

# THE MYSTERY

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By Richard Holden

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## EPHESIANS 3

There were two objects embraced in Paul's ministry. He has expressed them in verses 8 and 9 of this chapter, where he states in brief and plain terms the character of his commission as an apostle or evangelizer.

First, the grace was bestowed upon him of his being sent to preach among the nations the unsearchable riches of Christ.

The emphasis here is on the fact of the Gentiles being those to whom he was specially commissioned. The publishing or unfolding of the riches of God's grace in Christ Jesus was in itself no special charge to Paul. Others before him had been sent forth to preach these precious truths, but their labors were in the main, if not exclusively, directed towards the Jew. A richer and fuller exhibition of these unsearchable riches there certainly was in Paul's ministry; but otherwise the specialty of the grace given unto him lay in his being selected to preach them "among the Gentiles."

The second branch of the apostle's commission, was that expressed in the words, "To make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery."

There is here, I apprehend, an intended contrast between the "all" and the "Gentiles" of the preceding verse. Jew and Gentile were alike indebted to Paul's ministry for the knowledge and intelligence of a "mystery" unveiled through him, and which he was specially commissioned to make all see. My occupation is not now with the former, but with this latter branch of his charge.

To many it will seem a bold or even a rash assertion, that to the vast majority of Christians, learned and unlearned, this side of the apostle's commission has remained to this hour without effect. The Reformation (great and blessed work of God as it was, for which we cannot be too grateful), while it brought once more into light much of "the unsearchable riches of Christ" that had become encrusted with the corrosions of Popish error, left this side of truth wholly in darkness; and it has been reserved, in God's inscrutable wisdom, to a later day, and to "a feeble folk," to exhume from the word the long-buried treasure. As a sovereign, in the dispensing of His grace, God is pleased to revive or restore at the moment, and in the ways and measure that please Him. When men, because they did not like to retain God or His truth in their knowledge, have been given over of Him to a reprobate mind, and suffered for a season to reap the fruit of their doings, He is under no obligation to restore to them the knowledge and appreciation of truths they have forfeited. When, in the loving compassion and grace of His tender heart, He is pleased in any measure to do so, He chooses His own time and His own instruments; the latter, generally "the weak things of the world" - "earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God."

It is no disparagement of the Reformation, to say that it brought back only a part of the long-lost truths of the Word. It was pure sovereign grace that led men so far into truth as they did then go; as it is pure sovereign grace that has in these latter times, through other instrumentality, directed the minds of numbers of God's children to other truths in the Word not then discerned. The investigation of the subject before us will make it sufficiently clear that we have to do with a matter concerning which, in the writings of the Reformers, as in those of all subsequent theologians, entire obscurity prevails.

The first point to be looked at is one of criticism, in reference to the text of the passage.

If the reader has access to the little hand-book of *Textual Criticism* published by Bagsters (p. 56), he will see, on reference to this text, that the unanimous voice of criticism reads "dispensation or administration" (*οἰκονομία*) instead of "fellowship" (*κοινωνία*);<sup>1</sup> and so will he find "dispensation" given in the translations of Alford, Boothroyd, Ellicott, Davidson, and Darby; "stewardship," Green; "administration," Kelly.

"To make all see what is the dispensation (or administration) of the mystery," is then the language of the apostle and of the Holy Ghost, which it becomes our task to weigh and search into the meaning of.

At first sight the change will probably seem to many to render the text less rather than more intelligible, and this feeling it probably was, that, at the hands of some man more confident in his own understanding, than imbued with a sense of the inviolable sacredness of the word of God, led first to the substitution.

To many readers "dispensational truth" may be sufficiently strange, to render not unfitting nor unwelcome a few words in explanation.

The word before us, *οἰκονομία*-occurring also in verse 2 of the chapter, and translated "dispensation" there-is a compound word uniting two, which mean respectively "house" and "law;" so that to give its exact counterpart in English, it would stand thus-"house-law;" and its obvious and primary meaning would be-the law, rules, regulations or administration, of a household. The word itself is quite familiar to our English ears and tongues, in an Anglicized form-"economy." This term (correctly used in such phrases as "political economy"), in current usage is mainly taken in the sense of carefulness in expenditure, or in the dispensing of means or substance; a portion undoubtedly, though far from being all, that pertains to proper household rule.

In Scripture we have it translated "stewardship," in Luke 16:2-4; the kindred word, *οἰκονόμος* (literally, an economist), being translated "steward" in Luke 12:42; 16:1, 3, 8; 1 Cor. 4:1-2; Titus 1:7; 1 Peter 4:10; "governors" in Gal. 4:2, and "chamberlain" in Rom. 16:23 -while in 1 Cor. 9:17, Eph. 1:10, and Col. 1:25 we have it, as in the chapter under review, "dispensation."

As employed in these passages, and in the phrase "dispensational truth," it looks at the world as a great household or stewardly, in which God is dispensing, or administering, according to rule of His own establishing, and in whose order He has from time to time introduced certain changes, the understanding of which is consequently needful, both to the intelligent interpretation of His word and to intelligent action under Him.

If we suppose a couple of households in any city, conducted on very different principles-the one, the household of a godly man, of regular and orderly habits, who rules his house in the fear of God, ordering everything as under His eye and for Him; the other, that of a godless, dissipated man, in which everything is at sixes and sevens; and then imagine a domestic to pass from the latter into the former, and to proceed to regulate her conduct in her new place by the order or disorder with which she was familiar in the old, one can at once discern what a source of confusion she would be in the family. In order to her becoming a faithful and profitable servant in the godly household, she must first acquaint herself with its order or "economy," and then conform herself to that. Although there are certain general duties that may pertain alike to all households, the points of detail, even in well-ordered families, will of necessity vary with the varying circumstances, position in life, occupation, &c., of the inmates; so that, the "domestic economy" being different-as meal hours and the like-a servant has always 'to change or modify her action in each case as required. Even a change in the circumstances of the same household will necessitate sometimes a change in its rule, and demand therefore a corresponding change in the conduct of its servants.

Now surely it is just as simple and plain, that if God has, from time to time, introduced changes into the

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<sup>1</sup> "Dispensation," Alford, Griesbach, Lachman, Scholtz, Tischendorf, Tregelles, Wordsworth, Bloomfield, Burton, Webster, and Wilkinson, with all the uncial manuscripts that have that portion of the text.

order of His dealing with the world, and dispensing its affairs, the nature of these changes must be studied, understood, and acted on by His servants, if they would prove profitable servants, and co-operate intelligently in His plans. To import into one dispensation the directions or conduct prescribed for another must entail confusion and disorder, whether in the interpretation of the Scriptures relating to them, or in the regulation of action, individual or corporate, under them. Hence the necessity of what the apostle (2 Tim. 2:15) calls "rightly dividing the word of truth," the neglect of which has ever been and ever must be the source of unutterable confusion; in short, of most of the confusion we see around.

When man, beguiled by Satan, with the prospect of being "as gods," tasted the forbidden fruit, and acquired the coveted knowledge of good and evil -conscience- God allowed him to make proof for a season of the fruits, leaving him (with exceptional dealings in the case of individuals) to his own courses. The result is painfully developed in the first chapter of Romans.

At a certain period in the world's history He took up a special family, Israel, which He developed into a nation, and, so far as they at least were concerned, introduced a change in His world-rule, placing them under a dispensation of *law*. That dispensation closed at the cross; and subsequently a thorough and universal change was introduced, constituting the dispensation under which we now are, called in this passage "the dispensation of the mystery," and in verse 2 declared to be a "dispensation of the grace of God."

To "make all see what is the dispensation," or, in other words, to be the divinely-appointed instructor in the character and order of the present time, as Moses was in that of the dispensation of " law," is that special feature in the commission of Paul, in which it was distinct from that of the other apostles.

If then it shall appear that, far from seeing what is " the dispensation of the mystery," the mass of Christians have entirely missed it, and, as the natural consequence have almost completely misunderstood Christianity, importing into it the things proper to another dispensation, and so confounding Judaism and Christianity in an inexpressible jumble; surely it is matter for deep humiliation before God, and for earnest, prayerful effort to retrieve, with God's help, this important and neglected teaching.

Let the reader then observe, first of all, that Paul claims to have had the truth in question given to him "by revelation." (v. 3) Now the word "revelation" means unveiling or uncovering, and is used in Scripture to signify the communication, by God, of truth not previously known, or, up to that time shrouded under the veil of secrecy. The fact therefore, that the apostle claims for the truth he speaks of in this chapter, the character of " a revelation," ought in itself to prepare us for the discovery, in his teaching, of somewhat not to be met with in any previous portions of the word of God.

Next, be it observed, he calls it a "mystery," or secret, which secret he insists on with repetition and emphasis, as entirely hidden till given to him to tell out. Thus in verses 3 and 5, by revelation God made known to him the mystery which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed; and so in verse 9, " the mystery which from the beginning of the world had been hid in God." Language could hardly be more explicit than this. A secret which had not in other ages been made known to men, but from the beginning of the world had been hid in God, is now made known to the apostle by revelation. Granted for the moment that the " as it is now revealed " of verse 5, might, had it stood alone, have borne the interpretation that it was not before revealed with *equal* clearness or fullness, verse 9 thoroughly excludes the ambiguity, for language could not be more absolute than there employed. Nor is it here only that the apostle has put this on record. As though the Holy Ghost, foreseeing how this truth would be let slip, and the consequent need of special clearness in His teaching, in order to its ultimate recovery in the latter day, had been heedful to furnish the requisite light with superabundant power, one finds it again brought out in Rom. 16:25,<sup>2</sup> where the apostle speaks of " the revelation of the mystery, which was kept

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<sup>2</sup> It is to be noticed in connection with this text that a mistranslation in the following verse, might lead the English reader astray, inducing him to suppose, as many doubtless have done, that the Old Testament prophets are there referred to. This is not so; " and by prophetic writings (his own, to wit)... made known to all nations," is the correct rendering.

secret since the world began, but is now made manifest;" and in Col. 1:26, "the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but is now made manifest."

At the risk of seemingly unnecessary repetition, I insist strongly on attention to this, and would have the reader to weigh well the Spirit's language, and mark by what varied forms of expression he has labored to shut out all cavil, and to fix attention on this truth. To other ages (or generations) it was not made known; from (the) ages and (the) generations it has been hid -hid from the beginning of the world, hid in God, kept secret since the world began. I know of no truth in the whole range of the word to which the testimony is more explicit and unmistakable, and I trust the reader will be prepared, in view of it, to set it down as a point of certainty, that whatever "the mystery" may be, it is something quite unknown until the day of Paul.

If the reader has now fully bowed to the Word on this point, he will at once perceive that to look for an unfolding of this mystery in the pages of the Old Testament must be a hopeless and deceptive proceeding. For any man to imagine he finds there that which the Holy Ghost so expressly declares was hidden-an unrevealed secret-when that book was written; must be to follow a will-o'-the-wisp, that will lure him into the quagmire of misinterpretation and confusion. Let the reader keep this point in memory; it will meet us again when we have advanced our inquiry another stage, examining next into the subject of "the mystery" itself.

We have not far to search in order to the discovery desired. In verse 6 the apostle gives us the statement, in summary, of that which was the burden of " the mystery," specifying it under three particulars: 1st. That the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs.

2nd. That they should be *one body*.

3rd. That they should be *partakers* or co-partners of God's promise in the Messiah.

In other words, the Church or assembly of God as distinguished alike from the Jewish assembly and from the kingdom.

For this thing, the Church of God, or for any one of these three features of that which distinguishes it most markedly, as well from all that has gone before, as from all that will follow after, the reader will search in vain throughout the pages of the Old Testament.

This, then, is "the mystery;" the Church of God, as the apostle states it in chapter v. verse 32, where, after exhibiting the typical counterpart of it in the marriage relationship, he sums up by saying, " This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the Church." In this connection he had set forth the headship of Christ over and to the Church (enforcing by it that of the husband to his wife), and His relation to the Church as His *body*, of which He is the Savior; the individuals saved being "members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones," as Eve was said to be of Adam, when he owned her as " bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh." So in Col. 1:24-26 he fills up the afflictions of Christ for His body's sake, which is the Church, according to the dispensation given to him... even the mystery.

" But," the reader may say, " surely the Church is spoken of in the Old Testament; " does not Stephen affirm it in Acts 7:38, where he speaks of " the Church in the wilderness " ?

That Stephen uses the word " Church," and applies it to Israel as found in the wilderness, is beyond a question; just as certain as that the Holy Ghost employs it in Acts 19:41, and applies it to the idolatrous rabble gathered into the theater of Ephesus; of whom, after they had spent two hours in shouting "Great is Diana of the Ephesians," it is said, " He dismissed the church." The employment of the word church or ecclesia in these cases no more implies that the one assemblage was the Church of God than the other. Not only so, but if it were a mere question of a word, it might be found in the old Testament often enough for that matter, as the word " congregation " used of Israel continually (as in Ex. 16:1, &c) has precisely the same meaning; is translated constantly by *ἐκκλησία* in the Septuagint; and might with perfect propriety, so far as mere translation goes, have been translated " church " in our English version. Let it then be fully understood by the reader, that it is not for a moment a question of the Word, but of the thing known in the New Testament by the name of the Church of God. Of this thing it is that, with the apostle, we affirm, not a

trace is to be found in the Old Testament; save in the form of types, intelligible and expressive now that the veil has been taken off, but which in themselves revealed nothing whatever on the subject to their contemporaries.

Let us consider, then, in detail the three particulars of "the mystery" supplied us.

1st. That the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs.

The broad statement in this, as in the other points, is that of Gentile equality with the Jew. To be a fellow-heir, though it does not of necessity imply that each gets an equal share in the inheritance, does argue an equality of position or title. One heir is not necessarily as near a blood relation as another; but if he has a legal title to a share in the inheritance, be it to a large share or a small, his title is as good and his position as definite. As an heir he is the peer of all the other heirs, just as a baron is the peer of a duke, though he does not hold so elevated a rank in the peerage. A person admitted to a share in the benefits of another's inheritance, or of another's share in an inheritance, is not a fellow-heir. And such is the highest position of the Gentile in the prophecies of the Old Testament; he is to share in the benefits of Israel's inherited blessing, but is never lifted into the position of a co-heir-never made Israel's peer.

Take as an example of this, Isa. 60:3-" The Gentiles shall come to *thy* light, and kings to the brightness of *thy* rising." "Oh, but," says some one of my readers, "isn't that Christ's light?" Not at all. Look at the context. It is Israel's light. Christ *is* the Light of Israel; and hence, in the first verse, she is bid to arise and shine, because *her* Light is come, and the glory of Jehovah has risen upon her; that is, when the time shall have arrived, as stated in verse 20 of the previous chapter, that the Redeemer shall have come to *Zion*, and shall have turned away ungodliness from *Jacob*; and when, while darkness still covers the earth, and gross darkness the peoples (plural), the Lord shall arise upon Zion, and His glory be seen upon her, so that the Gentiles shall come to her light, as already quoted. It is not Christ, but Zion who is invited, in verse 4, to lift up the eyes and see all gathered *to her*, the abundance of the sea converted to her, and the forces or wealth of the Gentiles coming unto her. It is not Christ's, but Zion's walls that the sons of strangers are to build up (v. 10); not Christ's, but Zion's gates are to be open continually that the forces and kings of the Gentiles may be brought thither. It is not of Christ, but of Zion that it is said, " The nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted." (v. 12) Not Christ, but Zion is to suck the milk of the Gentiles (v. 16), and to know that the Lord is her Savior and her Redeemer, the mighty One *of Jacob*. True, it is of Zion, as enjoying and reflecting the light of Christ's presence, and as the center of His rule, that these things are said; but still it is of Zion or Israel that they are spoken, and the Gentile is there exhibited as coming to her light to be blessed, and finding his blessing in ministering to her; as might happen where the servant of a master who has come into a rich estate, might share in the benefit of his master's improved circumstances, though not himself a co-heir with him in his inheritance. Israel is to inherit the Gentiles (Isa. 54:3); but the Gentile is not to inherit Israel. (Isa. 61:5)

2nd. That the Gentiles should be "one body" - one body with the Jew.

Did my reader ever detect, in the course of his study of Moses and the prophets, anything that looked like this? Most surely not. If there is one thing more evident than another in the Hebrew Scriptures, it is the steadily-maintained distinction between Israel and the nations, from first to last; under the glory of the future as under the vicissitudes of the past. The welding of Israel and the nations into one body, from which their nationalities shall disappear; all distinctive autonomies be lost; is a thought as foreign to the ancient oracles as heaven is to earth. Take any of the Scriptures that refer to the Messiah's reign and the blessings that are to attend it; the nations and Israel will ever be found in separation. Shall we select, for instance, the striking picture of the promised glory presented in Psa. 72? Here we have "the King" judging *His* people with righteousness, and the poor with judgment; descending in blessing like rain upon the mown grass; His dominion from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth. But here also we have the kings of Tarshish and of the isles bringing presents, the kings of Sheba and Seba offering gifts; all kings falling down before him, and all nations serving Him; all men blessed in Him, and all *nations* calling Him blessed. Blessed and blessing, yet still "nations" with kings reigning over them. No blending with Israel here. Or

shall we turn to Isa. 2? Here again we have the mountain of the Lord's house established in the top of the mountains, and exalted above the hills, and *all nations* flowing unto it. Then many peoples (plural, Heb) say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; the law goes forth from Zion, Jehovah judges among *the nations*; "nation shall no more lift up the sword against nation;" but there, the nations are.

So again in the kingdom picture of chapter 11, when the "Branch" from out the roots of Jesse shall be reigning, and Jehovah shall have set His hand to recover the remnant of His people (singular, Heb) from the lands whither they are scattered, assembling the outcasts of Israel, and gathering together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth; He sets up "an ensign for the nations," the root of Jesse stands for an ensign of the peoples (plural), and "to it shall the Gentiles seek." Blessing for Israel, Judah, and the nations; but, the nations are "peoples" and "nations" still. Or again, in Isa. 61:6, when Israel are to be "named the priests of Jehovah," and men shall call them "the ministers of our God," then shall they "eat the riches of the Gentiles, and boast themselves in their glory;" their seed shall be known among the Gentiles," and their offspring among the peoples (plural). In Ezekiel's vision there is the division of the land among the tribes of Israel. In Zechariah (14), when Jehovah shall be king over all the earth, and there shall be one Lord, and His name one, then every one that is left of all the nations which came up against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles, &c. Everywhere it is the same: Israel and the nations in their respective places, in most telling contrast with what the apostle insists on as distinctive of the present order of things, wherein (Col. 3:11) "there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free; but Christ is all, and in all."

3rd. Partakers, or co-partners in God's promises in the Messiah.

If there is any one thing that excites the ire of the Jew, it is the claim of the Gentile to an equal share with himself in the Messiah. He laughs to scorn the Gentile pretension to show from the prophets that such a thing should be; and he does so triumphantly; it is not there, and to pretend to it is to weaken under pretense of strengthening the Christian cause. God has said it is not there; to profess to find it is to pervert His truth, and must lead to the confusion of him who attempts it. Intimations of Israel's failure and their rejection there are; predictions of blessing to the Gentiles under Israel, and in connection with the Messiah, abound, as in the Scriptures that have already been before us; but a co-partnership, anything like the equality of privilege in the Messiah that the gospel has introduced, and we ourselves at this moment enjoy, will be sought for in vain.

But if there is indeed no mention of the mystery -the Church of God- in the Old Testament Scriptures, of what then is there mention? I answer, Of the kingdom.

A reign of righteousness and peace under the kingship of the Messiah. Zion, the seat of rule. Israel, a people of peculiar nearness and special privilege, with the nations grouped around this center, in their subordinate places; blessed in Israel's blessing, in whom all the families of the earth are to be blessed. Such is the future depicted by the prophets, alluded to in the New Testament (Acts 3:19-21), as "times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord," "the times of the restitution of all things." This and this only is the theme of the prophets of old. A state of things with which the present dispensation in no wise corresponds, at almost any point. A state of things the world has not yet seen.

Have, then, the prophecies failed? By no means. So certainly as these things are foretold, so surely will they one day come to pass.

Throughout the word of God two mighty truths run side by side -God's sovereignty and man's responsibility. Man, in the narrow grasp of his little mind, is ever prone to lose sight of one or other; or, deeming them irreconcilable, to fill his eye with the one to the exclusion of the other; it is faith's office to maintain the balance; accepting truth in its completeness, as given forth by God, without pausing first to bring all down to the level of man's own small standard. From the plan of God's revelation, as from His counsels, neither of these truths is ever omitted; while in the fullness of His sovereign power and

far-reaching wisdom, He governs all, orders and shapes according to the counsel of His will, giving no account of His matters unto any; triumphing over all the workings of evil; bringing forth higher and higher blessings out of the deepest falls and failures of the creature; everywhere gracious and righteous. At the same time, He ever gives to the responsible creature his full place in responsibility, throughout his actings; never treats him as a mere machine, nor fails to leave scope for the freedom of his choice; and for us to do otherwise, in the interpretation of His Word, is of necessity to miss its teaching and go astray.

In His dealings with Israel this principle of action has been studiously maintained. If the national failures and their righteous chastisements were from the very first foreseen and preintimated, in words of warning admonition, it never took on the form of a mere irresistible fatality, but opportunities for better things were ever provided; opportunities which might have been turned to account, for the averting of evils and the securing of good. Even so, in the matter of the kingdom and of the prophesies concerning it; while the certainty of its rejection and postponement were assuredly present to His mind throughout, and find expression in the admonitions of His watchful love, yet all is ordered, with the most careful provision for the full and uninvaded responsibility of Israel, so that if to this hour unblessed and under the ban of Lo-ammi, they suffer but the righteous retribution of their guilt.

For the Christian, then, to-day, to read the prophetic Scriptures simply and purely in the light of the existing order of things, and try to bring all into harmony with that, without taking into account the contemplated issues of Israel's responsible action, as such, is and must be misleading. The more closely the prophesies are studied, the more evident it becomes with what skill they are framed, so as to leave full room for the alternative of responsible Israel's faithfulness, had such been found. In the coming of the Messiah there was a real and perfectly consistent offer to Israel of the long-prophesied kingdom; an offer which, had it been accepted, would have led to the immediate accomplishment of the promises, in the introduction of His glorious reign. To say how this *would have been effected* is no doubt beyond us, to discern how it *might have been* is within our province, and the limits of sobriety. Had a portion of the nation, sufficiently large to give it a representative character, accepted the Messiah when He appeared, it is surely no vain overstraining of possibilities to conceive, how the more politically powerful party might still, in league with the Roman, have fulfilled the prophesies in His death, as actually occurred; in which case, His resurrection, instead of being followed by a suspension of the kingdom, might have been followed by immediate judgment on His enemies; the deliverance of His adherents, who by espousing His cause would have drawn down on themselves the wrath of persecution; the seventieth week of Daniel, with its crowded events, matured (as they ultimately will be) with a more than hot-bed forcing, might at once have run its course; and prophecy might have fulfilled itself to the letter, without any such interregnum as at present has place.

To Satan, for whom, be it borne in mind, the counsels of God are as secret, until revealed, as to the children of men, it must have appeared a marvelous triumph of his ingenuity and devilish craft, when he had succeeded, to appearance, in overturning the plans and giving the lie to the prophetic teachings of God, by securing the rejection and crucifixion of God's King. That the Messiah should take into His hand the reins of earthly government, and set up a kingdom of heaven on earth, was clear to a demonstration in the word. That the Messiah had come, and no such kingdom had been set up, was no less clear from the facts. That the prophesies should ever now be capable of a literal fulfillment, such as should vindicate the truthfulness of God. and His word, seemed to him, doubtless, as impossible as it has seemed to thousands of God's own children, who have therefore long abandoned the expectation, and exchanged it for the fruitless effort to spiritualize the prophesies, into a forced and unnatural harmony with existing events. While many of the latter still cling to this error, Satan has assuredly long since been undeceived. The revelation of "the mystery," unfolded in vain before the eyes of God's children, has been seen of him with clearer discernment. Nor let the reader consider this as mere conjecture; it is the teaching of the Word itself. In verses 9 and 10 of our chapter, the apostle, in opening his commission "to make all see what is the dispensation of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God," adds, " who created all things by Jesus Christ: to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in the heavenlies might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God." Here we have the fact that the display of God's manifold wisdom, by means of the church, was a fore-contemplated object of creation, and that, with

express reference to " the principalities and powers in the heavenly places." Now, if in Eph. 1:21 and Col. 2:10, " principalities and powers " seem employed to designate celestial inhabitants, in favor with God; in Eph. 6:12, the same is used for the deadly enemies of God and man, the wicked spirits known elsewhere as "the devil and his angels;" by whom this manifold wisdom will be learned to their confusion and dismay, as by the others to their edification and joy, through the demonstration of God's ability to accomplish results, the highest and most blessed, through the instrumentality of the very elements that seemed most to thwart his plans and traverse his purposes.

Is the reader one of those who vainly dream of a gradually-diffused gospel, converting the world, under the agency of the Spirit, and ushering in a millennium of spiritual blessedness, without the presence of a personal Messiah, in manifested glory, on the throne of His father David? If so, he will have to revise his position ere he will be able " to see what is the dispensation of the mystery." Can a child of God rest satisfied, that such a victory should abide in the hands of Satan, as that he should have baulked the literal accomplishment of prophecy, and reduced God to the necessity of giving to it only such a, so-called, spiritual accomplishment, as no simple reader of the Word could ever suppose to be its purport? No; Satan has not triumphed. God's purpose is not foregone. God's plans have suffered no frustration. A postponement, but a foreseen one, has delayed the immediate establishment; but, in his seeming victory the prince of darkness has outwitted himself, has wrought out God's secret purpose, to suspend for a season the erection of the throne, in order to the preparation of a bride for His King, to be associated with Him in His reign-the Church of the living God- an otherwise unknown thing; a people brought into a special place of nearness; who, owning and taking part with Him in His humiliation and rejection, shall also have part in His exaltation and glory; who, because they "suffer with Him, shall also reign with Him;" filling that very place in the heavenlies, in which Satan and his angels now are-those powers of the air of which he is prince, the " wicked spirits in the heavenlies," against whom, as the opposers of her blessing, the Church, in her individual members, has now to contend in spiritual conflict. (Eph. 6:12, margin.<sup>3</sup>) No; the prophecies spoke only of earth; there was in these no intimation of a people to fill the place of the Satanic powers, no word of their being dispossessed in favor of a people redeemed from the earth. This was a secret, a mystery hid in God, which Satan's seeming triumph gave occasion both to the unfolding and to the accomplishment of, to his own utter and eternal confusion, and to the display of God's multiform wisdom, His grace and His glory; and the kingdom, the kingdom which Satan thought to frustrate, will yet be set up on earth-the millennium of New Testament prophecy-to the literal accomplishment of every detail of God's word, and the full vindication of the faithfulness of God and the truthfulness of His prophets.

The present dispensation is, then, an interregnum or parenthetic period, contemplated indeed in the counsels of God, but not revealed till "given" to Paul, as set forth.

Once this truth is seen, it becomes the key to the interpretation of Scripture and to the "rightly dividing the word of truth," in the sundering of things Jewish from things Christian. Until it is seen, neither Testament can be understood aright; and Christianity, instead of having its proper and distinctive character, is degraded into a sort of bastard Judaism. Of the manner in which this acts, King James' translators of the Bible furnish a ready example.

Far be it from me to detract from the merits of these beloved men of God, to whose labors we, together with all the intervening generations, owe a debt of deepest gratitude. Their work is a monument of faithful and painstaking industry, and a marvel of success for their times. But they did not "see what is the dispensation of the mystery;" and because they did not, they have also left us, in their chapter-headings, a monument of the inevitable consequences of ignorance of this cardinal truth. In common with all the divines of their day, they took up the erroneous notion that Christianity, instead of being, as taught by Paul,

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<sup>3</sup> The reader will understand this better if he compare Eph. 2:2; 6:12, with Gen. 1:6-8, observing by what name God called the firmament or expanse (our air or atmosphere); and this again with 2 Cor. 12:2. Let him see also 1 Kings 22:19-22; Job 1:6; Luke 10:18; John 12:31; Rom. 16:20; 1 Cor. 6:2-3; Rev. 12:7,8, &c.

a distinct thing, and a previously unrevealed secret, was but the foretold outcome -the regular and anticipated development of what had preceded-the full-blown flower from the bud of Judaism. Of the parenthetic or interregnal character of the dispensation, they had not a conception. That the Church of God was a thing so distinct and peculiar, in respect of all that had gone before, as to be quite unknown to prophecy was a thought to which they were wholly strangers-a thought so foreign to their minds, that, taking for granted that Christianity and the Church must be there, they turned to the Old Testament scriptures, with the deliberate purpose therein to discover it. The natural result of a research for what was not, under the control of a foregone conclusion that it was, is easy to anticipate. They must of necessity misapply to it what belonged to something else; and accordingly, the prophetic announcements concerning Israel and "the kingdom," are made to do duty on behalf of the Church; with the necessary consequence, in their own and all minds that have followed in their wake; of an entire misunderstanding of the Christian dispensation, no less than of the millennial dispensation, yet to follow-a blending of things Jewish with things Christian, to the lowering of the entire character of "the heavenly calling," and a misapplication, throughout, of the truth of God.

Let the reader take up his marginal Bible of the "authorized" version, and turn, almost at random, to any of the chapter headings where prophecies of the future are found, and he may at once verify the point. He will find "the Church" abundantly in the headings, but for the Church in the text, he will search in vain; he will find there only Israel, Zion, Jerusalem, or the like.

A single example to make it clear. The heading of Isa. 52 begins with "(1) Christ persuadeth the church to believe His free redemption;" but on looking into the chapter, the reader will perceive, that it is Zion who is exhorted to awake and put on strength; Jerusalem, the holy city, that is bidden to put on her beautiful garments, and to shake herself from the dust; the people who went down aforetime into Egypt to sojourn; the people whom the Assyrian oppressed; and so throughout the chapter. The only glimpse of truth, in the heading, is in its last clause, "(13) Christ's kingdom shall be exalted." The kingdom is undoubtedly the thing in view in the place, but then, "the kingdom" in the view of the chapter headings, is but another name for "the Church," with which they invariably confound it.

Nor need we wonder at the widespread confusion that prevails in the interpretation of the Word, if we accept the correction of the critics<sup>4</sup> on Col. 2:2; who, omitting from the text, as an interpolation, the words, "and of the Father, and of Christ," read, with the following verse, "all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, wherein are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

If all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hid in "the mystery;" so that the dispensation of it, as given to Paul, is the filling up, or completing, of the word of God, as stated in verse 25 of the previous chapter; then it is self-evident, that where "the mystery" is not understood, the key to the understanding of the Word, is not in the hand; and the treasures of wisdom and knowledge," though fully revealed of God, must remain locked. "God would make known to His saints," through this ministry of Paul (v. 27), "what is the riches of the glory of this mystery," and, alas I the vast proportion of them are indifferent to the acquisition of the knowledge.

Christ is the center of the truth and ways of God; but the Christ of God's counsels is not simply the man Christ Jesus; but, "as the body is one, and has many members, so also is the Christ." It is "Christ and the Church"-the mystery; the second Adam, not alone, but with His Eve; united with Him, even under a common name; as was the first Eve with him, bone of whose bone, and flesh of whose flesh, she was; so that in Gen. 5:2 it is said, "Male and female created He them; and blessed them, and called *their name Adam*." As Adam was incomplete without Eve, so is the Christ of God's counsels and purposes incomplete without "the Church, which is His body, the fullness (or complement) of Him that filleth all in all." (Eph. 1:23)

The hope of the Church is "the hope of glory." Israel's hope, in the wilderness, was the hope of the land.

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<sup>4</sup> Griesbach, Scholtz, Tischendorf, and Alford. (See *Textual Criticism*, p, 59)

(Deut. 12:8) Their hope, in the future, is still the land, under the kingdom, in the millennial blessedness. If there is glory connected with it, as there certainly is (Isa. 4, &c), it is still earthly glory -glory in the earth. The Church's glory, on the contrary, is celestial glory -the glory of God and of Christ. " The glory which thou hast given me I have given them;" " I will that they also, which thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory."

Israel's hope of promised blessing rested on the presence of Jehovah *with* them in the pillar of cloud and of fire. "My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest." "Wherein shall it be known that I and thy people have found grace in thy sight? is it not in that thou goest *with* us? so shall we be separated, I and thy people, from all the people that are upon the face of the earth." " For the cloud of Jehovah was upon the tabernacle by day, and fire was on it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys." " They have heard that thou Jehovah art among this people, that thou Jehovah art seen face to face, and that thy cloud standeth over them, and that thou goest before them, by day time in a pillar of a cloud, and in a pillar of fire by night." " For what nation is there so great that hath God so nigh unto them?"

Jehovah, with and among them, in a symbolical presence, was thus the glory of Israel's position in the midst of the nations of the earth, and the guarantee, on which their hope of the promised inheritance reposed.

The riches, or wealth, of the glory of "the mystery" is, Christ *in* His people, the hope of glory. (Col. 1:27)

Great as was Israel's privilege, in having Jehovah so nigh to them, as never to any other people or nation; their pledge of a land flowing with milk and honey; that glory is eclipsed, by the overflowing abundance-the wealth of glory, pertaining to the pilgrim Church of God, in the dispensation of the mystery; which glory, is personal union with a risen, exalted, and divine Head, as members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones -a union which is to them the unfailing guarantee and basis, of that hope of glory which is set before them, as the goal toward which they journey onward. Well may the apostle term this a "wealth of glory" -a glory veiled indeed from carnal and unbelieving eyes; so that " the world knoweth us not, because it knew not Him;" but how real and how unspeakably precious, to him to whose faith and experience it is known! Well might he, in comparison of Israel's glory, say "Even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory which excelleth. For if that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious."

"Christ in you, the hope of glory!" 'Do our souls enter into it? Does our faith lay hold on the fullness of its riches? Does the glory fill our eye and satisfy our hearts, till all earthly glory pales beneath its brightness? What an inheritance is ours -glory! -"an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God." This is much. To be kept by power, and that the power of God, is strong, and sure, and precious; but there is more. The thought before us goes beyond it. It is more than being kept; it is union, oneness, with the Keeper. "He that is joined to the Lord is one Spirit;" "by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body;" "members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones." And this is the peculiar, the excelling glory, of "the mystery;" and we, by grace, have our portion in it. Surely, for such a portion, we would praise and bless "the God of all grace, who hath called us to His eternal glory, by Christ Jesus."

These thoughts lead us upward, to what may be called the heavenly side of the mystery; to which we are introduced in Eph. 1:9: " the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself: that in the dispensation of the fullness of times He might gather together in one all things in [the] Christ, both which in heaven, and which are on earth." This is not another mystery, but another phase, or a more advanced stage, of the same great secret.

The third chapter, which, along with Colossians, has mainly occupied us thus far, introduces us only to the present or earthly side of the mystery -to the Church, in her pilgrim character, as journeying towards her inheritance, in the dispensation called by the Holy Ghost " the dispensation of the mystery;" as that, to which the unfolding and development of the truths of the mystery, gives tone and character.

Here we are introduced to another, and yet future, dispensation; equally secret to the by-gone ages, but

now brought forth, as the complement of the uncovered mystery -to wit, the union, under the scepter of the Messiah, of heavenly as well as earthly things in one kingdom of God. This coming dispensation is termed that of the fullness of times or seasons, as that in which the dealings of God with this earth (to which times and seasons, *κρονοι και καιροι*, belong) will attain their completion; and that which characterizes it is the gathering together -literally, the heading up- of all things in heaven and on earth in the Christ. The language is peculiar, and strikingly impressive, this heading up. Has the reader ever seen a cooper "heading up" a cask? He groups the staves together on end, around the head of the cask, fitted into the "chime" or groove, cut in each to enable it to receive and grasp the beveled edge of the head. When all are in position, he tightens a hoop around, and drives on hoop after hoop, till all the separate pieces are firmly compacted into one vessel. Did he drive the hoops on the upright staves, without the head, the first stroke of the hammer would cast all into confusion. The center of cohesion, around which the staves are headed up, is the head or end of the cask; and once that is in place, the greater the compression, the firmer and better the work.

Christ is the center and head, in whom are to be headed up all the separate elements, both heavenly and earthly, whose union, under the hand and scepter of the Messiah, like that of the union of Jew and Gentile in one, under the present dispensation, was wholly foreign to the scope of Old Testament revelations.

I have already somewhat anticipated this part of the subject, when speaking of the suspension of the kingdom and its results. It is the culminating glory of Him who, when seen of John in vision, as coming forth to inaugurate " the dispensation of the fullness of times," of which we speak, had on His head "many crowns;" and was followed by " the armies which were in heaven," when descending to set up the throne of His millennial glory on the earth. (Rev. 19)

I now turn from the doctrinal view of the subject to its practical bearings on our course and conduct.

As those whose lot is cast in " the dispensation of the mystery," it clearly behooves us, not only to inform our minds as to its true character and objects, but also to fashion our conduct in accordance with its order and aims. God never reveals truth to us for the mere gratification of our curiosity, but in order that it may exercise a formative influence over us, molding us into agreement with itself.

If God has revealed to us, that the order and plan of the dispensation in which He has set us is that Christ should, by His death, not only save our souls, but should "gather together IN ONE the children of God that were scattered abroad," so that there should be " ONE FLOCK and one Shepherd" (John 11:52;10. 16); that in reconciling men to Himself, by the cross from among Jews and Gentiles, it was His will that this should be effected, not as scattered units, as in former ages, but that those so reconciled, should be found in unity-" in one body " (Eph. 2:16); that this "body," of His divine purpose, *has been* formed by the " one Spirit," by whom all are baptized into it (1 Cor. 12:13); that He " has tempered the body together," and " has set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased Him" (1 Cor. 12:18,24), in order that the whole body, fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, should make increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love " (Eph. 4:16); and that, for this reason, His will is " that there should be no schism in the body." (1 Cor. 12:25) If, I say, such is the revealed mind and will of God, as concerning ourselves, and the dispensation under which He has placed us, then clearly all action on our part that does not conform to this truth, and has not this principle as its basis, must be in contravention of His plans and in opposition to His will, and therefore SIN. Had we not from Him one single word beyond the simple announcement, " There is one body;" the divinely-communicated knowledge of that fact would put us under as complete a moral obligation as any amount of perceptive teaching could do; for divinely-constituted relationships are quite as valid a ground of moral obligation, as divinely-given precepts. A Jew was as truly under obligation to "honor his father and his mother," while dwelling in Egypt, before he, or any one else, had heard a commandment on the subject, as he was after God thundered it forth from Sinai; though the command gave an additional clearness, and added an additional sanction to the obligation. If he failed to do it in Egypt, he sinned; if he failed to do it in Canaan, he both sinned and disobeyed.

Now God has both revealed to us the fact, and enjoined on us the conduct befitting us, as arising out of

the fact. He will have us to "walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called" (Eph. 4:1); and inasmuch as we are not only called with a holy and heavenly calling, but are "called in one body" (Col. 3:15); accordingly, among the instructions in detail, which follow, a most prominent position is given to the duty of "endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace;" and this, as arising out of the truth, that there is one body and one Spirit, even as the hope of our calling (the glory) is one, and unity characterizes all that pertains distinctively to it-"one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."

To act then in any manner contrary to this divinely formed unity, is to walk unworthily of the vocation wherewith we are called; and to set oneself in opposition to the whole order and plan of the dispensation; the very thing the entire Church of God has been doing for centuries. What doctrine, in all the range of truth, has been so trampled under foot -so daringly and systematically set aside, as unity? Who, that lets the eye range over Christendom, would suspect for a moment that it was a fundamental truth of Christianity, that these people were professors of a calling to be one body, and that on their unity, its founder relied (John 17:21) for the standing evidence of His divine mission? What a multitude of bodies stand out on the platform, with their various names and characters. Look for unity anywhere but in Christendom. Judaism is a unity, though the nation be scattered. Mahomedism is a unity; but Christianity, of which unity should be the prominent characteristic, alas! alas!

Popery, the earliest parent of schism, is the only sect that has retained even the shadow; while Protestantism, yielding to the exigencies of its own position, has adapted its doctrine to these; and for the most part, laid claim to the liberty of ignoring the obligation entirely; with at best but an occasional sigh over unity, as a thing of the past. How few have had the courage, or the faithfulness, to look the obligation in the face; to go down to the root of the evil; to judge it, and to return to the old paths. Perhaps the most subtle snare and obstacle, to which enquirers after this truth are exposed, is the apparent impossibility of turning aside from the pathway of schism, without thereby increasing the very evil disclaimed, by adding another to the number of the already too numerous divisions. Most specious is this difficulty, and many a soul does it hold back from taking the stand for God; but it is as unreal as it is specious. To separate from schism is not schism. To withdraw from that which has itself withdrawn from the order of God, is not to divide the Church of God, but to renounce that which has already divided it. Let us suppose a ship's company to have mutinied, taken possession of the ship, and turned their captain and officers adrift, as the mutineers of the *Bounty* did. Would it be mutiny, for an individual, or individuals, of their number, to repent of their share in the crime; to protest against and separate from fellowship with the unlawful acts; and, at the risk of life or liberty, to insist on maintaining and owning only the Queen's right of ownership, and seeking to recall the others to duty? Would these few repentant loyalists, be chargeable with another mutiny; or would they only be doing the right thing under the circumstances?

But mark here a distinction. Supposing these individuals, instead of withdrawing from the others, in order to return to their allegiance to the Queen; separated, merely on the ground of some difference of judgment or will, as to the navigation, movements, or destination of the vessel; how different would be the case!

Just such is the distinction between return to unity and sectarian division.

The origin of all sectarian divisions has been diversities of judgment or will, as to points of detail, in principles, doctrine, or customs. No doubt, in many of these cases, there has been a conscientious desire, for the glory of God; supposed to be involved, in the maintenance of this or that peculiar tenet; but in no case have the reformers gone to the root of the matter. In no case, until very recently, has there been a sifting of the question to the bottom-a digging through, and clearing away, of the rubbish, right down to the foundations; that God's own foundation might be reached again, and built on. Each fresh sect has but modified or patched up the form of things it has been used to; and so, in coming out from one sect, has done so only to form another. *So long as one item of unscriptural human corruption is clung to, sectarian ground is still maintained* no matter what the pretensions may be.

When, however, the divine foundation has been reached; the divine ground once more taken up, this is not schism, whatever men may say; but obedience, and faithfulness to God. This, and this only, is to "walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called;" this only is honestly to endeavor "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

What! exclaims some startled reader, do you mean to call it endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, to break peace and disunite yourself from every body, or from all but a mere handful of people as mistaken in this as yourself? Yes, I answer, I do. I mean unhesitatingly to say, that the Spirit has formed, and does form, no unity on any other ground, than that of scriptural obedience to God. The unity of a sect, or of all the sects together, could they to-morrow be compressed into a gigantic Evangelical or Catholic Alliance, is not, and would not be, the unity of the Spirit. Did the whole of Christendom succeed forthwith in arranging a platform on which they could once more unite, and form a single body, I should spurn it, and stand aloof from it, as much as I stand aloof from a divided Christendom this day. Every platform of union, other than that which renounces *all* that is of man-and with the rest all principles of voluntary association-is of man, and not of God-is the unity of the flesh, and not of the Spirit.