

] Less Than the Least of All [

Ephesians 3:1 – 13

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~ You and I are living in days of almost total apostasy in the church. Liberalism is in complete control of all major denominations. There are a few Bible-believing and Bible-teaching churches that actually love the Word of God and believe the Bible is the Word of God remaining true to the Lord – but not many. See, the devil does not attack the Bible directly; Satan attacks the men who are teaching and preaching sound doctrine from the Word of God. If one attempts to take the Word of God to the entire world — and if that teaching is proper, correct and complete — then the attacks will be almost unbearable. Satan is smart, friends. Most people think the devil is a stupid liar; which is only half-true — and many Christians actually think they are smarter than the devil — but they aren't.

The man who loves God and believes God — and loves the Scriptures and the Lord Jesus — will be sifted by Satan. Anyone presenting sound doctrine will be hurt badly for standing for the truth of the Bible in this world. The main place they are attacked and harmed is right inside their own church; which is why a sincere labor to properly glorify Christ is usually soon abandoned by most. Couple that with literally no support, and it's no wonder that many men count the cost of ministry too high. The unbelieving mobs outside in the lost world don't care two whit's worth about a church member or a pastor who is honestly standing for God. They'll knowingly blurt out malicious slander with no compunction whatsoever. They will laugh at him as he starves. The devil operates inside the church; but the only way he can get inside is through other church members! Quite candidly, what I have to say regarding this topic, and have said so far in these safari reports, isn't even half of the story I could tell. Most of you think I am very cynical and pessimistic as it is but, if I told you the whole story, then the dictionary would have to redefine the words pessimistic and cynical.

Some people seem to view the church is some sort of sacred cow that one doesn't dare criticize or speak poorly of; they associate any criticism of the

church on par with attacking Caesar's wife. Let's suffice it for now to say that the church is in big trouble — *DEEP* trouble — today. Our politics, schools, and society in general, are utterly disintegrating right before our very eyes. A failure of the church is to blame. Should the church be immune from criticism when those other institutions are going so horribly wrong? I don't think so; the church bears a greater portion of responsibility for their evil — and somebody needs to speak out on these things. I just happen to be the person who has no problem doing it.

I fully understand I would do much better with people in religious circles — and even in my own physical church — if I presented only the nice, lovely, sweet things that conform to an American liberal Jesus — and if I just played along with the status quo. I understand my literary mannerism and physical presentations both seem utterly obnoxious to some people; but, my friends, you're reading the writings of a man who, as long as I am able to write, and as long as I believe the Holy Spirit is speaking through me, intends to tell you *EXACTLY* what I believe the Word of God is trying to teach all of us. You can pass me by if you want to — that's between you and the Lord. Fair warning for you, though: we have had some tough lessons in Ephesians — but we have yet to come to the *really* strong things in this Spiritual Safari — so, I just wanted to prepare you for the unbelievably potent medicine that is coming along very soon....

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

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

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

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

~ In our last report, we began to consider the church as a mystery. "Mystery" simply means that the church was not revealed in the Old Testament. If you have not read our last report, then I suggest you go back

and do so now. I understand our last report was almost entirely theological — and I don't typically write that way — but it is important to understand and develop certain theological tenets of truth. We saw how some theologians just ignore this “mystery” — and erroneously reach back in an attempt to identify the church in the Old Testament as being a continuation of the nation Israel. I have even heard of one seminary professor who claimed to have traced the church all the way back to the Garden of Eden! Well, if you want to teach that, then you should know you are teaching something the Spirit of God never taught you; because the church is simply not revealed in the Old Testament. Now, if you really think you're smarter than God, then that's your business — but know very definitely you are totally and completely wrong conflating the nation Israel and the church body of believers.

The other extreme is the hyper-dispensationalist; and that means they have several dispensations after the Day of Pentecost. Well, something very definitely happened on the Day of Pentecost, and to wash back and forth over Pentecost like the tide over the sand on the beach is entirely wrong. The Holy Spirit came upon believers and formed the body of the church on the Day of Pentecost; and that ministry work is going to continue until Christ returns to remove the church from the world in the rapture. Believers are told we are sealed by the Holy Spirit until the day of redemption. I don't see how it could be made any clearer than that. *In that day* we will be taken out of the world and presented to the Lord Jesus Christ....

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

~ There are specific mechanics we need to understand in this chapter: the first four verses are the *explanation* of the mystery of the church; and verses fourteen through twenty-one are a prayer for *understanding*! Verses two through fourteen form a parenthesis in this chapter that further spell out the mystery of the marvelous privileges; which are now accorded to Gentiles, and which Paul enumerated in chapter two. Verse two means this is all contingent upon a supposition that they heard of the dispensation of the grace of God. Remember, Paul told them they were “.... *afar off and strangers without hope and without God.*” Here, all of that has been rectified; and all have been brought into the body of believers through faith in Christ. The result of all of that doctrinal teaching is that Paul is going to pray for them to receive understanding of it.

Now, I understand that many people vehemently do not like any teachings on dispensation. Unfortunately for them, if we believe the Bible is the Word of God, then we’re a dispensationalist. We have had that word in chapter one, and we have it again here in verse two of chapter three. I hope you aren’t a hyper-dispensationalist but, if you do not believe that we live in the dispensation of grace today, then there is absolutely *NO WAY* you can say you believe the Bible — because that would, literally, be impossible. I didn’t coin the word and Dr. C.I. Scofield didn’t make it up. No, friends, it is a

doctrinally sound teaching that came directly out of the epistles of Paul the apostle.

Dispensation speaks of the way in which Paul was called and sent by God exclusively to the Gentiles. The other apostle's ministries were altogether different than Paul's, too, by the way; such as Peter being sent to the Jews only. The Gospel message was exactly the same; but the people to whom the message went were as different as night and day. Remember, Paul had been a Pharisee, so this was altogether new for him. So, that equates to differing dispensations – different *economies* – than that of the Old Testament. Of course, God has always saved by grace, because Old Testament saints required a sacrifice that pointed directly to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. But God didn't change. He changed us!

On the basis of verse three, the hyper-dispensationalist will assert Paul was the only one who had the mystery revealed to him. Actually, they used to say that – I really don't know if that is their theology today, because I just don't care to keep up with those things. They change too often. I would caution anyone to make sure you read verse five very carefully before attempting to defend a position. I'm not sure how anyone could miss that this "*mystery*" was made known to all of the other apostles; but, apparently, some do miss it. I should also add that the word "*mystery*" is used twenty-seven times in the New Testament, and it refers to eleven separate mysteries:

- (1) the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven
- (2) the Mystery of Israel's blind condition during this age
- (3) the mystery of the translation of living saints at the end of this age
- (4) the mystery of the New Testament church as one body composed of Jew and Gentile
- (5) the Mystery of the church as the bride of Christ
- (6) the mystery of the indwelling and indwelling of Christ in believers

(7) the mystery of God even Christ; that is, Christ as the incarnate fulness of the Godhead embodiment in Whom all the divine wisdom and understanding of mankind exists

(8) the mystery of the processes by which the likeness of God is restored to man

(9) the mystery of iniquity

(10) the mystery of the seven stars and

(11) the mystery of Babylon

Interestingly, Paul seems to be making a contrast here to the “*mystery religions*” of the Greco-Roman world of his day. There were myriad religions practiced in secret lodges where sadistic rights were performed. The initiates were warned not to reveal the secrecy of the particular religion. Many still exist today; but most Christians don’t understand much about the so-called mystery religions. It should be well understood that Jesus informed Paul that when Paul persecuted the church, he persecuted Christ Himself. That’s when Paul first discovered that God was doing something altogether brand new in the world. The church body had come into existence on the Day of Pentecost. Later, Paul would say, “.... *woe is me if I preach not the Gospel.*” Today, you and I are stewards of the mysteries of God, friends. We are to give His message out to the entire world by shouting it from the rooftops — not keep it in a secret lodge. The mystery, of course, is that Christ is risen from the dead, and His body is now made up of Jews and Gentiles — and of all nations, tribes, peoples and tongues of the earth.

Romans 16: 25 *Now to him that is of power to establish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, 26 But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith ~*

Colossians 1: 26 *Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: 27 To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory: 28 Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus: 29 Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily ~*

So, now that we have complete clarification of what Paul means by “mystery,” we can see there is a sharp contrast between the sons of men in past generations and the prophets and apostles of the church. Let me just say it again: not one person in the Old Testament had even an inkling of a glimmer of light relative to the church that was to come later. It was revealed for the first time to the apostles, directly by Jesus, and they were made holy because they were specifically set aside by God – sanctified – for this particular office. That means the apostles are most definitely the New Testament prophets, as we concluded in our last report. Further, the “mystery” was certainly *NOT* that Gentiles would be saved; because the Old Testament taught clearly that Gentiles would be saved.

John 16: 15 *Jesus saith, All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you ~*

Isaiah 11: 10 *And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious ~*

Isaiah 60: 3 *And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising ~*

Zechariah 2: 11 *And many nations shall be joined to the LORD in that day, and shall be my people: and I will dwell in the midst of thee, and thou shalt know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto thee ~*

Malachi 1: 11 *For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place*

incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the LORD of hosts ~

So, the “mystery” is the revelation that the Israelites and Gentiles are to be placed on the same basis by faith in Christ — and lifted to a much higher plane than the Old Testament economy – dispensation; and they are to now to be brought into the body of the church. That is *VERY* important to understand, friends. Don’t miss it. Christ is the head of the new body. That revelation, by de facto, caused a three-fold division in the human race: (1) from Adam to Abraham, which was two thousand years plus, all were Gentiles (2) from Abraham to Christ, also two thousand years plus, there were Jews and Gentiles (3) then, from the Day of Pentecost to the rapture, also two thousand years plus, we have Jews, Gentiles and the church of God. All of that is exactly what Paul said, too, by the way.

1 Corinthians 10: 32 *Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God ~*

The entire human family is gathered up and divided in this statement; and there is no fourth group. There is Israel, the Gentiles, and the church of God; but those can be broken down further into two groups: believers and unbelievers. That’s quite a mathematical equation for us to learn. When Jesus said, “*on this Rock I will build My church*” – speaking of Himself – He was speaking of the future; but He said that in the New Testament! To go out beyond the Day of Pentecost makes the body of Christ a Siamese twin. By insisting there is a Jewish church and a Gentile church that co-exist, you’re creating a monster that doesn’t exist. It’s positively absurd, friends. When the church began at Pentecost, the church was one hundred percent Jewish, I understand that; however, the following time period is the transitional period where the Gentiles were brought in – and that includes *all* peoples of the world.

Paul never claimed superiority in some intellectual capacity. He only took the place of a helper or a fellow worker – a deacon. It was the gift of God’s grace which had transformed him from the proud pygmy Pharisee known as Saul of Tarsus, who persecuted, imprisoned, tortured and murdered

church members, to Paul the apostle; who now sits in a Roman Mamertine prison awaiting execution at the time in which we are studying.

Every minute detail of every small event leading to this moment has happened at the direction of the exclusive working of the Holy Spirit in him. Paul said he was “*less than the least*” of anyone else in verse eight. How many Bible people do you see making that claim today? God hasn’t told us everything, that’s for sure; and most don’t think I know very much about the Bible – and you’re right – but when we get to Heaven, we’re *ALL* going to become educated quickly. One thing I do know for sure: the angels and all of God’s created intelligences are learning of the love and wisdom of God through the church! Another thing that I also just happen to know — for sure — is: I, Andrew C. Hunt, am much less — SO much less — than Paul the apostle; and God just happens to give the least of all men the unsearchable riches of Christ, my friends. God only uses the simple to confound the wise — you can just write all of that all down ~

13 Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory ~

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