on these subjects. Although the writers do not see eye to eye on every aspect of these topics (e.g. three views of God's foreknowledge are presented), they share the belief that biblical election and predestination are first and foremost *corporate*, rather than individual, concepts. In short, they believe that the biblical concepts of election and predestination are that God has foreordained a plan to redeem "in Christ" a people for himself and that all who freely choose to participate are incorporated into that people (i.e. the church) - through faith in Christ. In that sense, they become part of God's "elect" and share in all the blessings and responsibilities of God's foreordained "people."

This book also does a good job of showing the ever present influence of Greek philosophy and

Gnostic thinking on the post NT development of many of these doctrines. In a separate book *The Early Church*, Henry Chadwick, a scholar of early church history, summarizes Gnostic beliefs concerning redemption which form a background to the post NT development of these doctrines:

The influence of fatalistic ideas drawn from popular astrology and magic became fused with notions derived from Pauline language about predestination to produce a rigid deterministic scheme. Redemption was from destiny, not from the consequences of responsible action, and was granted to a pre-determined elect in whom alone was the divine spark ... The Gnostic initiates were people of the spirit, the elect, whose salvation was certain and indefectible (*The Early Church*, p.38).

It is part of the task of *The Grace of God and the Will of Man* to undo the influence of such thinking on our understanding of the biblical terms and concepts involved in these topics.

The chief emphasis of this book, however, is the portrayal of God as a personal being who *truly* "desires for *all* men to be saved and come unto a knowledge of the truth" (I Tim. 2:4). Because of his love for mankind God has predetermined a plan and executed this plan through his Son - thus making salvation available to *all* who desire to participate in it. In contrast to the sham of the Calvinist idea of God's predestination of each individual to an eternal destiny apart from their own free will choice, the biblical truth is shown by this book to be precisely as stated in the most familiar verse of all: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that *whoever* believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). This verse clearly is an *open* invitation to *all*, with acceptance or rejection based on the free will of each individual. Thus, in the biblical scheme each individual *freely chooses* to participate, or not, in God's foreordained plan. This is the "gospel of God's grace" - open to *all* who choose to believe.

[Bethany House Pub. ph. 1-800-829-2500]

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Paul's Stewardship of the Mystery of Christ:
Compare the Versions - Eph. 3:1-11

NRSV

This is the reason that I Paul am a prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles - for surely you have already heard of the commission of God's grace that was given me for you, and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote in a few words, a reading of which will enable you to perceive my understanding of the mystery of Christ. In former generations this mystery was not made known to humankind, as it is now revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: that is, the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God's grace that was given me by the working of his power. Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ, and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord.

NAB

Because of this, I Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles - if, as I suppose you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for your benefit, [namely that] the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly earlier. When you read this you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to human beings in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit, that the Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body, and copartners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. Of this grace I became a minister by the gift of God's grace that was granted me in accord with the exercise of his power. To me, the very least of all the holy ones, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the inscrutable riches of Christ, and to bring to light [for all] what is the plan of the mystery hidden from ages past in God who created all things, so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the principalities and authorities in the heavens. This was according to the eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles - Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus. I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to the eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

NIV

Notes & Quotes on the Bible

What is the "Mystery of Christ?"

The "gospel of God's grace" (Acts 20:24) was the fundamental "gospel of salvation" (Eph. 1:13) that was preached by the original apostles and believers of the first century church and remains today as the bedrock or foundation of the new covenant Christian faith (I Cor. 3:10-11; Eph. 2:20). This gospel message of "salvation by grace" through faith in Jesus Christ had been foretold in the prophets of the OT scriptures and promised before to Abraham and his seed (Rom. 1:2; Gal. 3:8). It became effective through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and by the giving of the Spirit on Pentecost - thus, inaugurating the new covenant era of salvation (Luke 22:14-20; Acts 2; I Cor. 11:17-34; II Cor. 3:1-6, Heb. 9:11-15, etc.). Included in the Old Testament prophecy concerning this gospel was the truth that one day even Gentiles would turn to the God of Israel and receive his blessings (Rom. 15:9-12). However, one particular "mystery" or "secret" regarding this gospel message had been "hidden in God for ages and generations" until it was finally "revealed" to Paul, and then, to the other apostles and prophets of the new covenant church (Eph. 3:2-5).

Though there are several "mysteries" that are revealed in the NT letters of Paul (e.g. I Cor. 15:51; Rom. 11:25), this particular "mystery of Christ" (Eph. 3:4) related specifically to the following truth: through believing the "gospel" (Eph. 3:6: cf. 1:13) *Gentile* believers in Christ now become *equal* "heirs together, members together of one body and partakers together" with believing Israelites "in the promise in Christ" (Eph. 3:6) - i.e. in the covenant promise originally made to Abraham and his seed and now fulfilled "in Christ" (cf. Gal. 3 and Rom. 4). Paul's letters to the Ephesians and Colossians set out these truths concerning this mystery:

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles -

Surely you have heard about the administration [Gr. oikonomia] of God's grace that was given to me for you, that is

the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration [Gr. oikonomia] of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence (Eph. 3:1-12).

Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church. I have become its servant by the commission [Gr. oikonomia] God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness - the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory (Col. 1:24-27).

In each case above the particular aspect of the mystery that is revealed "to the saints" (i.e. God's holy people) regards benefits to *Gentiles* who believe the gospel that had previously only been thought to be for believing Jews. That there would one day be a new covenant church was certainly not

a mystery; however, this promise was made specifically to "the house of Israel" (Jer. 31:31). How then could *Gentile* believers in Christ be included in the full blessings promised to God's new covenant people that had come into effect through Christ's death, resurrection and the giving of the Spirit? Was it only through first becoming a proselyte to Judaism via circumcision and the other requirements of the Mosaic Law? These were the questions that caused much debate within the first century church (See Acts 15; Book of Galatians, etc.)

But the resolution of the problem came through a special revelation that had been "hidden in God from ages and generations." Through faith in the gospel message (Eph. 3:6), and the corresponding reception of the Spirit (Gal. 3), *Gentile* believers in Christ now become "heirs together, members together and full partakers together" with Jewish believers in all of God's covenant promises now available "in Christ." "In Christ" all barriers - legal, ethnic, social, etc. - between Jews and Gentiles had been broken down and abolished so as to establish an absolute equality of membership in the new covenant people of God. In short, "Christ is all and is in all" (Col. 3:11) thus making us all "one [new man] in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28).

We must remember that originally in the early chapters of Acts the new covenant church was made up of only Jewish believers or proselytes to Judaism from among the Gentiles. These believers understood, correctly, that the coming of Christ was in fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies that had been made to Abraham and his seed. But they did not understand that Gentiles believers in Christ were to be included in the seed of Abraham by virtue of being included on an equal basis "in Christ." To think that they could now be admitted into the new covenant people of God on an equal basis with Jewish believers so as to become one organic body, without first becoming Jews (i.e. via circumcision, etc.), was a revolutionary truth indeed to the first century church - so revolutionary in fact that it turned not only the Roman world, but also their own Jewish world, upside down!

Is the Mystery a Period of Time that had Been Hidden in God?

One common misconception regarding this topic of the mystery is that it is the subject of a special period of time. That is to say, a special period of time that had been kept secret in God until it was revealed to the apostle Paul. This misunderstanding stems from confusion regarding the Greek word translated as "administration" (NIV) or "dispensation" (KJV) in Eph. 3: 2, 9, etc. This word is the Greek word *oikonomia* and it has two closely related meanings in normal Greek usage: (1) the administration or arrangement of a household; (2) the stewardship of the one who administers it. In the Bible, however, when *oikonomia* is applied to the things of God it always refers either to the *administrative plan or arrangement* of a particular aspect of God's plan of salvation or to the *stewardship* of the one who is responsible for making this plan known. As with all words, the exact meaning of each occurrence of *oikonomia* is determined by the context in which it is used.

It is important to emphasize, however, that *oikonomia* never refers to a period of time. This common misconception is important to correct and *The Expanded Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* does so in a special note under the word "Dispensation" (Gr. *oikonomia*):

Note: A dispensation is not a period or epoch (a common, but erroneous, use of the word), but a mode of dealing, an arrangement or administration of affairs (p. 312).

Though many Bible believing "dispensationalist" groups insist that the mystery was a special period of time that was "hidden in God" - and is now in effect *in between* God's separate dealings with Jews and Gentiles - this understanding can find no support on the basis of the Greek word *oikonomia*. Certainly *the truths* made known concerning the mystery *are* now in effect but the terms "administration of God's grace" (v. 2 NIV) and the "administration of the mystery" (v. 9 NIV) do not mean that Paul is referring to a secret *period of time* that was hidden in God. Instead, the mystery reveals *specific truths*, previously hidden, about God's plan of salvation *in* the new covenant era - an era which had been previously foretold in the OT and has been in effect since Pentecost.

The Greek word *oikonomia* in Eph. 3:2 and Col. 1:25 most likely refers to the "commission, or stewardship" (NRSV, NAB) that was given to Paul in setting forth or preaching the mystery to others. It could, however, refer to God's "administrative arrangement, or plan" as set forth in the truths of the mystery itself (i.e. Eph. 3:6). This is what the NIV means by its use of the word "administration" as can be seen by checking the notes of the *NIV Study Bible*. In Eph. 3:9 *oikonomia* probably refers to God's administrative "plan" of the mystery (NRSV, NAB, cf. NIV, etc.). In all of these cases it is difficult to be absolutely sure of the exact sense intended but since the "plan" was "entrusted" to Paul it ultimately comes out the same. Concerning Eph. 3:2 Frances Foulkes states that Paul is "thinking especially of the stewardship entrusted to him (cf. I Cor. 4:1; 9:17), though the other thought of arrangement or purpose of God is not far away" (*Tyndale NT Commentaries, Ephesians*, p. 98). J.D.G. Dunn also comments on the proper understanding of *oikonomia* in his commentary on Colossians:

The noun [*oikonomia*] would normally designate the administration or stewardship carried out by the *oikonomos* ("steward or administrator" of an estate). But Paul applied the language to his own work: he saw himself as commissioned by his master, like a good steward having received his orders in his master's absence; hence I Cor. 9:17; Eph. 3:2 and Col. 1:25. The thought is already developing into the fuller and still more distinctive idea of "God's plan of salvation" (as in Eph. 1:10; 3:9) [*The New International Greek Testament Commentary, The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon, Eerdmans*, p. 118].

The different possibilities for translating each occurrence of *oikonomia* by Bible translators is reflected in the wide variety of renderings of this word in the different versions of the Bible (see p. 14). The differences, however, do not cause a problem in the overall understanding of the subject of the mystery, they simply emphasize either the *plan* of the mystery itself or the *stewardship* of bringing its truth to others. In no case, however, does *oikonomia* ever refer to a period of time.

This is not to say, of course, that Paul and the other biblical writers did not view God's plan of salvation as being worked out by God's guiding and over-ruling hand through different phases or epochs

of human history. Without any doubt God's dealings with mankind have differed according to the circumstances of the times and according to the specific phase of human history that was then in effect. Such periods of time are clearly marked in the Bible in various ways (e.g. Rom. 5:12-14; Luke 16:16; Rom. 10:4; Gal. 4:4; Eph. 1:9-10; etc.). Joseph Fitzmeyer in his commentary *Romans* in the Anchor Bible Series (Doubleday, p. 108-109) speaks directly to this issue:

God, the Creator, is presented [in Romans] as the author of a plan or "project" of salvation (*prothesis*, 8:28, 9:11), which accords with his "will" (1:10; 15:32) and his "predestination" of all things (8:28-30). This divine plan is concerned with human history and is now ordered to the salvation of his "people" ...

To this plan of salvation are related phases of human history, as Paul viewed them through Jewish spectacles. He knows of a phase "from Adam to Moses (Rom. 5:17; cf. Gal. 3:17) ... then of a phase from Moses to the Messiah (Gal. 3:19; Rom. 5:20) ... the phase of the Messiah, of Christ who is "the end of the law (Rom. 10:4) ... This phase, already begun, when "Christ died at the appointed time for the godless" (Rom. 5:6), perdues until the coming of "the day" of the Lord (Rom. 13:11-14).

Other biblical phases of time could include, for example, the larger epochs of "the present age" and "the age to come" (Eph. 1:21). However, none of these periods of time are ever called in the Bible an *oikonomia*. We can, on the other hand, speak of an *oikonomia* of the Old Covenant or of the New Covenant if by this we mean God's arrangement or administrative plan as set forth in them - but not in the sense of a period of time. This is the way *oikonomia* is used in Ephesians 1:10 where it speaks of God's administrative plan that will be "put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment." But, again, *oikonomia* does not refer here to the time period itself but to the administrative arrangement or plan that will be put into effect *at* that time.

When was the Mystery of Christ Revealed?

Another common misconception about the "mystery of Christ" regards the time at which this

mystery was revealed. First, it should be immediately obvious that the "revelation" of the mystery (Eph. 3:3) did not come to Paul when he was imprisoned after the Book of Acts and only then set forth by him in the prison epistles of Ephesians and Colossians. According to Eph. 6:19-20 and Col. 4:3 it was precisely *because* of preaching the "mystery of Christ" that Paul had been put in prison at the time in which he wrote these letters.

The word "now" in the passages of Eph. 3:5 and 10 has caused some confusion in this matter. However, the word "now" in these contexts does *not* mean that the revelation of the mystery was not made known until it was revealed to the apostle Paul while in prison (after the Book of Acts). Instead, the word "now" in these contexts refers to the "now" of "the new covenant era of salvation" in contrast to "ages past" or, as scholars often call it, "the eschatological now." It is often used in this sense in the NT, including in Paul's letters (cf. Acts 17:30; Rom. 3:21; II Cor. 6:2; Col. 1:22). In this case, Paul's usage is absolutely confirmed by Eph. 2:13, "But *now* in Christ Jesus you who were once far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ." Obviously, this did not occur only after the Book of Acts had ended nor was it only made known or revealed then.

At least as early as the letters to the Galatians and Romans this mystery had already been "made known to God's holy apostles and prophets" (Eph. 3:5) for the purpose of bringing the Gentiles "to the obedience of faith" (Rom. 16: 25-26). This is easy to see, not only from this verse, but by comparing the contents of the mystery, as set forth in Ephesians 3:6 and Colossians 1:24-27, with *the exact same truths* that are revealed and explained in the other NT letters of Paul - all of which were written well within the period outlined in the Book of Acts:

1. *Gentile* believers in Christ are:

- "heirs together" with Jewish believers (Eph. 3:6; Rom. 8:17; Gal. 3:1-4:7).
- "members together of one body" with Jewish believers (Eph. 3:6; Rom. 12:4-5; I Cor. 12:12-27).
- "sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus" with Jewish believers (Eph. 3:6; Gal. 3; Rom. 9-11).

2. *Gentile* believers in Christ:

- have "Christ in you, the hope of glory" along with Jewish believers (Col. 1:27; Rom. 8:10; Gal. 2:20).

When then did Paul receive this "revelation" (Eph. 3:3) about the mystery? Most scholars believe it was at the time of the Damascus road "revelation of Jesus Christ" (cf. Gal. 1:11-16) as recorded in Acts 9 and elsewhere. This seems to be implicit in Paul's own account to King Agrippa concerning Paul's apostolic commission to the Gentiles as recorded in Acts 26:

Then I asked, 'Who are you, Lord?'
'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,'
the Lord replied. Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles.

I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place (gr. kleron = "inheritance," cf. Eph. 3:6 "sunkleronoma = "heirs-together") among those who are sanctified by faith in me (Acts 26:15-18).

Simply put, as can be seen from the above sections of scripture both in Acts and the other Pauline epistles, the truths of the mystery were from the very beginning of Paul's apostolic commission part and parcel of the "gospel of God's grace" (Acts 20:24) that he preached. It took some time, however, for the other "apostles and prophets" to come to this same understanding "through the Spirit" (Cp. Eph. 3:5; Acts 10, 15 and Gal. 1-3).

God's Eternal Purpose "in Christ"

The new covenant era of salvation began on the day of Pentecost and the "gospel of God's grace" presents the message of salvation inherent in the new covenant truths. The effects of Christ's death and resurrection are "once for all" and the "mystery of Christ," now revealed, of bringing Gentile believers

together with Jewish believers into "one new man in Christ" is the focal point of God's "eternal purpose" (Eph. 3:11) that he has been working out since before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:3-10). Far from being a special period of time *in between* God's separate dealings with Jews and Gentiles, this creation of a new humanity "in Christ" is God's ultimate goal for the human race. "In Christ" all barriers between human beings with each other, as well as between mankind and God, have been *forever* broken down and abolished. Never again will God deal with mankind on any other basis than by what he has now accomplished "in Christ."

In fact, so wonderful is this unity of believing Jews and Gentiles "in Christ" that the book of Ephesians shows it to be a *preview* or *foretaste* to the "rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms" (Eph. 3:10) of the final stage of "the mystery of God's will" - to be accomplished at Christ's return - "to bring *all things* in heaven and on earth [i.e. spiritual beings and human beings] together under one head, even Christ" (Eph. 1:9-10).

F.F. Bruce sets forth the cosmic significance of these verses in his commentary on *Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon* in the *New Int. Comm. on the NT* (Eerdman's, pp. 319-322):

... the church fellowship in which Gentile and Jewish believers were united was no mere enrollment on a register of membership; it involved their union with Christ by faith and therefore their union with each other as fellow-members of his body. The "third race" was coming visibly to life: something that had not been seen or imagined before was now a matter of experience. Before all ages God's undisclosed purpose had existed in his own mind; now its accomplishment was evident not only to human beings on earth but also "to the principalities and powers in the heavenly realm ..."

The "principalities and powers" learn from the church that they too have a place in the plan of God. The reconciliation between Jews and Gentiles in this new creation is a token of the reconciliation in which they in their turn are to be embraced. In Col. 1:19-22 the cosmic reconciliation which God has planned is anticipated in the experience of believers in Christ,

whom "he has now reconciled" - and the means of reconciliation in the one case as in the other is the saving work of Christ, who has "made peace through the blood of the cross." The church thus appears to be God's pilot scheme for the reconciled universe of the future, the mystery of God's will "to be administered in the fullness of times," when "the things in heaven and the things on earth" are brought together in Christ (Eph. 1:9-10).

The divine purpose, to be consummated in Christ, was originally conceived in him. Jewish and Gentile believers who have now been reconciled in him were already chosen in him "before the world's foundation" (Eph. 1:4), and what is true of the church is true of the universe: its final reconciliation in Christ was decreed in Christ according to God's eternal purpose. And in the outworking of the "purpose of the ages" the people of Christ are given an essential part to play.

Those - whether Jew or Gentile - who freely respond by faith to "the gospel of God's grace" are now incorporated "into Christ" and become heirs together in God's eternal purpose - a purpose that was designed and accomplished "in Christ." In him, a new humanity is being formed who share in the destiny of all that God has prepared "for those who love him." To share in that destiny is to share in the God-ordained purpose of life itself - "to the praise of his glorious grace" (Eph. 1:6)

[There is wide agreement amongst the best NT scholars regarding the truths of the mystery of Christ. Highly recommended and simpler studies include the study notes in the *NIV Study Bible* and *The Tyndale NT Commentaries, Ephesians*, by Frances Foulkes. More detailed studies include: a commentary on *Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon* by F.F. Bruce in the *New International Commentary on the NT* series; *Ephesians*, by Andrew Lincoln in the *Word Biblical Commentary* series; and J.D.G. Dunn's commentary on *Colossians and Philemon* in the *New International Greek Testament Commentary* series. All are available from CBD at ph. 1-508-977-5000]

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