

How to Approach the Bible

A study series by Arthur J Licursi

Part 1 of 24 – Introduction to “How to Approach the Bible”

The Apostle Paul emphasizes the need for the Ephesian believers to gain a proper *understanding* as he writes of his prayer for them to receive “the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him (Christ).”

“Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself” Ephesians 1:9

“I (Paul)... Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; ¹⁷That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: ¹⁸The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, (Eph.1:17, 18).

We have so much more reason to *study* the Scriptures now that God's great “*eternal purpose...in Christ Jesus*” and God's secret plan called “*the mystery*” has been revealed through the writings of Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles. We can now “*understand*” the Scriptures intelligently, without contradiction and confusion, by making use of a few simple study tools that we will discuss in this study.

How can we *believe* what the Bible says unless we first *understand* what it says? God would have us to understand what we read and believe it intelligently. God has never asked that we put our thinking cap aside to believe the fables that are so often preached from the pulpits of the church at large today. A true believer will want to know and understand more and more of God's Word. One who does not care whether or not he *understands* what God has said is not really interested in knowing what God has said at all. His faith is based upon his own will and preference rather than on the truth of God's written word. Regardless of the meaning of Scripture, some will ignore the word or take any passage that suits their fancy and use it as they wish. He usually says “*What I think is...*” I prefer to study and see what the truth of God is for today in this day of “*the dispensation of the grace of God*” (Eph 3:2).

As we see by Paul's prayer above, God Himself puts importance upon *understanding* His word. On one occasion, when our Lord Jesus saw the multitudes, He “*was moved with compassion toward them because they were as sheep not having a shepherd: and He began to teach them many things*” (Mark 6:34).

Personally, my desire is to help bring Christians to a better understanding of God's eternal intention as we today live under “*the dispensation of the grace of God.*” My prayer is that all Christians come to see how it is that God Himself has made a way for us by giving His Son Christ Jesus not only *for us at the cross*, but also *to us, to be our all-sufficient life-supply*. These truths, with the liberty and enjoyment that they bring, may be seen in His written word as we approach His written word intelligently and receive the light of “*the Spirit of Truth.*”

I believe also that we can best enter the doorway to understanding these truths by applying the critical instruction we receive from the Apostle Paul with regard to the proper method of study of God's written word.

How to Approach the Bible

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

It takes a King James (1611 Authorized Version) of the Bible to see this verse, but it is key to our understanding of Scriptures. **“Rightly dividing”** in Greek is “orthotomeo”; it means to make a *“straight cut,”* which results in dividing the word into pieces. We must divide the Bible into its parts if we are to clearly see God’s intention and His all-sufficient accomplishment by the offering of Christ, without confusion and without contradiction.

Dividing the word is one thing, but *“rightly dividing the word of truth”* is quite another. The phrase **“rightly dividing the word of truth”** implies that there must be ways to wrongly divide the written word. Sadly, much of Christianity travels a path of either no division or wrong division of the word. Thus, they miss out on God’s intention and the benefits He has made available to those who see and enjoy the truths put forth in His word. Both the undivided word and wrongly divided word of God can only lead us to misunderstandings of God’s intent and His message for *“the church, which is His body”* (Eph 1:22b-23a) today.

There are in fact God ordained divisions in the Bible.

- They pertain to different times and different peoples, as to how God deals with them and what is expected of them. These are commonly called dispensations.
- There also are three kinds of people mentioned in the Bible – *“the Jew, the Gentile”* and those who are of *“the church, which is the Body of Christ”* (1Cor 10:31). We can say that the every word given in Scripture pertains to at least one of these, while some Scriptures pertain to only one of these three classes of people.

How can one align themselves with Paul’s instruction to Timothy - **“teach no other doctrine,”** unless we first understand the content and intent and Paul’s unique doctrinal message of grace that He received by direct revelation from the ascended Lord (Gal 1:12), concerning Christ and His relationship with *“the body of Christ.”*

1 Timothy 1:3-4 As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest **charge some that they teach no other doctrine**, Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than **godly edifying** (building up) which is in faith: so do.

I want to acknowledge at least some of the many sources for the content of learning over the last 14 years of my study of “the word, rightly divided.” My writing of course is built upon the understandings that I have gained over these years through the writings and teachings of many people, as the Lord has enlightened my path by the grace of His *“Spirit of Truth.”* In my writing I have often borrowed (without specific attribution) information, phrases, paragraphs, terms, bits, pieces and parts, and thoughts from the writings and/or verbal sharing of men such as Cornelius Stam, E.W. Bullinger, Charles Baker, Richard Jordan, Paul Sadler, Ricky Kurth, Russell Miller, Casey Groeneveld, Robert Brock and others. In writing this series, I have borrowed heavily from Cornelius Stam. Yet, I do not ascribe the understandings that I put forth in my writings as the exact understanding of these men, since each of us may see certain aspects of these truths in various shades according to the light we each have received. Nevertheless, the Lord has used these and many other men to whom the Lord has led me in my seeking to know Christ *“according to the revelation of the mystery”* (Rom 16:25). They have helped open the truth of His word to me, as gained only studying it *“rightly divided,”* according to its ordained dispensations.

How to Approach the Bible

Unless and until we acknowledge and study the word “*rightly divided*,” we will only have the scantest and most shallow understanding of Bible truth. Otherwise, we cannot fully appreciate the greatness of the grace-filled salvation that we now have and may now enjoy due to the grace we have received in Christ and by the work of His all-sufficient cross.

My prayer is that this 24-part study will help some to gain a better perspective of the importance of proper study and hermeneutics, (method of interpretation). We should never play fast and loose with the Scriptures as I myself may have done over my former years in ignorance. We must always let Scripture interpret Scripture. God has not been slack in giving us His word as it has been preserved through the years of its writing that began with Moses. There’s a need for us to be doggedly consistent in our contextual study of the written word of God as we seek to know “*the whole counsel of God*,” as Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, wrote of it.

Romans 11:13a For I (Paul) speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles...

*Acts 20:27-30 For I (Paul) have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.²⁸ Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to **feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood**.²⁹ For I know this, that after my departing shall **grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock**.³⁰ Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.*

Part 2 of 24 – The Typical Approach to the Bible

Many Christians approach the Bible piece-meal, with no forethought as to how they should approach it. Most Christians pick and choose segments, verses, and phrases from the Bible to read and/or study without regard to the big picture of having an overall understanding of God's intent as to whom those verses apply.

Most do not know the structure of the Bible as to its *dispensations*. This then makes it difficult for them to get a handle on what the Bible presents in its proper context, and what it really says to us and about us today. We need to realize that God and his messengers, Moses, Israel's prophets, John the Baptist, Jesus of Nazareth, and the twelve Apostles, oftentimes were addressing differing peoples, at differing times, under differing circumstances, speaking things that do not necessarily apply to us today.

We need to study in order to gain the *proper overview of the whole Bible*, to sort out the “*who*” and “*what of them.*” Only then may we proceed to study *the particulars* that apply to those *who* are being addressed or referred to. Some Christians don't necessarily care to realize that they may be studying the specific *particulars* of a certain portion of the Bible that may only apply at that time and/or to the people who were involved and addressed in that Bible portion. Yet, many Christians incorrectly think the Bible is all about us today, so they attempt to apply it all to themselves, regardless of who was being addressed.

Such a misappropriation of the Bible is dangerous, leading to all sorts of confusion, contradictions, misunderstandings, disappointments, and sometimes even a loss of faith when their misunderstanding and false belief does not work out as they had presumed or supposed. When we mistakenly have the idea it is God's will to always heal us physically and we are not healed, this becomes a devastating disappointment that can lead to a loss of faith and trust in the Lord. Sadly, this false notion was built upon this idea was built upon misinterpretation of the Bible. Paul's own experience shows us it is not always God's will to heal us (2Cor 12:6-8). As we will see in this study, the Apostle Paul just happens to be “*the Apostle to the Gentiles*” for today (Rom 11:13), so his instruction and teaching should be valid for us.

God in fact has forged and unshakable salvation for us today. We can have a proper understanding of “the faith” to stand upon. But an erroneous approach to the Bible prevents people from establishing a solid foundation upon which to stand, build, and understand their held faith in their relationship with God. Thus, they miss out on the full impact of what God has done via Christ's cross, and what He is doing with regard to the members of “*the body of Christ*” today, during this day of “*the dispensation of the grace of God*” (Eph 3:2).

This series of studies is intended to help us to better sort out the Bible, so as to reveal its intended message of truth for us today. To do this, we might begin by utilizing logic that will aid us in eliminating some of difficulties. Logic tells us we cannot reason from the incidental particulars that we may find just anywhere in the Bible... to then presume the general overall truth and intent of God for us today.

That is to say, we cannot expect to find and see *God's overarching eternal plan* by arguing from certain incidental particulars in any old part of Bible. We must gain a proper Bible overview first. If we are to reason accurately, the *proper way of study is... from the big-picture overview of God's plan... to the particulars.*

In order to gain the correct general overview we must be careful to *note and distinguish the differing times, the differing peoples involved, and the differing circumstances* involved at various times over the entire span of the Bible.

How to Approach the Bible

Only after we have done so can we arrive at a *sure ground of the foundational truth for today*. Only then may we go back to **note the incidental particulars within the differing relationships that have existed between God and man through those differing times**. Only then may we go back to **note the requirements and expectations** that pertain to the persons addressed in those relationships.

If we have come to see the Bible's *proper general overview and truth* we cannot help but note that God's relationship with **the nation Israel** has a different set of defined requirements and expectations than God has for **"the body of Christ."**

Example: Israel was under **"the Law,"** while **"the body of Christ" today is not under the law**. Paul writes to the body of Christ; *Romans 6:14b ... ye are not under the law, but under grace*.

We will come to wrong conclusions if we view Bible particulars without first having gained the proper big picture overview of the different dispensational times involved within the context of the whole Bible. Many Christians have adopted an incorrect general overview of the Bible that simply says this;

"The Bible presents only one large dispensation or relationship between God and man - it's simply about good versus evil; whether Jew or Christian God wants all of us to be like Jesus was."

Having this false notion, they then take everything said of God's requirements and expectations that are written in the Bible concerning Israel and the Jews as though they were spoken to *"the body of Christ"* today. They do this without regard to the fact that God was particularly addressing His relationship, requirements, and expectations to **only one particular people – the people of the nation Israel**.

When God was exclusively *speaking to Abraham, Israel and the Jews*, He was then *simultaneously excluding all other humans, who were then to be called "the Gentiles."* (See *Eph 2:11-13, Acts 11:9*). Simply put; if I am talking with Susie, then I am not talking to Jack.

The first time we see a Biblical *exclusion* or *distinction* arising among the people of the earth was when God called Abram (later to be called Abraham) out of the families of the earth (Gen 12:1-3). First God took Abram out of the population of the day, and then later God separated Abraham's offspring, the nation Israel, unto Himself by making them even more peculiar (Deut 14:2). This was done through imposing a set of unusual laws like circumcision, etc. God thereby created two classes of people on earth at that time – *the called of Israel* and the other was **"the Gentiles."** We need to always make and maintain that distinction between these two classes of people in all our studies of the Bible. Frankly, this distinction is overlooked by most Christian Bible teachers. They seem to say, incorrectly, "All God's people are one."

We must see that there is a God-created division among the people addressed within the Bible. The Jews were then God's called and chosen people, as Abraham's offspring, being separate and distinct from the rest of humanity. In fact, about 80% of the Bible is devoted to Israel. The Bible records their history; including God's promises given to them, Jesus of Nazareth coming to them, their rejection of Jesus of Nazareth as Messiah, and their rejection of the Kingdom offered to Israel in the early Acts period. It also addresses the fulfillment of those God-given promises to Israel as seen in the Books of Revelation, Matthew, and elsewhere, which are mostly yet to be fulfilled.

We need to note that in his writings, the Apostle Paul refers broadly to the *proper general overview* of the times pertaining to the Gentiles as being their relationship with God... in *"time past"* (*Eph 2:2*) and ... *"but now"* (*Eph 2:13*) and the *"the ages to come"* (*Eph 2:11*).

Part 3 of 24 – Noting the Differing Peoples and Differing Times within the Bible

For the sake of discussion, let's now refer to God's speaking to His chosen people Israel as recorded in the Bible as "***Jewish mail***," sent to and belonging to the Jews only. Christians today, as non-Jews, may read some ***Jewish mail*** that is delivered into their mailbox - their Bible. Though it's not their mail in particular, they may in fact learn some Jewish information that adds to their knowledge about God, His relationship with His promises to the Jews; nevertheless the details of that "***Jewish mail***" pertain to the Jews only.

We may liken that ***Jewish mail*** to be as an electric bill sent to the Jews, or a phone bill to the Jews, or some good news mail, or some promised blessings and curses for the Jews. We Gentiles would **not** be expected to respond and pay those electric or phone bills sent to the Jews – would we? Yet, many Christians try to appropriate God's promises that were made to Israel, to them, while being careful to ignore God's promised curses. Then the mistaken Christian wonders why the promises **don't really work for them**. That's because **those promises belong to Israel alone**. All of this indicates that even though the ***Jewish mail*** can be found in our joint-mailbox called the Bible, we need to be careful to read to whom the "mail" in the box is actually addressed. We certainly should not pilfer other people's mail.

Example: The book of James is ***Jewish mail***, obviously belonging to the nation of Israel. Note its introduction. "**James... to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad...**" (*James 1:1*)

Thus, we can see that James' statement that "***faith without works is dead***" is instruction for Israel. By contrast, Paul tells "***the church, which is His body***" we are "***saved by grace through faith, not of works***." (*Eph 2:8-9*). Now salvation is received by hearing and believing **alone**. Paul makes it clear that works for salvation are not merely unnecessary; they are forbidden. Today salvation is "***to him that worketh not, but believeth***" (*Rom. 4:5*).

Once the works of the Law were required for salvation: "***But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested***" (*Rom. 3:21*) and men are saved solely by faith in Christ, "***being justified freely by (God's) grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus***" (*Rom. 3:24*). We are saved as we hear and believe what Paul calls, "***the Word of truth, the gospel of your salvation***" (*Eph. 1:13*).

God has changed His dealings with men from time to time down through the ages, teaching one lesson at a time to the people of that time. This is why it is so important to note the dispensational distinctions in Scriptures by "***rightly dividing the Word of truth***," if we are to see what exactly is for us today under the grace gospel.

Considering the Bible's overview, the Apostle Paul uses three terms in one verse that describe the only three kinds of people that exist today. There are "***the Jews, the Gentiles, and the church of God***." *1 Corinthians 10:32*. All Bible "***mail***" is addressed specifically to or spoken particularly about one or the other of these three. For any one of these three groups to read and apply the "***mail***" that was addressed to another party as though it was for them can only lead to confusion, contradiction, misunderstanding, and disappointment.

Since we cannot pay attention to the details of other people's "***mail***," applying it to ourselves, without likely coming to confusion and contradiction, we need to see and understand the general big-picture by noting these in our study. 1) ***To whom God and/or His representatives (i.e., His prophets, angels, and Apostles) are speaking...*** 2) ***concerning who...*** 3) ***to apply at what time...*** and 4) ***to what effect***. So, our core principle in approaching the Bible in study is to logically start by gaining the proper, big-picture, ***general overview***, by "***rightly dividing the (written) word of truth***" (*2Tim 2:15*). We need to discern ***who*** is involved, ***at what time***, and ***to what effect***.

How to Approach the Bible

Only then should we proceed to dig into the *details and particulars* that apply to each *dispensation* and the relationships we find for the differing peoples involved. Today, we should *particularly* study what applies to us, to the Gentles of “*the church which is the body of Christ*” (*Eph 1:22b-23a*), as written by the “*Apostle*” appointed “*to the Gentiles,*” Paul (*Rom 11:13*).

Now let’s consider certain aspects of the changing times within the Bible.

In Romans 5:12 we learn that “*by one man (Adam) sin entered*” the human race. Then later, after Adam’s fall from the time of “*innocence,*” many things changed. Still later “*the law entered*” (*Rom 5:20*). But still later, several years after the cross, the Apostle Paul was given to say: “***But now, the righteousness of God without the law is manifested***” (*Rom. 3:21*) and ***Romans 6:14 ...sin shall not have dominion over you...ye are not under the law, but under grace.*** Thus, we see change upon change.

Another example of change is the varying means prescribed by God for dealing with man’s sins...over time.

- Early in man's history, as seen by Adam and Eve being covered with skins of an innocent animal slain by God, ***blood sacrifices*** of innocent animals were instituted and required for acceptance with God.
- Then later ***circumcision and works of the Law*** were required of the *children of Israel* (*Gen 17:14; Ex 19:5*).
- Still later, in the Gospels and early Acts, ***repentance and water baptism*** were required for salvation (*Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38*).
- It’s not until Paul receives and delivers to us the “*gospel of the grace of God*” (*Acts 20:24*), which he received from the ascended Christ, that we learn of a ***salvation by grace through faith alone, on the basis of Christ's finished, all-sufficient work of redemption at the cross.***

So today, ***repentance with baptism in water is “out,” not applicable for “the body of Christ.”*** The “*baptism (immersion) into the body of Christ*” is the “*one baptism*” we have each partaken of. ***Ephesians 4:5 One Lord, one faith, one baptism.*** The time has changed, so today there is no other baptism for us as pure grace believers. This “*one baptism (immersion)*” into Christ’s body was accomplished the moment we received Christ.

1 Corinthians 12:13 For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. Galatians 3:27 For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

It is only as we recognize the *changes occurring with time* in Scripture, that we clearly see the differences between the dispensation of “*the Law*” and that of “*the dispensation of the grace of God.*” We then come to see the differences in so many critical matters of the faith with a clear understanding, such as this below.

1. Note the difference between “*the kingdom of heaven*” to come to earth for the ***nation Israel alone***, and that of “*the body of Christ*” consisting of ***Jews and Gentiles without distinction*** (*Gal 3:28*).
2. Note the differences between “*the gospel of the kingdom*” coming ***on earth*** (*Matt 6:10*) for the nation Israel and “*the gospel of the grace of God*” for “*the body of Christ*” whose “***citizenship is in heaven***” (*Philip 3:20*). These then are two differing gospels, having two differing eternal outcomes.
3. Note the differences between the “*dispensation of law*” and “*the dispensation of the grace of God.*” Paul writes this to “*the body of Christ.*” ***Romans 6:14 ...you are not under law, but under grace.***

How to Approach the Bible

Noting these God ordained changes that have occurred with the passage of time is why the Apostle refers to the passage of time in "... *the faith which should afterward be revealed*" *Galatians 3:23*. Paul also declares that our Lord "*gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time*," and Paul adds this, "*whereunto I am ordained a preacher and an apostle*" (*I Tim. 2:6-7*).

Paul refers to the details of the gospel he preached in the context of the passage of "*time*." Comparing Romans 3:21 and 26 (below) where Paul uses the terms "*But now*" and "*the present time*." This indicates how this time element is emphasized in Pauline Scripture to help us to better note the significant changes we see by Paul's "*gospel of the grace of God*" (*Acts 20:24*).

Romans 3:21 (NIV) But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.

Romans 3:26 (NIV) he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

It is only after discussing the function of the Law in Rom 3:19-20 that the Apostle Paul declares: "*But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested...*" Then in verse 26 Paul states this it is God's purpose "*To declare, I say, at this time His (Christ's) righteousness; that He (God) might be just and the Justifier of him that believeth in (trusts, clings to, and relies upon) Jesus.*"

Part 4 of 24 – An Agreed Change between “The Twelve” Apostles & the Apostle Paul

Here below, in Galatians 2, we see an account wherein the Apostle Paul describes his second journey to see the Jerusalem church leaders, some fourteen years following his first visit to see Peter. He there told the twelve Apostles and elders about the good news of “*that gospel*,” which had been revealed and committed to him directly from the ascended Lord Jesus (Gal 1:12) and that he preached to the Gentiles.

“And I (Paul) went up by revelation and communicated unto them that gospel which I (Paul) preach among the gentiles, but privately to them which were of reputation, lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain... (Gal. 2:2AMP)

Why would Paul refer to “*that gospel*” which I preach among the Gentiles” unless Paul’s gospel was in some significant way *different* from the gospel that Peter and “the twelve” were preaching principally to and among “the Circumcision” (Gal 2:8)?

In that meeting, as noted here above (see also Acts 15); Peter, James, and John promised publicly to restrict or confine their ministry the Circumcision, while they loosed Paul to go to the Gentiles with his “*gospel of the grace of God*.” This is significant change in view of the fact that “the twelve,” not Paul, had originally been sent by Jesus into “*all the world...unto all nations*” (Matt24:14).

And when James, Cephas [Peter] and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me (Paul) and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship, that we should go unto the heathen [Gentiles, nations], and they unto the Circumcision [Israel]” (Gal. 2:9 AMP).

So, upon recognizing Paul’s unique ministry and unique gospel message of *grace for the Gentiles*, Peter acted to “bind” or limit the preaching of “*the gospel of the kingdom*” that the Twelve had been given by Jesus for “*the circumcision (Jews)*.” Peter used “the keys” he had been given by Jesus to “bind” their ministry on earth, and he “loosed” Paul to take his unique gospel message of pure grace to the Gentiles. This was according to the authority Jesus had given to Peter, as noted Matt 16:19.

A Question?

Since the Twelve had now limited their message of “*the gospel of the kingdom*” to Israel, were they now out of the will of God in making this decision? By no means. Subsequent revelation proves that they were all very much in the will of God. You see, with Israel’s rejection of Christ, God ushered in a new heretofore hidden program called “*the dispensation of the grace of God*,” which he revealed first to Paul, for us today.

Ephesians 3:1-2 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: Colossians 1:25 Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God;

In the light of these Scriptures it is difficult to understand how anyone could argue that Paul’s ministry was merely a perpetuation of that of “the twelve,” or that “*the gospel of the kingdom*” and “*the gospel of the grace of God*” (Acts 20:24) are the same gospel. They are two distinct gospel messages for two different peoples, having two different outcomes.

If the above passage teaches anything clearly, it teaches the unique character of Paul’s apostleship and message. The Apostle devotes almost two chapters of his letter to the Galatians to **the fact that he had not received his message from the twelve**, but rather **he communicated**

How to Approach the Bible

it to “*the twelve*” as “*that gospel which I preach.*” Below Paul tells the Galatians how he received the gospel he preached.

Galatians 1:11-12 But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. ¹² For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.

In Gal 2:2 and 9 (above) Paul stresses the fact that “the Twelve” who had first been sent to all nations “*beginning at Jerusalem,*” had now, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, **agreed to turn over their Gentile ministry to Paul** that he might proclaim “*the gospel of the grace of God,*” far and wide, as he later did.

Ephesians 2:8-9 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: ⁹ Not of works, lest any man should boast.

Under Paul’s gospel teaching we see the grace of Christ’s cross is the basis of our justification, freely given.

Romans 3:24 Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:

Part 5 of 24 – Why is the Church Today So Impotent?

If we will be honest we must admit that the church today is impotent and is seemingly unable to affect the world. Christianity has become a laughing stock in the eyes of the world. The world looks at the so-called TV evangelists who extort money to “*keep the gospel on the air*” when in fact we hear very little of anything resembling the “*gospel of the grace of God*” from them. We either hear “*come and get your blessing*” as they quote promises that God made to Israel or “*the Law*” that God gave to Israel, or a mixture of both.

This pitiful condition of the church at large today contradicts the facts we find clearly delineated in Paul’s epistles wherein he makes powerful proclamations of the victory that is **already** ours, in Christ (2Cor 2:14). Paul says “*the body of Christ*” **already** stands “*holy and blameless...in Christ*” (Eph 1:4) and “*the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ... hath blessed us (already) with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:*” (Eph 1:3). While most Christians seek God by praying for something from God; power, grace, peace, love, etc., Paul says “*the faithful in Christ*” **already** have all these things in the person and indwelling Christ. Paul says we have need of nothing since “*ye are complete in Him (Christ)*” (Col. 2:9-10). “*All*” is in Christ who “*indwells*” the believer’s spirit as their “*all*” (Col. 1:27, 1Cor. 6:17, Col 3:11b).

There is a fundamental reason why the Christian church as we see it today is so spiritually bankrupt, impotent and ignorant of the significance of these Pauline truths noted above. It is ignorance of the Scriptures “*rightly divided*” and *properly interpreted* that has made the church so poor.

Paul said “*faith cometh by... hearing the word of God*”; that assumes hearing the word properly interpreted. We can observe that there are many Christians who live without the faith by which they may apprehend all the riches and security that is their rightful inheritance in Christ. We can only conclude then that this is so only because...**they have yet to “hear (the truth of) the word of God” clearly delineated.**

Having faith or not, God is faithful and He still working within the hearts of every true seeker who desires to know Him and the truth for them today as members of “*the body of Christ.*” God desires that we come to an intelligent understanding of His word that can only be understood as we “*rightly divide*” His written word in study. God has equipped every human with the faculties of mind and a human spirit such as necessary for us to receive divine revelation and truth by His Spirit.

- Are the Pauline statements that I’ve recorded above and below concerning our enriched position “in Christ” true?
- Are these Pauline statements parts of the God-breathed written word given by God to teach and to sustain the “*church, which is His body*” today?
- Are we to believe Paul’s words that he writes to the members of “*the church, which is His body,*” claiming them to be effective “*now*” under “*the dispensation of the grace of God*”?

If so, then why do we find so many Christians praying for what Paul says they **already possess “in Christ?”**

- Many seek **wisdom**. Yet Paul says “**Christ has (already) been made wisdom unto us**” (1Cor 1:30). Note the past tense “*Christ has been made wisdom unto us*”
- Many seek **holiness**. Yet Paul says “*may the God of peace sanctify you*” (1Thes 5:23). Thus, **God is seen as our sanctifier who has already made us to stand holy and blameless “in Christ”** (Eph 1:3-4).

How to Approach the Bible

- Many seek to **work for Him**. Yet, Paul says *first* “***it is God who worketh in you***” (*Philip 2:13*). God is the one who is at work in us. Our one work is to believe, as in trust in Him, and cling to Him (John 6:19).
- Many seek **peace**. Yet, Paul says “***Now the Lord of peace himself give you peace always by all means. The Lord be (is) with you all.***” (*2Thes 3:16*). Since **we have Christ in us, we already have peace resident within us all the time**.
- Many seek **victory**. Yet, Paul says “***we are more than conquerors through Him***” (*Rom 8:37*).

Something keeps the church at large from absorbing the knowledge of the rich truths that concern the members of “*the body of Christ*.” It should become obvious that the “something” that keeps us from this truth is... **a resistance to acknowledging Paul’s unique gospel and message for “*the body of Christ*”** as being separate, distinct, and **DIFFERENT** from the message that Jesus of Nazareth gave “*the twelve*” Apostles.

Paul tells us that he is “**THE** Apostle” to the Gentiles in several verses that he has written to “*the church, which is His body*.” ***Romans 11:13 (KJV) For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles...***

The poor condition we see among “*the church*” today is mostly due to ignorance of the truth. That ignorance springs from that fact that many have been fed and adopted Bible interpretations by spiritualizing the Bible in such a way that it prohibits the members of “*the body of Christ*” from seeing the sufficiency of Christ and His cross as presented in Paul’s epistles.

Most incorrectly tend to mix together everything that God says in the Bible to Israel and “*the body of Christ*” as though it is all spoken to us for today. They then they try to apply it, as though every word in the Bible is written to and concerns “*the body of Christ*.” This of course is simply not true since about 80% of the Bible is about the nation Israel, **not** about the members of “*the church, which is his body*.” We must note that the Bible mostly records that which concerns the nation of Israel; with the promises, prophecy, and description of the ultimate fulfillment of those prophecies for “*Abraham’s seed*.” These prophecies are mostly still yet to be fulfilled. Paul tells us that God’s program for Israel has been interrupted, set aside for a time, “***until the time of the Gentiles be fulfilled (Rom. 11:25)***.” Paul, as our Apostle, speaks to us concerning the truth for “*the body of Christ*” today, during this period that the nation Israel has been set aside.

A most common error among Christians over the past many years is the method they use to approach the Bible. They take the liberty of “***spiritualizing the Bible***.” They attempt to interpret the Bible by applying everything written as though it concerned “*the body of Christ*,” though it was written mostly concerning Israel. “*Spiritualizing the Bible*” has become the most common method among Christians, used today to interpret and even develop doctrines as though it were truth for “*the body of Christ*.” Paul says of this “***they teach for doctrine the commandments of men***” (*Titus 1:14*).

Paul’s thirteen epistles are foundational to the gospel of “*the grace of God*.” While the whole Bible is written for our learning, these thirteen epistles, from **Romans to Philemon**, are not to be mixed with the remainder of the Bible as the basis for faith and living for “*the body of Christ*.” Otherwise, by mixing the whole Bible together, we will have a terrible time dealing with the resultant contradictions and confusion.

Apart from rightly dividing the word as prescribed by Paul, how else could we reconcile a **salvation that requires faith and works** (*James 2:20*) with a **salvation that Paul says is available to us today “*by grace through faith that is not of works*,”** wherein the believer is simply counted as righteous “*by faith*.”

How to Approach the Bible

Now consider and compare these words of James to “*the lost Sheep of the house of Israel*” with those of Paul to the members of “*the body of Christ*” at Ephesus.

James here writes “to the lost Sheep of the House of Israel” (James 1:1):

James 2:20 *But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? James 2:26 (KJV) For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.*

Paul here writes to the members of “*the body of Christ*” at Ephesus:

Eph 2:8-9 *For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: ⁹ Not of works, lest any man should boast.*

Romans 11:6 *And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace...*

Part 6 of 24 – The Danger of “Spiritualizing” the Bible

Most commonly, Christians tend to “spiritualize” the Bible today by taking that which concerns Israel as though it *concerns* and applies also to “*the body of Christ*.” They thereby marginalize the truth for today and miss out on the power that is in the truth that applies to us today. They miss out because when they mix the Law, which belongs to Israel, with the grace that God has provided for us today, it is like leavening the whole loaf of great truth for “*the body of Christ*” – it makes Paul’s “*gospel of the grace of God*” to become “*of no effect*” (Gal 5:4). “Spiritualizing” the Bible is very dangerous; it has corrupted the truth, making havoc of proper Biblical interpretation of the Bible. It has essentially watered down and emasculated the Bible of the power of the truths of the faith as revealed to the Apostle Paul for “*the body of Christ*” today. Such mixture corrupts. Only the unadulterated truth has the power God intended for us.

These truths were revealed to and through Paul, “*the Apostle to the Gentiles*,” for this age and time called “*the dispensation of the grace of God*” (Eph 3:2). The result of “spiritualizing” the Bible is to have Christians who are weak in “*the faith*” (2Cor 13:5). Paul says, those who “spiritualize” the Bible by attending to matters of the Law are veiled to the truth by mixing the truth of God’s unmerited favor for today with the things of the dispensation of “*the Law*” that came by Moses (2Cor 3:15). They cannot see clearly to comprehend, and appreciate the truths of the faith in such a way that it makes them to know and enjoy the security and riches they already possess “*in Christ*,” and by Christ’s life indwelling their spirit. Ignorant of the truth, they keep asking God to bless them, asking for what they already have. This is not a sign of humility, its evidence of their ignorance of the truth. Yet Paul says, when their heart is turned from Moses (the Law) the “*veil will be taken away*,” and they will see the truth (2Cor 3:16).

The Bible makes clear the fact that the secret of all God’s good news, victory, and security for believers is centered in Christ’s cross of Calvary. While it was prophesied that the Messiah would come to Israel and die a horrible death, the meaning and purpose of His death was not revealed to be explained until it was first revealed to the Apostle Paul in order to complete God’s revelation for us today. ***Colossians 1:25 (Darby) of which I (Paul) became minister, according to the dispensation of God which [is] given me towards you to complete the word of God***.

If we do as so many Christians have done, that is set aside Paul’s writings of his revelation of the sufficiency of the cross in dealing with every situation of life; we then miss out on the fulness of the benefits of the cross.

The twelve Apostles never knew these truths until it was first revealed to Paul. We should note that at Pentecost the Apostle Peter never preached *redemption by the blood of Christ*. Peter, rather than rejoice in the cross, scolded the Jews for killing “*the Prince of life*” (Acts 3:15). Before that time Peter had only known of animal sacrifices as the remedy for sins, to bring salvation, but then in early Acts he preached “*repent and be (water) baptized for the remission of sins*” as Jesus of Nazareth had instructed him to preach. Peter, at that time, knew nothing of the true purpose and sufficiency of the cross and blood of Christ. Peter at that time had no idea of the meaning and significance of Christ’s cross until Peter learned it from the Apostle Paul. We can deduce this from Peter’s own words in 2Peter 3:14-16.

While it was prophesied that the Messiah would die a horrible death, it was not until several years after the crucifixion that “*the preaching of the cross*” would become widely proclaimed, and that was by Paul, who at the time of the cross was yet to be converted. Paul’s message of the cross is clear, as he writes of it most explicitly in Romans.

We need to see that the many ***prophesies*** that belong to Israel are not enough to bring full “*knowledge of the truth*” that is for us today. The “*knowledge of the truth*” for today came via

How to Approach the Bible

the ascended celestial Christ who descended from Heaven as “*the Spirit of truth.*” Christ then descended for the express purpose of revealing this critical truth to the newly saved Saul Paulus of Tarsus (later called Paul) in the form of “*the gospel (good news) of the grace of God*” (1Cor.1:18; Acts 20:24).

The proclamation of “the gospel of the grace of God” is centered upon the revelation of “*the mystery,*” which was the plan that God formerly had kept secret. **Romans 16:25 (KJV)** *Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began,*

Paul proclaimed God’s super-abounding unadulterated grace gospel through Christ’s cross “*according to the revelation of the mystery*” – it is of a **grace that is not mixed with law and works at all.** That grace is based solely upon the sufficiency of Christ’s self-offering at the cross.

Paul’s epistles tell us “*we have redemption through His (Christ’s) blood*” (Eph.1:7),

- We are “*justified by His blood*” (Rom.5:9),
- “*reconciled to God by the death of His Son*” (Rom.5:10),
- “*made nigh by the blood of Christ*” (Eph.2:13),
- And we are “*made the righteousness of God in Him*” because “*God hath made Him to be sin for us*” (2Cor.5:21).

When we spiritualize the Bible we tend to mix the things belonging to Israel with the things that belong to “*the body of Christ.*” It was Paul who received the “pure” grace gospel for “*the body of Christ.*” The knowledge of sin comes by the law (Rom 3:20); yet not one ounce of benefit comes from grace when it is mixed with “*the works of the law*” (Gal 2:16). In fact, attempting to keep the Law makes grace to be “*of no effect*” (Gal 5:4). Thankfully, “*the body of Christ*” is freed from the Law that was given only to the people of Israel (Rom 6:14). **Romans 9:4 (KJV)** *Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises;*

Paul calls his gospel message “*the preaching of the cross.*”

- The “covenant” of the Law was abolished by the cross. **Colossians 2:14** *Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross;*
- Now “*ye are not under the law, but under grace (Rom 6:14b).*”
- The curse of the Law was removed by the cross when Christ fulfilled it. **Galatians 3:13a** *Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us...*
- Now all believers, Jew and Gentile, in the body of Christ are “*reconciled to God in one body by the cross.*” **Ephesians 2:16** *And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby:*

Paul says how thankful we should be “*for His unspeakable gift*” (2Cor 9:15). We see the cross as God’s full reply to Satan’s work. At first glance it had appeared that the cross was Satan’s greatest triumph, but Satan did not know “*the mystery*” (1Cor 2:7-8), the secret plan of God that had “*been kept secret since the word began*” (Rom 16:25). Paul says, had he (Satan) known “*the mystery*” he would not have crucified the Lord.

1 Corinthians 2:7-8 *But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: ⁸ Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.*

How to Approach the Bible

That “*mystery*” revealed to Paul for us, in its simplest personal form, is defined here as “...*Christ in you (individually) the hope of glory*”

Colossians 1:26-27 Even *the mystery (musterion, secret plan) 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:*

The fruit of the cross is Christ’s literal “*spirit of life*” to be deposited into the believer’s human spirit (1Cor 6:17; Col 1:27). This is the key to the full salvation of God that includes victory for the Christian in his daily life. The indwelling of Christ’s resurrection life is the basis upon which we have already been “*blessed with all spiritual blessing in Christ*” (Eph 1:3).

Part 7 of 24 – Hermeneutics – How We Interpret the Bible

Theologians use the word “*hermeneutics*” to mean “*the method of interpretation*” of the Bible. If we are going to study the Bible in order to determine what applies to us today, relationally and doctrinally, the first question we should consider in our approach to our study is this; should the Bible be interpreted “*literally*,” or may we take the liberty to “*spiritualize the Bible*” through **allegory** whenever we think we see an allegory?

The *allegorized* approach originally arose out of a need to reconcile Biblical teachings of the church at that time with the teachings of the Greek Gnostics as the church was coming under criticism and persecution from Greek philosophers. The Greek philosophy underlying Alexandrian thinking believed the God of Judaism was absurd and unreliable. Both Clemens and Origen (c. 150-c. 215), as early church fathers, wrote about Christian doctrine and reacted to this Greek intrusion. Origen was an [early Christian](#) scholar, [theologian](#), and one of the most distinguished of the early [fathers](#) of the [Christian Church](#). Taking the *allegorical interpretation* allowed Origen and Clemens to use the Old Testament in an *abstract way* that disregarded the seeming absurdities of the Jewish *God who “walked in gardens” and “spoke on mountains.”* Clement and Origen advocated the approach of *allegorizing the Bible*, even though Jesus Himself referred to the Old Testament *literally*. It seems the church to this day has not been able to completely shake their **negative influence** of embracing *spiritualized allegory* ever since. This approach has given rise to the many non-Biblical beliefs that have been adopted and past on by the Roman Catholic Church. Many protestant believers today also have adopted this approach, doing great harm to “the faith.” Such *spiritualizing of the Bible* has also given place to a gross error called “replacement theology,” whereby some Christian teachers believe “*the body of Christ*” is something they call “spiritual Israel,” the new real Israel; where all that was said of Israel is to apply to “*the church, which is His body*” today. The Christian modernism we see among some Pentecostals and Fundamentalist today is rooted in “spiritualizing the Bible,” such that they are essentially saying the Bible does not mean what it says. Spiritualizing the Bible can lead to all types of grave errors.

If spiritualizing is the means by which you have come to perceive Bible, then it likely it will be hard for you to see it any other way without help and the courage to be different. I trust that this study may help you to see the folly of thinking that we have freedom to *spiritualize* the Bible as much as we want. You should be able to see that spiritualizing the Bible opens us to as many interpretations as there are people to have them – everyone can essentially write their own Bible. It's almost as if such a one has been **handicapped** when they read the Bible. Spiritualizing through allegory becomes a risky method of interpretation when we let it contradict truth. Some spiritualize trying to make law and grace fit together, even though they are mutually exclusive to one another. Such spiritualizing leads to inconsistency, thus keeping believers from having the secure, worry-free life that God intended for believers to enjoy as they come to know the unadulterated truths applying to them in this day of “*the dispensation of the grace of God.*” God has been very precise in guiding the writing of His book, the Bible. He will reveal truth for today to us if we approach the Bible in God’s prescribed way; that is to use the method prescribed by Paul, which is to “*rightly divide the word of truth.*”

In “*rightly dividing the word of truth,*” there is a set of very easy to follow **guidelines** for understanding the Bible as it was intended. Few people know and or apply these study principles. The first key is to view the Bible *literally*. Literal is the proper and “normal method” used to interpret what the Bible says. We can see that this is true as we consider the following facts and logic concerning the literal method of interpretation.

How to Approach the Bible

1. Literal is the way average people normally communicate. When we say “*I am giving this gift to you.*” it does not mean I am giving this gift to someone else. Yet, this is exactly what many Christians, Christian Bible teachers, and preachers do with the Bible. They apply and take that which was said to one party (*i.e., the Law given to Israel*) and apply it to another party to whom it was **not** spoken (*i.e., “the body of Christ”*).
2. Why abandon the **literal** method when we have examples that demonstrate that the Bible has consistently been **literally** fulfilled?

E.g., The Bible specifically and literally tells us exactly where Jesus was to be born; He would be born to a virgin, how He would suffer and die, soldiers would gamble for His garments, plus 100 other points of fact. Though seemingly unbelievable, all of these were fulfilled as prophesied - literally; we should not let our lack of faith limit God’s ability or willingness to fulfill His promises **literally**. We need not to spiritualize, or make up false theories such as we see promulgated on the TV’s History channel to try and explain the miraculous occurrences we find Bible.

Having said all this, the “*literal*” method of interpretation does not preclude the **proper use of metaphor, figures, allegory, or symbolism**. When I say “*literal interpretation*” is the proper method of interpretation I do not mean that when the text clearly indicates a **parable, allegory, or a figure of speech** is involved, that we are to ignore those indicators to be slavishly literal. The “*literal interpretation*” just means that we do not *take license* to treat anything non-literally without those indicators being present. We do not try to spiritualize because we cannot make sense of something any other way. So, I use “*literal interpretation*” to mean a “**primarily literal,**” plain sense, natural reading in contrast to the common “*primarily symbolic*” or “*spiritualized*” reading approach that so many use today.

The Apostle Paul himself uses allegory and Paul even identifies it as **allegory** several times in his writings. E.g., Paul’s *allegorizes Sarah* as representing “grace” and (H)Agar representing “the law.” ***Galatians 4:24 Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is (H)Agar.***

My rule of thumb regarding how I view allegory is this. **We should not use metaphors, figures, symbolism, and allegory to manufacture or support doctrinal truth that would be contrary to the clear doctrinal truths of “the dispensation of the grace of God” that were given to Paul and clearly delineated in his writing for “the body of Christ.”**

Biblical metaphors, figures, symbolisms, and allegories are mechanisms used to convey and enlarge our understanding of a **literal truth**, but **not to establish or make doctrine**. Allegory is a form of **extended metaphor**, in which objects, persons, and actions in a narrative, are equated with the meanings that lie outside the narrative itself.

All through the Old Testament **the cross is seen in allegory**, but it is only dimly seen. Though a hundred historical characters and the Levitical sacrifices and rituals may be seen as types and shadows of the reality of the Christ and His finished work, **not once does the Old Testament state this clearly**. The silence is profound. The clearest Old Testament prophecy of Christ’s death is seen in Isaiah 53, yet still it does not even specify who the Sufferer would be.

Paul is the first one to reveal the detail of the cross for “*the body of Christ.*” Peter and the Twelve only had the Old Testament writings during their ministry to Israel. While Peter only scolded the Jews for killing the Prince of life (Acts 3:15), **it is not until the Apostle Paul** received revelation directly from the ascended Christ (Eph 3:3) that we have what is called “*the preaching of the cross*” (1Cor 1:18) as “*the power of God unto salvation*” (Heb 9:28). By Paul’s

How to Approach the Bible

great message we see that our Lord is no longer seen as the **Victim** in being “killed,” but rather as **the Victor**; not merely a Victor after death, or Victor over death, but as **Victor “in” His death**. His death itself is seen as His greatest triumph; both paying for the sins of the world and freeing the believer from the power of Sin as a nature. “...*after He had offered one sacrifice for sins (He) sat down... for by one offering He hath perfected forever them that are sanctified*” Heb. 10:12,14. Now we can look back to see the many metaphorical types and shadows of these truths that Christ has given us to be seen clearly through Paul’s straightforward writings. Only now can we enjoy the enlarged view of these very real doctrinal Pauline truths by seeing these Old Testament allegorical shadows and types; but again I say we do not make doctrine from the shadows and types.

Here are some examples of proper Biblical allegory of Christ’s cross that only become crystal clear to us by the knowledge we gain from Paul’s *straightforward* writings.

- In the Old Testament animal blood sacrifices were made to only “**cover**” the sins of the people of Israel. These blood sacrifices were a proper Biblical *allegorical* reference to Jesus as “*the lamb of God*.” The OT allegory did not give us the complete picture because by Paul’s writing we see something more – Christ’s blood now purges or takes away sins (Heb 10:2-4). It is only by Paul’s teachings that we now have a clear view of Jesus Himself as the real or literal redeeming “*lamb of God*” whose blood was shed to pay for all sins, to redeem and justify anyone who believes this to receive Him.
- Jesus Himself is also literally viewed as the real “*serpent lifted up*” (John 3:14) bearing our sins and also dying as our serpentine “*old man*” (Rom 6:6, 7:4). Jesus reveals Himself “*lifted up*” to be the reality of the brazen serpent “*lifted up*” on Moses rod (Numbers 20). In that account the Israelites were bitten by serpents and dying, but they were healed when they looked upon the brass serpent “*lifted up*.” Yet, it is only by Paul’s teachings that we learn the full clear meaning in Romans 6, 7, 8.
- Jesus Himself allegorized again in John 11:24. There Jesus views Himself as the literal “*seed*,” as the real “*grain of wheat*” that was to fall into the ground and die in order to bring “*forth much fruit*” of His life. It is only by Paul’s teachings that we learn that He died and we are the living fruit of His death, having His resurrection life in us (see Rom 6:4, 7:4, Col 1:27, Christ the seed Gal 3:16).

These truths are clearly stated by Paul, but these allegories above are all very helpful. They are given to enlarge our view, helping us to see Christ as the literal reality of each aspect of the Pauline truths that they enlarge.

Part 8 of 24 – The Case the “Literal” Interpretation of the Bible

The noted theologian Charles Ryrie, author of the “Ryrie Study Bible,” begins his discussion of *literal Bible interpretation* by referring to Bernard Ramm, who wrote the standard hermeneutics textbooks of his day.

“Dispensationalists claim that their principle of hermeneutics is that of literal interpretation. This means interpretation which gives to every word the same meaning it would have in normal usage, whether employed in writing, speaking or thinking.”

The *literal* means of interpretation is sometimes called the principle of “*grammatical-historical interpretation*” since the meaning of each word is determined by grammatical and historical considerations. The principle might also be called “*normal interpretation*” since *the literal meaning of words* is the *normal approach* to their understanding in all languages. It might also be designated “*plain interpretation*.”

As I wrote in the last installment, nobody should receive the mistaken notion that the literal principle rules out *figures of speech*. It does not. Biblical *symbols, figures of speech, types, and allegories* may still be appreciated but they are all to be interpreted plainly and they are in no way contrary to literal interpretation. After all, the very existence of any meaning for a figure of speech depends upon **the reality of the literal meaning** of the terms involved. Figures of speech are used in order to make the meaning plainer. Figures of speech are an aid to help convey the **literal, normal, or plain meaning** to the reader. One might read the book “The Study of Types” by Ada R. Habershon to be enriched by learning of many of the legitimate Old Testament types and shadows. *Colossians 2:17 (KJV) Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body (reality) is of Christ.*

“*Spiritualizing*” the Bible is the means so many Christians embrace today. By “*Spiritualizing*” the Bible there can be as many different interpretations as the number of people to do the spiritualizing. Everybody has an opinion. But below we see that Peter says “*no prophecy of Scripture is of private interpretation.*” *2 Peter 1:20-21 (AMP) ¹Yet] first [you must] understand this, that no prophecy of Scripture is [a matter] of any personal or private or special interpretation (loosening, solving). ²¹ For no prophecy ever originated because some man willed it [to do so—it never came by human impulse], but men spoke from God who were borne along (moved and impelled) by the Holy Spirit.*

There is only a God-ordained interpretation for Scripture and it is not to be variously interpreted by each of us to suit ourselves. We may not all see God’s truth at same time, and not all may see it fully at once, since truth is often multi-layered, nevertheless, there is only the proper interpretation of truth and it may only be seen through revelation we may have by the “*Spirit of truth*” (*John 16:13*).

Here again I will state the most common example of the error of “spiritualizing the Bible.”

It has been a GREAT ERROR to say that which is written to, of, and concerning Israel, is also said to, of, and concerning “the church, which is the body of Christ.”

Erroneously presuming that what is said of Israel is also said of “*the church which is His body*,” many Christians today then proceed to pilfer and appropriate the positive promises of blessing that God has made to Israel. Yet of course they are not so attentive to take and preach the curses that were also promised to Israel. They ignore the God-promised consequences *if* Israel failed the “*if thou*” conditional requirements placed upon Israel by God. Note below some of the “*if thou*” requirements that God gave Israel – *pro and con*.

How to Approach the Bible

Deuteronomy 28:9 (KJV) *The LORD shall establish thee an holy people unto himself, as he hath sworn unto thee, if thou shalt keep the commandments of the LORD thy God, and walk in his ways.*

Deuteronomy 28:15 (KJV) *But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee:*

In contrast to Israel's conditional basis of blessing under the dispensation of "the Law", all the **blessings for "the body of Christ" under grace are available right now under "the dispensation of the grace of God," to anyone who simply believes.** There are no contingent requirements so there are no "if thou" conditions attached to them. We only have to "believe" in order to receive all that Christ has done for us. We can begin with this; **Acts 16:31... Believe on (trust in) the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved...** Faith is the one basis of all that we may receive of the Lord today.

Consider also the command for Israel to stone to death anyone who does not keep the Sabbath. **Exodus 31:15** *Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD: whosoever doeth any work in the sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death.* Yet this stoning is not practiced by the Christians today who seem to believe that which was spoken to Israel is spoken to "the church which is his body," for them to embrace and practice.

The fact and truth is that Paul does address the Sabbath in His writing to "the body of Christ" in Colosse. Though the Sabbath is one of the Ten Commandments given to Israel, we should note that in Colossians 2:16 Paul tells them, and also we who today are under "the dispensation of the grace of God," **we should NOT be concerned for keeping the dietary laws or the Sabbath.** **Colossians 2:16** *Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: This would be heresy to a Jew, but it is **truth for today**, under "the dispensation of the grace of God" for "the body of Christ."*

Most know the Old Testament primarily concerns Israel, but we need also to see that the instruction and practices noted in the four Gospels and the early Acts period also belongs to Israel only. The issues we see in the Gospels and the early Acts period are not a pattern for "the body of Christ." Our Bibles have improperly assigned the term New Testament to the books that begin with Matthew. Jesus of Nazareth was born "under the (dispensation of) the Law" (Gal 4:4), which was still in force as it was in the Old Testament. Actually, the "New Testament" could not have occurred at least until **after** the death of the testator – Jesus. **Hebrews 9:16-17 (KJV)** *For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. ¹⁷ For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth.*

The early Acts period concerns Israel, during what Paul calls "time past" (Gal 1:13, Eph 2:11), a time prior to "the dispensation of the grace of God." "Time past" was when the Jews were still the object of God's working and dealing under the Law and the Gentiles were "without hope and without God" (Eph 2:12). The early Acts period was all about Israel. It was not about "the body of Christ." Peter, on the day of Pentecost addressed "Ye men of Israel" (Acts 2:22, 36, 3:12). The early Acts period was a time when the Messianic Jewish Church (not "the body of Christ") was expecting the long promised Kingdom to come to earth and Jesus' return as King (Acts 3:19). In the Gospels Jesus had said the kingdom was "at hand"; then the twelve Apostles, in the early Acts period, actually offered the Kingdom if the nation Israel would repent and receive Christ (Acts 3:20). Obviously they did not. The early Acts period ended in Acts 7 with the stoning of Stephen, and the call and salvation of Paul in Acts 9. Paul was to introduce an entirely new, formerly hidden, dispensation of the pure grace of God that "**had been kept secret**

since the world began.” Romans 16:25 (KJV) Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my (Paul’s) gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began.

I’ve heard Christians say they want to do as Jesus taught and instructed the disciples in the Gospels; or they say they would like to go back to the church as it was in the days of the so-called “early church,” as seen early in the book of Acts. Then I must ask why won’t they follow Jesus’ instructions in the Gospels as being for them? I don’t see too many Christians “*taking all they have and giving it to the poor*” as Jesus instructed the rich young ruler in Matt 19:21. I don’t see many Christians who today are willing to live “*having all things in common*” (Acts 4:32) as they did in the time of the so-called early church. I can only reason that they are willing to pick and choose what dispensational relationships they desire to live by – they want to keep Israel’s promises of blessing for their selves, but they shun the promises of curses; or they ignore the difficult practices of the early Messianic Jewish Church in Jerusalem.

Once we “rightly divide the word” we will note that what we see in the early Acts period and in the so-called Gospels and the early Acts period does not apply to us at all today because the age has changed. Today, relationship with God has changed from “Israel only” and being “**Law based,**” to being “**grace based**” for every person who believes to receive salvation “*by grace, through faith, not of works*” (Eph 2:8-9).

Have you ever noticed that when the age had changed, after Paul was saved and given the new “*gospel of the grace of God,*” those Jews in Judea who in early Acts period “*had all things in common,*” wound up in famine, They received relief from those who were first to be called “*Christians,*” at Antioch, through Paul and Barnabas’ ministry (Acts 11:30). “*Having all things in common*” no longer worked because the dispensational age had changed from the near return of the Messiah. God’s focus had turned away from Israel, who was now set aside (Rom 11:25). God’s focus turned to “*the body of Christ*” consisting of some Jews, but predominantly the Gentiles. Jew and Gentile were then to be counted as “*neither Jew nor Gentile...for all are one in Christ*” (Gal 3:28), each now standing on an equal footing in “*one body*” (Eph 2:16).

The positive promises God has made to Abraham and his seed, Israel, are not for “*the church which is His body.*” i.e., the promised Kingdom on earth concerns Israel (Matt 6:10, Luke 11:2). Rather, we who are of “*the body of Christ*” are promised the destiny of heaven as our eternal home, the place of our citizenship. **Philippians 3:20 (NASB) For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.**

Thus we see that there are great differences between God’s prophesied program for Israel and God’s hidden, eternally planned, program for “*the church which is His body*” that is now revealed (Eph 3:5). We should be very careful to not mix the truth concerning one dispensation with the truth concerning another dispensation. Therefore, when in the Bible God and/or His messengers are addressing Israel, they then are addressing Israel ONLY – not “*the body of Christ.*” “*The body of Christ*” has its own instruction from Paul from its own Apostle, Paul. **I Corinthians 14:37 (KJV) If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I (Paul) write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.** **Romans 2:16 (KJV) In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my (Paul’s) gospel.**

Part 9 of 24 – The Unique Call & Ministry of Paul the Apostle

The conversion of Saul of Tarsus was one of the great unique events in the Bible. Saul loathed the very name of Christ. He blasphemed Jesus and caused others to be tortured so as to compel them to blaspheme that holy name. He led his nation and the world in rebellion against the resurrected, glorified Christ - the world which had already disowned and crucified the lowly Jesus.

In Act 5:34-39 we see that Gamaliel, a “*doctor of the law,*” cautioned the council of Pharisees; and Saul must have been there. His warning came true, because as Paul went forth persecuting the Messianic Jewish Church, he soon found himself “*fighting against God*” (5:39). Yet, as Saul went to Damascus, still “*breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord*” (Acts 9:1), God did a wonderful thing. Rather than crush the leader of the world's rebellion, He saved him. Christ broke through the heavens, as it were, to His greatest enemy on earth. As a result Saul's rebellious spirit was broken; in one moment the pitiless persecutor became a docile and devoted follower of Christ.

More than this, Saul of Tarsus the persecutor became Paul the Apostle. The glorified Lord committed to Paul “*the dispensation of the grace of God*” (Eph. 3:2) and “*the gospel of the grace of God*” (Acts 20:24). Now he went everywhere proclaiming “*grace,*” telling men how God loved them, how Christ had come into the world and had gone to Calvary to pay man's debt of sin so that believing sinners might be “*saved by grace through faith, apart from works*” of the law (Gal 2:16, Eph 2:8-9).

Unlike Peter, who at Pentecost scolded the Jews for “*killing the Prince of life*” (Acts 3:15); Paul's does not blame anyone for the death of Christ. Rather, Paul presents the cross as the good news. Paul introduced the “*preaching of the cross.*” It declares that “*we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace*” (Eph. 1:7). It says that “*God hath concluded them all in unbelief that He might have mercy upon all*” (Rom. 11:32) and that “*where sin abounded, grace did much more abound*” (Rom. 5:20). Thus, the worst sinner may now believe and enjoy the consciousness of having their sins forgiven.

Now we must see who Paul was **not**. **Paul was not one of “the twelve Apostles.”**

Some Christians teach that after Judas the Lord's eleven remaining Apostles acted arbitrarily by choosing Matthias to take Judas' place. They teach that the eleven Apostles first chose two candidates and then asked God which of these two He would have to fill the vacant position. They say, “*Actually, Paul was God's choice for Judas' place*”; but this is not so. According to the Biblical record, Paul was not even qualified. The fact is that Matthias was God's choice per Jesus' instructions to “the eleven.” Let's now examine the facts.

1. The 12 Apostles, with Peter as their chief, had been given authority to act officially in Christ's absence (Matt.16:19; 18: 18, 19). They used that authority.
2. They acted upon the Scriptural declaration that another apostle should be chosen to fill Judas' place (Psa.109:8 as seen in Acts 1:20).
3. Their action was based upon many days of united prayer (Luke 24:49; cf. Acts 1:12-15), and when two candidates were found they prayed and left the final choice in the hands of God (Acts 1:24-26).
4. Probably only two (Matthias and Joseph Barsabas) were eligible. Only those could qualify who had followed Christ continuously from the day of His baptism by John until His ascension to heaven (see Acts 1:21, 22; Matt.19:28, “***Ye which have followed Me***”).
5. **Paul would not have been eligible**, for **he had not even seen Christ during His earthly ministry** (1Cor. 15:8). Paul was not converted until Acts 9, some 8 years after the cross.

How to Approach the Bible

6. The conclusive proof that the eleven acted in the will of God in this matter is found in the fact that the God-breathed Scripture clearly states that “*Matthias...was numbered with the eleven apostles*” (Acts 1:26) and that “*they were all filled with the holy spirit*” (Acts 2:4), indicating God’s approval. Men out of the will of God are not filled with the Holy Spirit.

These facts above stand in stark contrast to Paul, who was a Jewish Roman citizen. Not one Apostle came from Jerusalem. “The eleven” all came from Galilee in the north; while Judas came from Issachar (Iscaiot) in the south.

Paul clearly stands separate and distinct from “*the twelve.*” Paul tells us he is “***the Apostle to the Gentiles.***” Paul alone was given the Jesus’ commission to introduce the “*dispensation of grace of God,*” which applies to us to this day and it will continue until “the rapture of the body of Christ.” Paul clearly knew who he was and his place in God’s plan.

Romans 11:13 For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as ***I am the apostle of the Gentiles...***

Romans 15:16a That I (Paul) should be ***the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles...***

Ephesians 3:1-3 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;*** (secret plan of God) (as I wrote afore in few words...

As you search your Bible you will discover that the Apostle to the Gentiles, Paul, is God’s messenger to introduce (among other key doctrines) the following otherwise unheard of Bible terms and doctrines that belong to “*the dispensation of the grace of God*” (Eph 3:2), in which we live today.

1) The “***preaching of the cross***” (1Cor 1:18), introduced by Paul, is the power of God unto salvation. ***1 Corinthians 1:18*** For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.

2) “***The body of Christ***” (Eph 1:11-23) that consist of Jew and Gentile – they now are equally one “*in Christ,*” without distinction (Gal 3:28, “*neither Jew nor Greek...in Christ*”).

3) The “***ministry of reconciliation***” (2Cor 5:18-19) under Paul’s “*gospel of the grace of God,*” in contrast to the “Great Commission” Jesus gave to His Jewish disciples – to preach the “*gospel of the kingdom*” (Matt 24:14).

4) The “***rapture***” or the “***catching away***” (1Thes 4:17) of “*the church, which is His body*” (Eph 1:22-23).

Part 10 of 24 – The Apostle Paul is God’s Authority for the Body of Christ Today

Scripture proclaims Paul as the one authority that God has provided for the Gentiles; to guide “*the body of Christ*” to the truth for the people of God during “*the dispensation of the grace of God*” (Eph 3:1-2).

Romans 11:13 For I (Paul) *speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle* (apostolos, sent one) *of the Gentiles, I magnify* (doxazo, esteem glorious) *mine office:*

Here above Paul says he is **not** just **one of the apostles** to the Gentiles but rather Paul claims to be “*the apostle of the Gentiles*” saying also, “*I magnify mine office.*” In writing this Paul is not exalting himself; rather, he is acknowledging the importance of *his divinely appointed office and calling, and his ministry of the glorious gospel message of the pure grace of God*. That message was given to him directly from the ascended Christ (Gal 1:12), for the Gentiles (Eph 3:1-2). Paul repeatedly claims his apostleship in all these verses - *Romans 1:1; 11:13; 1 Corinthians 1:1, 9:1-2, 15:9; 2 Corinthians. 1:1, 12:12; Galatians 1:1; Ephesians 1:1; Colossians. 1:1; 1 Timothy. 1:1; 1, 2:7; 2 Timothy 1:1, 1:11; Titus 1:1.*

2Tim. 1:11 I (Paul) am appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles.

1 Tim. 2:7 Whereunto I am ordained a preacher, and an apostle, (I speak the truth in Christ, and lie not) a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and verity (truth).

Paul repeatedly calls the message that he received “*my gospel.*” Many Bible readers rebel against this seeming arrogance. Yet, I might ask, it is true? Wasn’t Paul given this gospel message for “*the body of Christ,*” according to the Biblical record? If one considers this a problem then I might ask, **why not also question the fact that God gave “the LAW” message to Moses for its delivery to Israel.** That Law message is actually referred to as “*the Law of Moses*” in 22 verses of the Bible. Note Moses claims of his ministry in these verses; they sound somewhat like Paul’s claims.

Deut. 4:1-2 ...*hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgments, which I (Moses) teach you, ...* ²*Ye shall not add unto the word which I (Moses) command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I (Moses) command you.*

1 Corinthians 14:37 If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I (Paul) write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.

Was this self-importance or self-exaltation on the part of Moses? Was Israel following a man when they obeyed Moses? No, this was Moses’ calling, just as Paul was also called to a unique ministry! Jesus acknowledged Moses authority as being yet in effect when He was on earth and gave this instruction when healed a Jew.

Mark 1:44 ... *go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing those things which Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.* To another Jesus said,

Matthew 8:4 ...*See thou tell no man; but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.*

Speaking to Ananias, the ascended and glorified Jesus now also proclaimed Paul’s unique calling. **Acts 9:15** *But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he (Saul/Paul) is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel:* Paul’s calling includes something astoundingly new. He was to bear the name of Christ to the Gentiles. From the call of Moses until the day of Paul’s calling, the Gentiles were stranger, outsiders, having no relationship with God. They were “*without hope and with God in the world*” (Eph

2:12). A major change had arrived. The dispensation was now about to change from *the Law exclusively toward Israel...* to...*grace for all on an equal basis* (Gal 3:28).

Moses was simply the man, the vessel, who God used to authoritatively deliver the **LAW** to Israel; it was for Israel alone. So it is with Paul, our Apostle. Paul brought to **“the church, which is His (Christ’s) body”** the message of pure grace for this day of **“the dispensation of the grace of God”** (Eph 3:1-4).

These verses note the authority that God gave to Paul.

Romans 2:16 *In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel.* **1 Cor. 14:37** *If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.*

Similar to Moses claims, Paul says we should follow him, as He follows Christ. **1 Cor. 11:1** **Be ye followers of me** (Paul), **even as I also am of Christ.** How did Paul follow Christ? He followed the indwelling Christ that was revealed to him (Gal 1:16), and Paul commends the members of **“the body of Christ”** to also follow or walk in union and accord with the indwelling **“Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.”** **Colossians 2:6 (KJV)** *As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him:* We’ve each received **“the Spirit of Christ”** (Rom 8:9) into us and we are to now walk in union and accord with Him. **Galatians 5:16 (KJV)** *This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.*

In Paul’s epistles he sets forth his appointed position as the deliverer of the “grace” gospel to the Gentiles. John 1:17 declares **“Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.”** In Corinthians 3:10 Paul says he is the one who **“laid the foundation”** of God’s **“building.”** That “building” is **“the body of Christ,”** God’s living temple **“made without hands,”** which Paul calls **“the church, which is His body”** (Eph 1:22b-23a).

1 Corinthians 3:10 *According to the grace of God which is given unto me (Paul), as a wise masterbuilder, I (Paul) have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon.*

Ephes. 3:1-3 *For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, ²If ye have heard of the dispensation (oikonomia, administration of God’s household economy) of the grace of God which is given me to youward: ³How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery (mysterion, God’s secret gospel, see Col 1:27)*

Paul here makes the clear comparison between his gospel ministry to the predominantly Gentile **“body of Christ,”** which Paul calls **“the uncircumcision,”** and that of Peter to **“the circumcision,”** the nation Israel.

Galatians 2:7-9 (KJV) *But contrariwise, (on the contrary) when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me (Paul), as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter; ⁸(For he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles:) ⁹And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen (Gk. ethnos, ethnic nations, the Gentiles), and they unto the circumcision.*

Having seen that there were two different men with two different gospels for two different people groups, now we need to note the **two different commissions.** Much is written of the “great commission,” which our Lord gave to His Jewish Apostles just before His ascension. This **“great commission”** **does not say one word about “the preaching of the cross” or “the gospel of the grace of God.”** The “gospel” they were sent to preach was same “gospel” they had been

preaching - **the Gospel of the Kingdom** - only they could now declare, as Peter did at Pentecost, that the King had risen from the dead and would still some day occupy the throne of David.

The “**great commission**” demanded **faith, repentance, and baptism for the remission of sins** (Mark 16:15, 16); it included the power to heal the sick and work miracles (16:17, 18), but it ***did not*** include the message that “*Christ died for our sins*” (1Cor.15:1-3). When Peter at Pentecost began to carry out this commission, he blamed his hearers for killing Christ. When they were convicted of their sins, they asked Peter; “*What shall we do?*” Peter ***did not*** say “Believe on Christ who died for your sins.” Peter commanded them to “***repent and be baptized every one...for the remission of sins***” (Acts 2:38). Peter did not yet know the meaning of the cross as it had not yet been revealed, as it would first come through Paul, who was not yet converted. Compare this to Paul’s gospel wherein he says simply “***believe on the Lord Jesus Christ***” to be saved (Acts 16:31). Repentance and baptism are now excluded as requirements for salvation. “Faith” alone is the one requirement (Eph 2:8-9).

After Christ and His Kingdom were again rejected, God interrupted the prophetic program and sent *Paul* to proclaim “***the preaching of the cross***” and “***the gospel of the grace of God***”. In 2Corinthians 5:14-21 Paul proclaims “***the love of Christ***” who “***died for all***” and instructs us in the “**new great commission.**” “***And all things are of (provided by) God, who hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself... and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation***” (1Cor.5:18, 19). Today, the ministry for “***the body of Christ***” is “***the ministry of reconciliation***” under these new terms of salvation that we learn from Paul’s epistles.

Part 11 of 24 - A Comparison between “The 12 Apostles” and Paul, “the Apostle to the Gentiles”

Compare: The Twelve Apostles

12 Representatives of the Nation of Israel
12 Apostles, 12 Tribes, 12 Men, 12 Thrones -
Matthew 19:28

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

Called By Jesus of Nazareth, While He was on Earth

*Luke 6:13 And when it was day, he (Jesus) called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose **twelve**, whom also he named apostles;*

The Twelve Knew The Earthly Jesus (Act 1:9)
They proclaimed a **physical, literal, earthly Kingdom for the Jews, as promised to Abraham’s Seed.**

Apostles Message of the Kingdom was sent to Israel only. (Intended Ultimately to bless the Nations, through Israel)

*Matt 10:5-6 These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, **Go not into the way of the Gentiles**, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: ⁶ **But go** rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*

The Gentiles were to be saved through Israel.

*Luke 24:47-48 that **repentance and remission of sins** should be preached in his name **among all nations**, beginning at Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ And ye are witnesses of these things. (see Mal. 3:12)*

With: The Apostle Paul

Paul is God’s Representative to the One “Body of Christ”

*Acts 9:15 ...**he (Paul) is a chosen vessel unto me**, to bear my name **before the Gentiles**, and kings, and **the children of Israel**:*

*Eph 2:16 that he might reconcile both unto God in **one body** by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: Galatians 3:28 **There is neither Jew nor Greek... ye are all one in Christ Jesus.***

Paul was Called By the Ascended Jesus “from Heaven”

*Acts 9:3-5...suddenly there shined round about him (Paul) a light **from heaven**: And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, **I am Jesus** whom thou persecutest...*

Paul Knew Only The Christ of Heaven (1Cor 15:8)

Paul proclaimed the highest heaven for “the Church which is His body” (Eph 1:22-23), as our home (Philip 3:20).

Paul’s Gospel of Grace was Sent to All Men Everywhere, without Israel

*Romans 10:12 For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is **rich unto all that call upon him**.*

*Romans 11:32 For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that **he might have mercy upon all**.*

**Sent to Proclaim God's Prophesied Program,
With Salvation of The Gentiles to Come Through
Israel's RISE.**

Zechariah 8:23 ... take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you.

*Acts 3:25-26. Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. ²⁶ Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you... **Gen. 18:18, 22:18, 26:4***

The Twelve Agree to Confine their Ministry to Israel, After God Raised Up Paul to the Gentiles
(see Act 15).

*Gal 2:2 I went up by revelation, and communicated unto them that (unique) gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to them which were of reputation, lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain. **Gal 2:9** ...when James, Cephas, and John...perceived the grace that was given unto me (Paul), they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision.*

Paul says Salvation of the Gentiles Actually Came Through Israel's FALL. It was Not Prophesied (Rom 11:7-33).

Romans 11:11 (KJV) I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their (Israel's) fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them (Israel) to jealousy.

Paul is THE Apostle to the Gentiles, turning to the Gentiles after Israel Rejects the King and His Kingdom.

*Acts 28:28 Be it known ...unto you (Israel), that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles... they will hear it. **Rom 11:13** I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles... I Corinthians 14:37... let him acknowledge that the things that I (Paul) write unto you are the commandments of the Lord. **Romans 2:16** In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my (Paul's unique) gospel.*

Paul Was Not One of “The Twelve”

The qualifications for the position that Judas held are clear.

“Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that He was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of His resurrection” (Acts 1:21-22). The “lot” therefore fell to “Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles” (Acts 1:26).

These are Paul's inspired words. “**For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the Apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office**” (Rom.11:13). As we have already stated, Paul is not one of the Twelve Apostles as many teach today and certainly was not chosen to take Judas' place. Acts 1:16-26 gives ample proof that Saul of Tarsus *did not* even qualify as a follower of Jesus Christ at that time, he was an unbeliever! He had not followed the Lord from John's baptism “*unto that same day that (Jesus) was taken up from us*” (Acts 1:22).

Note Paul's own testimony as he later recounts his conversion before King Agrippa: “**And I punished them (the Jewish Christians) oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities**” (Acts 26:11). Paul was at the stoning of Stephen in Acts 7:58. Paul next comes upon the scene in Acts 9:1-2, which describes him as “*a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious*” (ITim.1:13), on his way to imprison and “*put to death*” Jesus' Messianic followers at Damascus (Acts 26:10). This is a far cry from Paul being eligible for the position that Judas held with the disciples of the Lord. **Paul was therefore most ineligible to be one of “the twelve.”** He had not even seen Jesus of Nazareth during our Lord's earthly ministry and certainly had not walked with Jesus as the twelve had.

Later, when Saul finally did get saved, it was the Lord Himself who stopped Saul in his tracks and saved him from further persecution of Messiah's followers: “**And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me? ... And when I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came into Damascus**” (Acts 22:7-11).

Thus, Paul was specially “*chosen*” by God through whom God's Son is to be revealed to all nations (Gentiles) since the favored nation, Israel, refused to accept the Messiah under the so-called “Great Commission.” This is what makes Paul's ministry and apostleship so very distinct from that of the Twelve, and their kingdom gospel.

Furthermore, Colossians, chapter one, makes it clear that God began something very new and different with Paul's conversion – “*the Church, which is the Body of Christ:*”

“**Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my (Paul's) flesh for His body's sake, which is the Church:**

“**Whereof I (Paul) am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me (Paul) for you, to fulfil (complete) the Word of God;**

“**the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints (believers): “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” (Col.1:24-27).**

Seeing these great differences between “*the twelve*” and Paul, then how foolish and wrong it is for any of us to take just any scripture in the Bible to determine the Lord's will for us today. By this I mean, what right do we have to choose some particular segment of our Lord's instructions to “the twelve” or “the eleven” Apostles, to whom He spoke of Messianic kingdom as promised

How to Approach the Bible

to Israel, and try to apply these instructions to ourselves or to the church today? The Lord gave only those Apostles those instructions as He spoke to them things that pertain to the Messianic “*kingdom of God*” to come to earth, as promised to Abraham’s seed. Nothing could be clearer than the fact that our Lord “*showed Himself alive after His passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God*” (Acts 1:3), which was promised to Abraham’s literal seed. Thus the object of Jesus’ teaching immediately after the cross was still “*thy kingdom come...on earth,*” as promised to Israel.

In those forty days then, one Person, our Lord Jesus Himself, spoke to the eleven Apostles. He gave them instructions as to the program they were to carry out after His ascension. Those instructions were to continue what Jesus had begun, as we see in the Gospels. In every single case it is crystal clear that these commands were **not** directed to any other persons who were to live at some future date. Only these Apostles were to commence to carry them out His instructions after Jesus’ departure, and after the Holy Spirit would endue them (come upon them to clothe them) with power to minister in this way with miraculous “*signs following*” (Mark 16:20), and for that time only.

This is emphasized by the phraseology found in all five records of the so-called “great commission” that Jesus spoke to those specific disciples only. *Matt. 28:19 “Go ye”*; *Mark 16:15 “Go ye”*; *Luke 24:48 “Ye are witnesses”*; *John 20:21 “So send I you”*; and *Acts 1:8 “Ye shall be witnesses.”*

It is preposterous to argue, as so many hard-pressed theologians have done, that one or more segments of the “great commission” are to be carried out by another generation and dispensation at a later time than that in which it was spoken. If this commission was to be binding upon “*the church, which is His body*” today, as they often seem to imply, what authority would we have to choose which part or parts of that commission we shall obey? Shall we cast aside Jesus’ command to “*take up serpents*” (Mark 16:18), as Jesus proclaimed to His Jewish Apostles? Shall we “*have all things in common*” as they the Jerusalem Pentecostal church had in the early Acts period? To do so would be to play fast and loose with our Biblical interpretation; robbing from those who were actually being addressed by the Lord at that time and in regard to their calling under “*the gospel to the circumcision.*”

Part 12 of 24 – How to Study the Bible

Our Apostle Paul says the Bible is to be studied by being “rightly divided.”

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

The words “*rightly divided*” are translated from a Greek word “*orthotomeo*,” which means to “*cut straight*.” How many pieces do you have if you make one straight cut? You have two pieces. The two pieces we are concerned with in “*rightly dividing*” the Scripture may be titled by these two Biblical terms, “*prophecy*” and “*mystery*.”

The Apostle used the word “mystery” 17 times in his 13 epistles for “*the body of Christ*,” but the word mystery but it is **not** once in the general epistles written by the Apostles to “*the circumcision*.” The word “mystery” is transliterated from the Greek “*musterion*,” which means “**a secret that only God can reveal.**” Paul was saved and chosen to be God’s revelator of “*the mystery*” gospel to the body of Christ. ***Ephesians 3:1-4 (KJV) 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 (Christ) 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)***

Obviously, the “mystery” as a “secret,” by definition, is the very opposite of “prophecy” that is spoken. Here below we have two verses that make clear that **two dispensations** are linked to **two gospel messages** – one gospel message was **spoken** “*by all the prophets since the world began*” and the other had been “***kept secret since the world began.***” These verses below use the very same phrase, “***since the world began,***” to make diametrically opposite claims concerning two gospel messages.

1) Peter preached this below to “*Ye men of Israel*” concerning the restitution or restoration of the Davidic kingdom, by the return and presence of the King (v19-20) and His Kingdom, as it had been ***prophesied repeatedly since the world began.***

Acts 3:20-21 (KJV) And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you (Israel): ²¹ Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.

2) Paul wrote this below to the Roman members “*the body of Christ*” concerning God’s ***secret plan***, called “***the mystery... kept secret since the world began,***” which was **first revealed by Christ to Paul, for us.**

Romans 16:25 (KJV) Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began,

When we “*rightly divide the word of truth*” we find that the Bible clearly accentuates the many differences between that which was the subject of “*prophecy*” and that of “*the mystery*.” That is, we come to see the difference between what was ***clearly made known concerning Israel through many prophecies since the world began***, and that which in the Bible concerns “***the mystery*” gospel for the body of Christ – which is God’s secret plan that had “***been kept a secret since world began.***” The “mystery” was the plan and provision of God for the members of “***the church, which is His body.***” In fact, Paul is the only Bible writer who uses the term “*the body of Christ*.” The “mystery” was kept secret until it was first revealed to the Apostle Paul for the Gentiles.)**

How to Approach the Bible

More than 80% of the Bible is devoted to Israel, including the *promises and prophecies concerning Israel* and its destiny to receive the **Kingdom of God on earth** and the promised “land” from “*the river Nile to the river Euphrates*” as an “*everlasting possession*” (Gen 17:8). Less than 20% of the Bible is devoted to “*the mystery*” as given to Paul for the predominantly Gentile “*body of Christ*.”

- 1) “**Prophecy**” and **promises** were spoken and repeated by God directly, and via His surrogate prophets, to, for, and concerning Israel. At Pentecost, Peter confirmed those prophecies and the possibility of their imminent fulfillment when he addressed “*Ye men of Israel...*” (Acts 2:22, 3:12), saying Pentecost was the fulfillment of some of those foretellings or prophecies.

Acts 3:24-25 (KJV) “Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken (prophesied), have likewise foretold of these days. ²⁵ Ye (Israel) are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.”

- 2) “**The Mystery**” or secret program of the pure grace of God for the Gentiles had been “*hid*” and “*kept secret since the world began*.” This “*mystery*” had never been prophesied or spoken of before the ascended Christ revealed it to Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles.

Romans 16:25 (KJV) Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel (Paul’s gospel), and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began,

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

Ephesians 3:9 (KJV) 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:

Could there be a more obvious difference found within the Bible than a dispensational message of God that was **spoken of** “*by all the prophets*”... to be compared with “*the mystery*” gospel message that had **not been spoken** and in fact was “*kept secret since the world began*”? Thus, as we approach the Bible in study we must always be careful to note and separate that which concerns the subject of “*prophecy*,” which always concerns *the nation Israel*, from that of “*the mystery*,” concerning the predominantly Gentile “*the body of Christ*.”

Biblical Interpretation:

Miles Coverdale, a Bible translator who died in 1569, states some basic tenets for proper Biblical interpretation. Miles Coverdale produced the first complete printed translation of the Bible into [English](#). Actually, normal people normally employ Miles Coverdale’s simple tenets when interpreting any book they may read. Frankly, it is a mystery to me as to why Christians ignore these reasonable Bible interpretation principles.

He wrote these words in the Early Modern English style. “*It shall greatly help ye to understand the Scripture if thou mark not only what is spoken or written, but also;*

- *of whom* (who is speaking) *and to whom, with what words,*
- *at what time, where,*
- *to what intent, with what circumstances,*
- *considering what goeth before and what followeth after (considering its context).”*

When we read in any secular book that we may be reading “*John promised Charlie such and such*,” we know John was speaking and to whom John was speaking, and about what John was speaking. We do not presume “*John promised Susie such and such*.” Yet, why is it Christians

How to Approach the Bible

take the liberty that when God and His prophets spoke to and about Israel that they are speaking to and about “the body of Christ”?

Three Kinds of People:

We need also to note that there are three categories of people that God is concerned with. Any Bible statement attributed to God may at times apply to only one, or at other times to more than one of these three categories of people mentioned here in 1 Cor. 10:32. “*Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God.”* The church of God to whom Paul refers here is “*the church, which is His body*” (Eph 1:22b-23a). We must always determine which of these three people groups any Bible statement applies. Thus, that which was specifically spoken to, of, or concerning Israel is **not** spoken to, of, or concerning “*the church, which is his body*” or the lost Gentiles.

Thus, it will serve us well to always bear in mind that Jesus of Nazareth came to Israel (Matt 15:24) as Israel’s Messiah and thus, that which was spoken by Jesus in the Gospels is most often specifically spoken to the Jews only; not to the “*body of Christ*.” We who are of “*the body of Christ*” still may learn from Jesus’ words about God’s character, wisdom, faithfulness, Israel’s history, and God’s promises to Israel. Yet “*the body of Christ*” has no doctrine to be derived from Jesus of Nazareth’s words that were spoken to Israel. Jesus’ words do not apply to “*the body of Christ*” for our instruction. It would be an obvious error to take the following verse of instruction that Jesus gave to “*the twelve*” as though it were for “*the body of Christ*.” **Matthew 10:5-6** *These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: ⁶ But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*

Part 13 of 24 – Rightly Dividing the Word Can Change Our Lives

Though I had studied the Scripture since I was saved in 1968, I was ignorant of Paul's principle of "*rightly dividing the word of truth*" until 1992. Following the teaching of Pastors and teachers that I had known, I took that which was spoken to and concerning Israel as though it was spoken to and concerning the Church, "*the body of Christ.*" Of course I observed the apparent discrepancies and contradiction which that approach to the Bible yields, but frankly, I tried not to face the obvious apparent contradictions.

My approach to the Bible now is to follow Paul's instruction to "*rightly divide the word of truth*" – I divide that which applies to Israel versus that which applies to the predominantly Gentile "*the church, which is the body of Christ.*" As I began to study God's written word "*rightly divided,*" some 17 years ago, the Spirit of God opened my blind eyes and gave me an entirely different perspective, understanding, and outlook upon His word. I now see and appreciate the Bible's perfect structure and continuity, as it has been fulfilled and even now is being instituted by the hand of God. The Bible has now become so clear, unambiguous, and free of contradiction. Most personally, "*rightly dividing the word of truth*" has made the riches of Christ and His cross so much more evident, meaningful, and empowering to me – it has changed my way of living such that I now have a greater peace and rest.

I have already referred to those who play "fast and loose" with Bible interpretation by "*spiritualizing*" the Bible, which is an improper way of Bible interpretation. When we do that we corrupt the word of God and thereby lose out on the riches and security that we should gain from our relationship with God. E.g., if we take Israel's law, which **does not apply to us today (Rom 6:14)**, we then lose out on the rest that we should have by living under the pure grace gospel.

First and foremost, **we should always determine to whom God is speaking and/or of whom the Bible writer is writing, and then take it literally for the intended party alone**, whether it concerns "*Israel*" or "*the body of Christ.*" As stated earlier, serious problems will arise when believers, Bible scholars, Pastors, and teachers "*spiritualize*" the Bible. Most specifically, the greatest error in interpretation comes about when they take the words God spoke to Israel and try to apply them to "*the Church, which is his body*" – "*the body of Christ.*" This is a blatant misuse of the Scriptures. This is a failure to "*rightly divide the word of truth*" (2Timothy 2:15).

Israel's Fall Gave Way to the Rise of "the body of Christ":

We must come to clearly see the difference between the gospel proclaimed by "*the twelve Apostles,*" and that gospel message preached by the Apostle to the Gentiles, Paul. "*The twelve*" were and are of another dispensation, for another people of God (Israel), during another God ordained time (dispensation). Though the "*kingdom of heaven*" was once "*at hand*" as Jesus of Nazareth proclaimed it when He walked the earth, God today is **not** now establishing the Messianic "*kingdom of God*" upon this Christ-rejecting earth. The King was rejected by Israel and that kingdom is now set aside, in abeyance. Jesus of Nazareth is now seated in heaven and "*the twelve*" Apostles and their callings have passed for now. Jesus now awaits His Father to "*make His enemies His footstool*" (Heb 1:13, 10:13) – then He will stand or "arise" as prophesied (Isaiah 60:1), to return in Judgment at close of the Tribulation. Israel fell and the opportunity to receive the Kingdom has passed; Israel rejected the King and His Kingdom that was being offered and confirmed by the signs and wonders that continued until the time of the stoning of Stephen in Acts 7. Israel has fallen (Rom 11:2). Now, the prospect of Israel's hoped for Messianic Kingdom on earth has been set aside, put in abeyance "*until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in*" (Rom 11:25).

How to Approach the Bible

Today, during “*the dispensation of the grace of God*,” God is not carrying out the *directives* of Jesus’ so-called “Great Commission” that Jesus of Nazareth gave to His Jewish disciples.

Read Romans 11:11, 13, and 25 and you will discover Israel’s fall and loss of the promised blessing, for the time being. The fact that Israel has fallen to the point of being set aside by God for now is so clearly seen in this one verse. **Romans 11:25 (KJV)** *For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that **blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.*** You cannot help but note that Israel has been set aside for a time during “*the times of the Gentiles.*”

At Pentecost, a Jewish feast, Peter addressed “*Ye men of Israel.*” Peter said “***this it that... (Acts 2:16)...which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began*” (Acts 3:19-21). Compare this with Paul’s message “***...which was kept secret since the world began***” (Rom.16:25, 26). In this way we can note the difference between God’s earthly program for *Israel and the nations on earth who are to come under Israel in the millennium*; and that of His heavenly program for “*the Body of Christ*” as revealed through the Apostle Paul for us today.**

We might say we live in a time of the “parenthesis” in the Bible. Just as a parenthesis interrupts a sentence, “*the dispensation of the grace of God*” has been revealed to have been inserted as a dispensational time that interrupts God’s dealing with the nation Israel.

Paul writes of Israel being set-aside using other words.

“***What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election*** (the “*little flock*,” Luke 12:32) ***hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded...unto this day*”** (Rom.11:7, 8).

“***Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the Scriptures, The Stone (Jesus) which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes? Therefore say I unto you, the kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation*** (Strong’s 1484, “ethnos,” meaning, “non-Jewish people,” Gentiles) ***bringing forth the fruits thereof*”** (Matt.21:42, 43).

In the raising up of the Apostle Paul with a new gospel, “*the kingdom*” that was to come to earth as promised to Israel was postponed and the nation was set aside because of Israel’s unbelief.

“***I say then, have they (Israel) stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them (Israel) to jealousy*” (Rom.11:11). “***For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the Apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office*” (Rom.11:13).****

Israel only “stumbled” by their killing Jesus, “*they (Israel) stumbled at the stumblingstone*” (1Peter 2:8, Rom 9:32), but that was not yet their “*fall.*” It was not yet their “*fall*” because at Jesus’ request, “*Father forgive them they now not what they do,*” God still held the door open to offer the promised Kingdom to come to earth confirming it with miraculous “*signs following*” at the hands of the Apostles. The Kingdom was offered from the day of Pentecost through the early Acts period, up to the stoning of Stephen. This was Israel’s final rejection, by blaspheming of the Holy Spirit; by this Israel fell. Jesus had said blaspheming the Holy Spirit would **not** be forgiven them “*in that age or in the ages to come*” (Matt 12:32). Stephen said; **Acts 7:51** *Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye.* With that, Israel stoned Stephen to death and Israel was set aside. God then introduced a heretofore hidden truth, a vertically deposited message from heaven. It appeared when Jesus came down from heaven to save the Apostle Paul, for Paul to introduce the heretofore planned but hidden, grace-filled, “*dispensation of the grace of God*” for the Gentiles (Eph 3:1-2).

How to Approach the Bible

Thus, it should by now have become clear that there are two separate lines of happenings that can be traced in the Bible; one is toward the ultimate destiny of the nation Israel; the other is toward the mostly Gentile “*body of Christ*.” Today, Israel has been set aside in unbelief, “**until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.**”

Rom 11:25 *I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.*

It has been said that the journeys of these two, the nation “*Israel*” and “*the body of Christ*,” are like two sets of train tracks – sometimes running parallel, but then often diverging. The parallel portion of track is in that, while having separate callings, we come together in that we each will ultimately depend upon the cross of Christ for our ultimate salvation. Nevertheless, these are two distinct people groups, having two different histories and two different ultimate outcomes for eternity.

Part 14 of 24 – “The Body of Christ” Today

Ephesians 2:14-16 *For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; ¹⁵ Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; ¹⁶ And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body (of Christ) by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby:*

In “time past” God had erected a “middle wall of partition” between Israel and the rest of humanity. He did this by giving Israel peculiar laws to keep, regarding such things as circumcision, dietary law, rituals, washings, and practices. These then made Israel distinctive in the world. God’s intention was that by these He would separate Israel to put a difference between Israel and the world (Lev 10), so that they might ultimately receive and obey Him, that He might bless the world through Israel. You see, the Gentiles at that time were cut off, “without hope and without God in the world” (Eph 2:12).

Of course we believers today now know that we have been blessed, but it was not through Israel’s success and obedience. Israel was always in rebellion toward God. So rather, Paul says, we are blessed **through “their fall.”** ***Romans 11:11*** *I say then, Have they (Israel) stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them (Israel) to jealousy. With their fall God turned to the Gentiles.*

God has today torn down that “middle wall of partition” and assembled a new thing - “the body of Christ,” where Jew and Gentile are now one on an equal basis. God has made “of twain one new man.” ***Ephesians 2:15*** *Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace;* To do this God first had to conclude the whole world guilty, that is all mankind, both Jew and Gentile, to stand on level ground as sinners having need of grace. ***Romans 3:19*** *Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.*

Today a Jew must come to God as a fallen Gentile to receive God’s salvation that is “in Christ.” ***Romans 11:32 (KJV)*** *For God hath concluded them all in unbelief (Jew & Gentile), (so) that he might have mercy upon all*. It has been said that now the ground is absolutely level at the foot of the cross. All men are lost and none has a higher standing than another. No group of people stands with any distinction above another. This universal fallen state of mankind prepares all mankind such that **all** may receive Christ and be blessed, be received into “the body of Christ,” where there is neither Jew nor Gentile. ***Galatians 3:28*** *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.*

God has worked via the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ to form Jew and Gentile into “the one new man” of Ephesians 2:15, and of the “twain,” to “**reconcile both unto God in one body**” (v16). Unlike the time of the Law, under which “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” were the object of Jesus’ and of the twelve’s attention (Matt 10:6, 15:24), this “one new man” is a joint-body consisting of both ***Jews and Gentiles who now stand equally***. **In Christ the Jew and the Gentile stand equally, without any distinction or preference**. The “body of Christ” is a new, **non-Jewish**, creation in Christ (2Cor 5:17). God has had other “churches” (*ekklesias*) or “called out assemblies” in other dispensations, but not until Paul did God form an assembly or church called “the body of Christ” according to “the revelation of the mystery” (Rom 16:25) given to Paul for us.

How to Approach the Bible

Understanding these Scriptures in this way of “*rightly dividing the word of truth*” will change our lives and also our thinking, if we will simply test “*the things that differ*” (*Philip 1:10, Greek Interlinear*). I encourage every Christian to be as the Bereans were, those who “*searched the Scriptures daily*” to see “*whether these things (that Paul taught) are so*” (*Acts 17:11*). Having eyes to see, you will be praising the Lord for the principle of “*rightly dividing the word of truth.*” It permits you to see what applies to us today versus that of Israel. In this way the riches of Christ are heightened such that we might see all that He has done for us and all that He now is “*in*” the members of “*the body of Christ.*” “*Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints,*¹⁶ *Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers;*¹⁷ *That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him:*¹⁸ *The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints,* *Ephesians 1:15-18* All that Christ is, is now **indwelling** the members of His body.

No more does *God dwell among* certain men or **come upon** them as He did in the Old Testament. At Pentecost Christ sent the Holy Spirit to “*endue*” (Gk. enduo, clothed) the recipients of His empowering Spirit. But today the fullness of the Godhead in Christ **indwells** every believer’s human spirit such that each one is now “*complete in Him (Christ)*” (*Col 2:10*). God has not parceled out a small portion of Christ’s Spirit to the believers today. Today, Jesus has gives us His “*Spirit without measure*” (*John 3:34*), just as He here promised He will do for Israel, at His coming.

Paul goes on to reveal to us the “*mystery*” (Gk. *musterion, secret plan*) of God that was revealed to Paul by the ascended Christ some several years after the cross. This heretofore secret plan was that the resurrected “*spirit of life in Christ Jesus*” would come and live within the human spirit of believers, to be one with the individual members of His body – “*the body of Christ*” – the church. It had been prophesied that one day God’s Spirit would indwell the believing children of Israel (*Ezekiel 37:14*), but never in the Gentiles, in an entirely new dispensation – apart from Israel.

Col 1:26-27 *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:*
1 Corinthians 6:17 *But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit.*

The “*church, which is his body*” is one with Christ because it possesses the fullness of Christ on earth today, and will one day, at the rapture of the church, fill **the heavens** with the glory (expression) of the Lord. *Ephesians 1:22-23* *And (God) hath put all things under his (Christ’s) feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church,*²³ *Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.*

By His indwelling we have His life and nature within us, to flow through us, that we might become **His expression** while we are here **on earth**. Our spirit is thereby regenerated (*Titus 3:5*) and our souls are being renewed (*2Cor 4:16*). We are the potential expressers of His life as He, the Head, governs every body-member from within their spirit.

Heaven & Earth:

Have you ever noticed the wording with which the Bible opens in Genesis? “*In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth*” (*Gen. 1:1*). It does not say that God created “the universe,” but “*the heaven*” and “*the earth.*” I maintain that this statement was made with

How to Approach the Bible

God's foreknowledge, looking ahead to "*the fullness of times.*" **Ephesians 1:10** That in **the dispensation of the fulness of times** he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are **in heaven**, and which are **on earth**; even **in him**:

God, from the very beginning of time, had a special eternal purpose for the **earth**, which is quite distinct from His purpose for the rest of the universe. This purpose concerning the **earth** and **the nations** who dwell upon it is progressively revealed in the Scriptures and linked to "*the kingdom of heaven*" that is yet to come to earth as promised to Abraham and his seed. This looks forward to the glorious "*fullness of the times*" and consummation of the ages when "*the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea*" (Isaiah 11:9) – a time when the Christ shall come into His rightful reigning as King of kings and Lord of lords on earth, as Israel's Messiah.

But God also had a very special purpose concerning "*the heavens,*" which He kept secret and hidden in His own heart of love until man's sin and rebellion had reached their climax. Then He stooped down to save the "*chief of sinners,*" Paul, in order to use him to make known "*the mystery,*" the secret of His purpose, offering sinners everywhere a *salvation that is by grace through faith alone*. He reconciles them to Himself in **one body** by Christ's cross, giving them a **present position**, "*in Christ,*" and a **future prospect in the highest heavens**.

God's purpose concerning the earth and Christ's reign upon it is the subject of prophecy (Luke 1:68-76), His purpose concerning the highest heaven and our exaltation there in heaven with Christ is the subject of "*the mystery*" (Eph. 2:4-10; 3:1-4). It is into these two great subjects – God's plan for the earth, and God's plan for the highest heavens, that the Scriptures are divided.

Part 15 of 24 – A Question: “Is it Sufficient to be Biblical”?

Many Christians say, “*I follow the whole Bible.*”

Actually, it should become immediately apparent that it is impossible to live by the entire Bible because it is impossible to keep **two opposite sets of instructions** such as define one dispensation versus another dispensation. By this I mean one cannot live both under “*the works of the Law*” that was given to Israel and at the same time live under the terms of “*the dispensation of the grace of God*” for “*the body of Christ.*” **Romans 6:14** ...*ye are not under the law, but under grace.*

Pure grace excludes “*the works of the law*” as a basis for salvation and acceptance by God – they are opposites. **Romans 11:6** And *if by grace*, then is it *no more of works*: otherwise grace is no more grace. But *if it be of works*, then is it *no more grace*: otherwise work is no more work.

Let’s now examine further how it could be that we might be Biblical and still miss the mark of God for us today.

Below is an example to demonstrate why it is impossible to keep all God’s instructions found within the Bible. We will here consider the apparently simple matter of *what foods God’s people are permitted to eat*, according to the Bible. This is an example of the possible contradictions and confusion that can result from not “rightly dividing” the Scripture to discern the expectations of God for people during differing times or “*dispensations.*”

- 1) In **Genesis 1:29**, under the terms of “the dispensation of innocence,” God gave Adam only the **herbs of the earth and the fruit of the trees** to eat as his food. They were to be vegetarian at that time.
- 2) Then later, in Genesis 9:1-4 under the dispensation of “*human government*,” God told Noah the people could add the **meat of the animals, fish, and fowl** to eat as food. The new terms under “the dispensation of Human Government,” if you can catch it you are allowed to eat it.
- 3) Then God’s gave dietary instructions to Moses for Israel under “the dispensation of **The Law**,” that is to **eat only certain meats, fishes, and fowls** as food, as the “**kosher**” or “**clean**” food (see Lev. 11), and **not to eat certain meats, fishes, and fowls**, being “**unclean**” foods.
- 4) Finally, the Lord gave Paul His dietary instructions for this day of “*the dispensation of the grace of God.*” We may **eat any kind of food** so long as it is received with thanksgiving (see 1 Tim 4:3-5). Every creature was created for our nourishment and nothing was to be forbidden or refused.

Knowing the foregoing Biblical history, let’s now imagine that there were (4) four preachers, each preaching today according to their beliefs and Biblical interpretations of the foregoing Bible facts.

- 1) One preached that we could **only eat fruits and vegetables**. He preached from the Gen. 1:29 instructions God gave to Adam and Eve in the garden, under the dispensation of “*innocence.*” His followers would start the “**Vegetarian denomination,**” and **this would be Biblical.**
- 2) The second preacher was preaching according the instruction God gave to Noah in Genesis 9:1-4. Under this, men could eat **any** meats, fish and fowl that they could catch, in addition to any vegetables and fruits. His followers could start the “**Meat & Potatoes denomination,**” and **this would be Biblical.**
- 3) The third preacher preached that we could eat only what we might call “**kosher foods.**” He preached from Leviticus 9. His followers could start the “**Kosher denomination,**” and **this would be Biblical.**

- 4) The fourth preacher said “*We can eat any kind of food as long as we gave thanks for it.*” He was Pauline, preaching from Paul’s letter to Timothy 1Tim 4:4-5. His followers would be “***followers of Paul***”- ***This would be not only “Biblical,” but also “dispensational.”***

Following the teaching of all these four preachers would be “*Biblical.*” They each will have Bible verses for their practice. All four would be *Biblical or Scriptural*, yet, they are not all being “*dispensational.*” Three failed to “*rightly divide the word of truth*” dispensationally for today. Three would offend the truth applicable to the “*dispensation of the grace of God,*” which is in effect and under which we live today.

The above example addresses only the matter of what we should eat. It’s not as much of a super-serious issue as eternal perishing versus eternal life. There are serious Bible issues where our misunderstanding and misinterpretation of the Bible can negatively affect the very core and basis of our relationship with God – our salvation and the enjoyment of the riches of the salvation.

Now here is the serious issue to consider – should we today have to do works of the law in order to be counted righteous by God?

Paul says we are not under the Law. Paul says “the Law of works” actually serves to negate “*the grace of God*” that we live under today, making “*grace of no effect*” (see Gal 5:4). Paul says such law-keeping people have “*fallen from grace.*”

Paul, as the Apostle of “*the dispensation of the grace of God*” for today, wrote this concerning Abraham who lived before “the Law” - “***to him that worketh not, but believeth, his faith was counted as righteousness.***”

Romans 4:3-5 For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. ⁴ Now to him that worketh is the reward NOT reckoned OF GRACE, but of debt. ⁵ But to him that WORKETH NOT, but BELIEVETH ON HIM THAT JUSTIFIETH the ungodly, HIS FAITH IS COUNTED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

We should only take from the Bible what is written specifically to us as being for us today under our “*dispensation of the grace of God*” (Eph 3:2). We may learn from “*all Scripture,*” but we only take and apply to us what is directed to us as being for us specifically.

Paul received this pure grace gospel from the ascended *celestial* Christ and delivered it to God’s *heavenly people* (Eph 1:3), “*the body of Christ,*” after Israel fell and was set aside (Rom 11:25).

Paul received the grace gospel from Christ and delivered it to “*the body of Christ,*” much as Moses received “the Law” from God and was instructed to deliver it to the children of Israel in the Sinai.

Some say to us, “*Well then, you don’t use the whole Bible.*” Yes we do. A good rule of thumb for understanding our view is this. We could correctly say, ***the whole Bible is for our learning, but only the writings of the Apostle to the Gentiles, Paul in his thirteen epistles, are written to “the church, which is His body” and about “the church, which is His body” in this day of “the dispensation of the grace of God.”*** All Scripture is God-breathed and for our learning, so we should learn information from all dispensations as written in the whole Bible and we may apply it to ourselves, ***so long as its instruction does not conflict with the truths of our “dispensation of the grace of God,” which today we enjoy by faith alone.***

Therefore, we may read and learn of Israel’s law and sad Old Testament history, but we should not try to apply Moses Law, which was given to Israel, to the grace believers of “*the body of Christ*” today – we live ***by grace though faith, apart from the works of the law*** (Eph 2:8-9).

How to Approach the Bible

Have you ever noticed that God does not hold the great men of Scripture up to us because of their personal goodness? Almost invariably their history is marred by failure and sin (Abraham, David, etc), but God asks us to look at **their faith**, to see what their faith and His grace and mercy did for them. Those who lived consistently good lives are not held up to us for their personal worth, because God knows their imperfections.

Paul writes: *“For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory-- but not before God. For what saith the Scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.”* (Romans 4:2-3). In Romans 4:6 goes on to say about David: *“Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works.”* God counts us righteous only through what He has done for us by Christ’s cross.

This is because man cannot live a life good enough to make him acceptable to God, for with God only perfection is good enough. One sin originally spoiled this earth; God will not allow one sin to spoil heaven too. This is why He gave Christ to die for our sins and to pay the just penalty for us. Because of the all-sufficient payment of Christ in our behalf, God can now be *“just, and the Justifier”* of those who place their **faith in Christ** (Rom. 3:26).

The eleventh chapter of Paul's “letter to the Hebrews” bears out the fact that salvation and acceptance with God is obtained, not by human effort, but by faith. This great chapter on the heroes in God's “Hall of Fame,” begins with the words: *“For by it (faith) the elders obtained a good report,”* and then goes on: *“By faith Abel ...,” “By faith Enoch...,” “By faith Noah...,” “By faith Abraham...,”* etc., and closes with the declaration: *“...these all...obtained a good report through faith ...”*

Part 16 of 24 - What about the Words Spoken by Jesus of Nazareth in the Gospels?

Jesus of Nazareth came to Israel “*under the Law*” dispensation, which was still in effect at that time. ***Galatians 4:4... God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law.***

Paul here also confirms that the eternal “*Word became flesh*” (*John 1:14*), that He was incarnated into human “flesh” through His physical birth via the physical body of Mary. Of course Jesus then became one who was of Adam’s lineage, as noted in His “human genealogy” found in Luke 3:38. Adam was originally created in the image and likeness of God, but Adam fell into sin (Rom 5:12), thus acquiring the “*Sin (as a nature) in his flesh*” (*Rom 8:3b in KJV*) and the flesh of all of humanity. Later, Adam “*begat a son in his own likeness, after his image”* (*Gen. 5:3*). All mankind bears Adam’s likeness and image; this includes the Sin infection that is passed from physical body to physical body by human birth. While Jesus of Nazareth received a corruptible temporal human body from Mary, complete with the Sin nature that all humans bear – **He never actualized Sin by any act of sinning.** ***Hebrews 4:15 For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.***

We can note that by His incarnation Jesus of Nazareth was born of the Kingly Tribe of Judah, ***Rom 1:3 ... (Jesus) was descended from (King) David according to the flesh.*** His Kingly genealogy is found in Matthews’s gospel. However, Jesus was an Israelite only on His mother’s side. His Father was the “*Spirit of God.*” Thus, Jesus of Nazareth was fully God and fully man. His real life source was His eternal Spirit-life and divine nature that was one with God the Father in His Spirit.

Jesus was born at a time that Paul calls “*time past*” (*Eph 2:7*), under Israel’s “Law” dispensation, as compared to this day of “*the dispensation of the grace of God*” pertaining to “*the church which is the body of Christ.*” In fact, at the time of Jesus’ physical birth it was not yet the New Testament since the testator of the New Testament for Israel, Jesus, had not yet died. No “Will & Testament” is applicable until after the death of its testator (Heb 9:6).

In Jesus’ ministry on earth, His words were specifically addressed to and concerning the people of Israel – **NOT** “*the church, which is His body.*” ***Matthew 15:24 But he (Jesus) answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*** Paul here clearly identifies the singular object of Jesus ministry. ***Romans 15:8 Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision (Israel) for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers (of Israel):***

Jesus also instructed His disciples to only go to “*the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*” ***Matthew 10:5-6 These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: ⁶ But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.***

Jesus’ ministry was to confirm every promise that God had made to Abraham and His seed, the children of Israel. Thus, He continued the Mosaic laws. ***Matthew 5:18 For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.*** In fact, Jesus added to and intensified the law to include matters of the heart that were not written in “the Law.” ***Matthew 5:27-28 Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: ²⁸ But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.*** This intensification of law was to raise the bar of righteousness so high that those who heard Him would realize their need of a Savior, that they would receive Him by a new spirit-birth of His life.

How to Approach the Bible

So, with regard to Jesus of Nazareth's earthly ministry, these facts are profoundly clear to us.

- Jesus of Nazareth came only to "***the lost sheep of the house of Israel***" (*Matthew 15:24*).
- He commanded His disciples to go only to "***the lost sheep of the house of Israel***" (*Matthew 10:5-6*).
- Jesus continued the Law (*Matt 5:18*).
- At the time of His earthly ministry, Jesus of Nazareth "***was a minister to***" one class of people called "***the circumcision***" (*Romans 15:8*) – the nation Israel, not to the Gentiles.
- Jesus was devoted to confirming and fulfilling the promises God made to the fathers of the nation Israel concerning the "Kingdom" to come "on earth." The Gentiles had no such "fathers" of promise.

Some would still **deny Jesus exclusive ministry to Israel** and say something like this.

*"Okay, Jesus came to Israel, but Jesus knew **Gentiles would be addressed at a later time**, so the writings of the four gospels concerning Jesus' time on earth must also be speaking to the Gentiles as instruction for the Gentiles; they are not written strictly for Jews only."*

I want to be very clear about how we should view the words of Jesus in the Gospels.

We as **Christians today are to learn from the entire Bible, including the four Gospels**. Israel's relationship with God under the Law is seen in the Gospels in its stark contrast to our "grace" relationship that we possess with God as our literal Father by faith. Learning of this contrast enriches our understanding and appreciation as we consider the riches of the grace of God toward us in Christ. Paul said this of the Old Testament happenings to Israel, "*These things are written for our learning.*" (*Rom 10:15:4*). Yet, the doctrine and instructions that apply to "***the body of Christ***" are derived **only from Paul's writings to "the body of Christ."** ***1 Corinthians 14:37 (KJV) If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I (Paul) write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.*** ***Romans 2:16 (KJV) In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my (Paul's) gospel.***

Have you ever noticed that never once does Paul, in his thirteen grace epistles, ever quote or refer to anything Jesus of Nazareth spoke in the Gospels or to any miracles of Jesus of Nazareth's earthly ministry?

Yet, Paul is the one who introduces "*the preaching of the cross*" to us (*1Cor 1:18*). ***1 Corinthians 2:2 (KJV) For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.*** Only that which Paul writes in His epistles is for the core understanding of our relationship with God today, under "*the dispensation of the grace of God*" (*Eph 3:2*), which is based upon the cross-work of Christ. The instruction we receive from Paul is not taken from Jesus of Nazareth's terrestrial ministry, which was spoken to Israel. Rather, Paul's passes onto us the instruction he received directly from the *ascended* heavenly Christ (v 3 below), who came down from heaven to reveal to Paul "***the mystery***," the pure grace gospel for the Gentiles, which had been "*hid from ages and generation*" (*Col 1:27*) and "*kept secret since the world began*" (*Rom 16:25*).

Ephesians 3:1-4 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 (Christ) 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)

Thus, Paul says we need to follow him, as he follows Christ. ***1 Corinthians 11:1 Be ye followers of me (Paul), even as I also am of Christ.***

Paul's "*mystery*" gospel is of a **salvation that is received "by grace through faith...not of works."** Logically, you cannot live under "*the Law,*" which Jesus confirmed to Israel, and "*the dispensation of the grace of God*" **at the very same time.** "The Law" and the works, which the law demands, are diametrically opposed to the **pure grace** of God, which operates on the basis of "*faith*" plus nothing.

Here below I summarize how the grace believer today should view the words of the entire Bible, as how it is that it may apply to them and there walk "in Christ."

The members of the body of Christ can enjoy and in some cases apply any understandings they may gain from the non-Pauline Scriptures, such as the four gospels... so long as that item of information and understanding is not in conflict with the revealed truths of "the dispensation of the grace of God," which is in effect for "the body of Christ" today.

Here is an example of how grace believers may view and learn from the **non-Pauline** Gospel Scriptures.

Jesus presented an allegory to His Jewish followers in John 15:1-8 that can also help us to vividly see our need, as "*branches,*" to abide in our union with Christ, as the "*vine tree,*" in order to have His life flow through us. ***John 15:4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.*** The allegory of John 15:4 expands our view of Paul's instruction he gave to the grace believers in Galatia. ***Galatians 5:25 (AMP) If we live by the [Holy] Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. [If by the Holy Spirit we have our life in God, let us go forward walking in line, our conduct controlled by the Spirit.]***

On the other hand, we should not take what Jesus said in John 15:2 as if it concerns "*the body of Christ.*" ***John 15:2 Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it (cuts it off), that it may bring forth more fruit.*** We know that Paul tells us we are "*saved by grace through faith*" alone; so we cannot be lost, purged or cut-off. The John 15 tree with its branches particularly represents Israel of whom and concerning whom Jesus was speaking. Jesus' allegory here was saying, some of the branches in Israel would reject Christ and His Kingdom and become cut-off, purged. In fact, the nation of Israel did fall and now is set aside "*until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled*" (Rom 11:25).

- Thus, by this example of John 15:1-8 we can see that...we may learn of God and His ways from **non-Pauline Scriptures.** We see in John 15:4 that we, as a branch or individual soul, need to "*abide*" in union with Christ's life that flows within our spirit if we are to permit His life to flow through our soul's faculties to govern our living, from within.
- However, **we do not take that which pertains to Israel being purged or cut-off** (v2) as though it refers to "*the body of Christ*" today. We know that we who have received "*the grace of God*" cannot be cut off or lost since we are "**saved** by grace through faith," and "**sealed** with the Holy Spirit of promise" (Eph 1:13).

Let me now refer back to the metaphor of "**postal mail**" that I used in Part 3 of our study series. There is "mail" or information that may have been delivered into our mailbox (our Bible) that is **not addressed specifically to us.** 1) If I did not notice the name on the address label and thought it really was my mail I may erroneously react as though it was my mail. Perhaps it was a bill. I am **not** responsible to pay that bill that was intended for another addressee – it belongs to that addressee only. 2) Even if it was not my mail and I opened the envelope, I still may have learned something by reading from that which pertains to the specific addressee.

How to Approach the Bible

Sadly, I find most Christians trying to pay on the “bills” or meet the requirements of another dispensation that is based upon “**the Law**,” not fully realizing that Christ has already fulfilled the demand of “the Law” on our behalf (Matt 5:17).

This is just one example of the many serious hazards of miss-applying the *dispensationally based mail* that is found in the Bible. We should not take the mail or instruction that does not belong to us as though it does belong to us. We do not take that which was spoken to or concerning Israel as though applies to the members of “*the body of Christ*” who live under “*the dispensation of the grace of God.*”

Part 17 of 24 - It Helps to Clarify the Word “church”

It would help us to properly interpret the word “**church**” as we study the written word of God. The word church immediately has a meaning to most who hear it. But, there is a great misunderstanding of this word – “church”; most associate “church” with the organization and/or the building that most call “churches,” but this is not the meaning of the word at all, as it is used in the Bible.

Many consider that all the believers in God who have trusted God through the ages as being members of “*the church, which is His body.*” This is not the truth. The fact is that there have been many churches through the ages and they are not the same church. A misunderstanding of the word church leads to misinterpretation of what the word “church” means, thus distorting “*the church, ²³which is his body,*”- *the body of Christ*, as it was revealed to Paul the Apostle for us (Eph 1:22b-23a). The KJV here uses the inanimate word “*which*” in the phrase “*the church, which is his body,*” but since it is made up of living people and not inanimate, the relative pronoun “*which*” should be translated “*who*” since its form is the same. Thus, the church Paul writes of is “*the church, **who** is His body.*” The body of Christ is organic, consisting of the members of Christ’s living body on earth today.

Lets’ now take a closer look by considering the Greek word often mistranslated as “church.” The correct transliteration to English is *ekklesia*, as seen below. Note below that the word’s that Vines Expository Dictionary assigns as the proper translation of “*ekklesia*” are *assembly*, or *congregation*. Thus, we could have an *assembly of people congregating* for any reason, not necessarily religious or spiritual, and we have such examples in the Bible.

Word: church, **Transliteration:** ekklesia, **Phonetic Pronunciation:** [ek-klay-see'-ah](#) **Strong’s:** G1577, **Root:** from a compound of [<G1537>](#) and a derivative of [<G2564>](#) **Part of Speech:** n f, **Vine's Bible Dictionary Words:** [Assembly](#), [Congregation](#) - From a compound of [<G1537>](#) (ek) and a derivative of [<G2564>](#) (kaleo); a *calling out...*

The “church” then is an assembly or congregation of people who gather out from among the other people. The same word for church, “*ekklesia*,” was also used here in **Acts 19:32** for what was almost a **riotous group**. Paul’s preaching against worshipping idols had stirred up no small dissension in Ephesus. A near riot occurred in the area of the Temple of the Goddess Diana. The craftsmen around the idol temple, who sold their idol images, were in fear of losing business after they heard that Paul had spoken against worshipping idols. “*So then, some were shouting one thing and some another, for the assembly was **in confusion**, and the majority did not know for what cause **they had come together.**” Here the verse 32 the KJV says “*the assembly was confused,*” using the very same Greek word “*ekklesia*,” that sometimes is translated “church.” Though the word here is the same “*ekklesia*,” it certainly is not referring to the “*body of Christ*,” or a “*religious church*” of any kind.*

The same Greek word “*ekklesia*” is used of the “**church** (or assembly) ***in the wilderness***” in Acts 7:38, below. Here the word “church” is used to describe the “*assembly*” of Israelites “*in the wilderness*” of Sinai, after God delivered them from Pharaoh’s Egypt.

Acts 7:38 *This is he, that was in **the church** (ekklesia, assembly) **in the wilderness** with the angel which spake to him in the Mount Sinai...*

This certainly was not “*the church, which is the body of Christ.*” This refers to a time that was long before the cross and the revelation of “*the body of Christ*” to the Apostle to the Gentiles, Paul (Rom 11:13).

How to Approach the Bible

Christians in this day of “*the dispensation of the grace of God,*” which Paul taught as his “*mystery*” gospel (Rom 16:25), are not just any “*ekklesia,*” but rather a specific “*ekklesia,*” which in Eph 1:22b-23a is called “***the church, which is his body.***” *Ephes. 1:22-23 And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church,²³ which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.*

Here, in Acts 2:47, Peter is speaking to “*Ye men of Israel*” who were found to be “*Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church (the Jewish, Messianic church) daily such as should be saved.*” This church referred to in Acts 2:47 is not “*the body of Christ,*” rather these were Jews, the circumcision, saved to the **Messianic Kingdom gospel that Peter preached** to the “*the Jews only*” (see Acts 2:22, 11:19, Matt 10:5-6). At that time, “*the body of Christ*” which is the only church of “*the dispensation of the grace of God,*” had not yet been revealed, since Paul had not yet been converted and he had not yet received the revelation of “*the body of Christ.*” None of Jesus of Nazareth’s “*twelve*” Apostles even knew of this “***church,***²³ ***which is his body***” that was to later come to fruition.

By the foregoing understanding, we can see that when we see the word “*church*” in the Bible, we should ask “*which assembly*” the text is speaking about. Is the particular church Israel in the wilderness, or the Jews who rejected and undermined Paul’s message of grace, or “*the body of Christ,*” or is it another “*assembly of folks*” entirely?”

So as to be clear, we might better refer to the church today as “*the body of Christ*” than to call it “*the church.*” By properly defining the various “*ekklesias*” more specifically, we will then **no longer** refer to such accounts as the Acts 2 “*assembly of Jews*” referred to on the day of Pentecost, as “*the body of Christ*”; I refer to that Acts 2 church as the “*Messianic Church,*” or “*the Pentecostal Church.*”

We should note that **it was Paul who introduced and used the term “*the church, which is His body,*”** per the revelation Paul received direct from the ascended Jesus Christ, as a key part of the “*mystery gospel*” that he preached (Rom 16:25, Col 1:26-28a). Paul received the revelation of the church that is of “*the mystery*” gospel from Christ, some 8-10 years after the cross and Pentecost. This occurred only after the Jews had rejected the King and His Messianic Kingdom when they stoned Stephen in Acts 7. Saul of Tarsus was there that very day, holding the cloaks of Stephen’s executors. Shortly after that we read of his conversion and the introduction of “*the church*” for today, which is called “*the body of Christ.*”

Hence, we can see that it might be best today to refer to believers today as being members of the “***body of Christ,***” of whom Christ is “***the head,***” not confusing it by the often misused of the word, “*church.*”

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

Many misuse Paul’s words in this verse. ***Ephesians 5:23 (KJV) For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body.*** Some have the mistaken idea that “*the body of Christ*” is the bride of Christ, but actually Israel’s elect is to be His bride at His coming. The issue here in Eph 5:23 is the headship of a husband over his wife during “*the dispensation of the grace of God*” on earth. The mistaken idea of Christ as the bridegroom of the church, “*the body of Christ*” is not the matter at hand. What we do see here also is the matter of the headship of Christ over His “*the body of Christ,*” without whom His body would be headless.

Part 18 of 24 – Conditional Blessing Commonly Taught in the Church Today

Great errors have been disseminated throughout the church at large today with respect to the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. The Son of God was incarnated to “minister to” and redeem “the circumcision,” the Nation of Israel; He “confirmed the promises made unto the fathers” (Rom 15:8), saying “the Kingdom was at hand” (Matt 4:17). Christ will in fact yet return to earth, but then as Messiah and King of Israel, but not as a lamb. This time He will return to render judgment upon Israel and the God-rejecting world.

While Christ is in fact the King of all Kings for “the body of Christ” Jesus is not our King or Messiah as He is to Israel. Rather, He is “our life” (Col 3:4a) and “Head of the body of Christ, which is the church” (Col 1:18).

To take the doctrinal teachings of Jesus of Nazareth given to Israel in the gospels, and then misapply that which He spoke to Israel as if it was being spoken to “the church which is His body,” has made the message of the church at large to be confusing and contradictory. Ask the nominal Christian today; “Are you going to heaven to be in God’s Kingdom?” They most always will answer “yes.” Then ask them why they pray the prayer Jesus gave to Israel, which says “**Thy kingdom come** thy will be done **on earth** as it is in heaven.”

The doctrinal errors that occur by failing to “rightly divide the word of truth” (2Tim 2:15) have made the church at large to be a weak and impotent witness for the Lord Jesus Christ during this very day of “the dispensation of the grace of God” (Eph 3:2). Such erroneous teaching is almost always based upon mixing “the Law” and grace and it ignores dividing that which was spoken of and to Israel from...the truth of God for “the body of Christ” today under “the dispensation of the grace of God.” This makes God’s provision of Christ for us, and His grace, to become “of no effect” for their adherents. **Galatians 5:4 Christ is become of no effect (no benefit) unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.**

An Example of Misapplying Scriptures:

Let’s now consider a commonly believed, but erroneous, interpretation of Scripture that concerns Israel at a particular time in their Old Testament history. It is often preached and taught by Christian leaders as being applicable to the church today in the U.S.A. This error is an example of religious leaders playing fast and loose with Scriptures, misleading their flocks, while it makes a mockery of God and His promises. **God does in fact keep His promises, but only for the people to whom He speaks them.**

2 Chronicles 7:14 If my people (Israel), which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land (Israel’s land of Canaan).

Before we yield to the popular notion that **2Chronicles 7:14** is somehow a conditional formula for America’s survival in these dire times in which we live today, which appears to be getting worse and worse, notice that **the intervention was for a specific people, Israel; at a specific time, under the dispensation of the Law. It was a specific purpose, to bless for obedience or punish for disobedience.** See Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 to see the terms of the **covenant between Israel and Jehovah**, defining the terms of blessing and cursing for Israel.

In a seeming “concern for society” too many have for too long been willing to ignore the Bible facts and take Bible passages that refer to another people (Israel) in another dispensation or age (the Law), and apply them to society today, thus perverting God’s program of “grace” available to us today.

Sadly, this is not only true of the so-called Modernist and religious Liberals of the Apostate fallen away church, but shamefully, it is also true of the so-called fundamentalist and evangelicals as well. I now refer to these new fundamentalist and evangelicals as neo-evangelicals and neo-fundamentalist; as new versions of evangelicalism and fundamentalism. They left Paul's doctrine of "*by grace through faith alone*" long ago, in favor of "conditional blessing" that requires works of spoken and implied manmade and man imposed laws. Oh yes. They will tell you that you are "*saved by grace*," but then they imply continued blessing is based upon your conformance to a set of principles, which are actually "laws." They call these laws "religious principles," needing to be followed in order to gain favor with God. But, Paul says our continued blessing is as our initial salvation, which was "*by grace through faith, not of works.*" Paul tells us we are not only initially saved by grace but also our walk is kept in the very same way of "*grace through faith.*" ***Colossians 2:6-7 (KJV) As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him:*** (See Also the author's paper called "The Pure Grace of God").

I was originally saved in a fundamentalist Baptist Church that promoted using the "New Scofield Reference Edition" of the Bible. Now I know that even the "New Scofield Reference Edition" of the Bible (1967) came into being in order to expunge the original "grace dispensation" teachings of C.I. Scofield that were found in his original 1909, 1917, editions of "Scofield Reference Bible (KJV of 1611)." Mr. Scofield was a "*right divider of the word of truth*," recognizing the dispensational truth regarding "*Israel*" versus that of "*the body of Christ*."

The truth is that today, under the current "*dispensation of the grace of God*," God has temporarily set Israel aside (Rom 11:25) and God today does not recognize Israel in its former status (or even their future status) as His chosen "*people*" (Rom 11:11, Gal 3:27-28). Israel today is "***Loammi***," meaning "*not my people*," for a time. Israel's being cut-off, set aside for a time, was prophesied here in Hosea. ***Hosea 1:9 Then said God, Call his name Loammi: for ye (Israel) are not my people, and I will not be your God.***

That fall of Israel occurred in Acts 7 with the stoning of Stephen, thereby finalizing Israel's rejection of the King and His Kingdom. With their rejection of God's Son as King, God now has turned to the Gentiles. ***Acts 13:46 (KJV) Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you (Israel): but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.***

Acts 28:27-28 (KJV) For the heart of this people (Israel) is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. ²⁸ Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it. Romans 11:25 (KJV) For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that ***blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.***

The fact is this. 1.) Today is not the day of the dispensation of "the Law" (Rom 6:14), but rather the day of "*the dispensation of the grace of God*." (Eph 3:2). 2.) Today God is not blessing anyone based upon obedience to "the law." Rather, we read this. ***Ephesians 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:***

Thus, we "***hath***" already been "***blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places***" by being "*baptized into*" Christ's "*one body*" (1Cor 12:13). This blessing is dispensed to those who simply believe (trust in) "*the gospel of the grace of God*," thereby placing each believer "into Christ," them being made "*complete in Him*" (Col 2:10). God has blessed us with a full salvation

How to Approach the Bible

on the basis of “saved by grace through faith, not of works” (Eph 2:8-9). Note that these facts are all stated in the past tense as acts that have been completed by God’s work on our behalf.

Contrary to pure grace, 2 Chronicles 7:14 refers to “**conditional promises**” of blessing that God made to Solomon as King of Israel at the time the Temple was finished being built. It only regards “***If my people (Israel)...***” This has nothing to do with God’s workings during the present “*dispensation of the grace of God.*” While 2 Chronicles 7:14 had exactly the right instruction for Israel referred to as “*my people,*” under the Law’s conditions, these “*if ...then*” promises cannot simply be torn away from their dispensational context and made to apply to us today in the U.S.A. Such spiritual larceny perpetrated by believer’s today dishonors God’s word, disregarding God’s program of “*grace*” for today.

There is more on these dispensational distinctions in the next installment.

Part 19 of 24 – The Real Need in the World

So, what about the needs of the world and the USA, in this time of wholesale rebellion of society against God and the spiritual famine in the land?

Many Christians have erroneously thought God's goal today is to make a Christian nation of the U.S.A. under His theocracy. This is yet another false concept by people thinking God still today deals with "nations" as He has dealt with Israel in "time past." They have this error because they have spiritualized the Bible to think this; "*Since God has dealt with Israel in this way as a nation - then surely He deals with the U.S.A. today in the same way.*" This is not correct during this day of "*the dispensation of the grace of God.*" Actually, God today is in the business of dealing with individual human hearts. He seeks to have a Father relationship with His Spirit birthed offspring, as many as would receive His Son, **individually**. Today, He does not deal with or call nations; He only calls people, individually, to receive Christ salvation and "*Spirit of life*"; to make them His Spirit-birthed children, born of His incorruptible "*Seed, which is Christ*" (Gal 3:16, 1Peter 1:23).

Sadly, the condition of the USA is largely unimpacted by the church at large. A survey taken several ago in the USA found that the number of people who do not participate in any religion has grown from 8% to 15% in just over 10 years. "*The percentage of Americans claiming no religion, jumped from 8.2 in 1990 to 15 in 2001. Given the estimated growth of the American adult population since that census had the population at 207 million and rising to 228 million; that reflected an additional 4.7 million "Non-religious." New England has taken over from the Pacific Northwest as the least religious section of the country, with Vermont, at 34 percent "Non-religious."*

Obviously, the "church" in the USA in its current condition has had little or no effect upon the general population.

Actually, the church today, "*the body of Christ,*" is not here to try and bring theocracy, reform the "nation," the world system, or solve the problems facing society, inaugurate social justice, etc. While true believers should have an impact for good wherever they are, we are not going to change the world system around us. In fact, part of our task is to **testify to the fact that the world is not going to be made acceptable to God, but rather as the age progresses it will grow worse, morally and spiritually, until Christ returns to put down man's rebellion and establish His reign on earth.**

The church is here to save individuals **out of this world system**, to **deliver men from "this present evil world"** (Gal 1:4). Part of that evil world is the religious systems that Christianity has become, since it marginalized Pauline teaching. I refer not of the individual believers but of the religious systems and organizations of men. The "*power of God unto salvation*" (Rom 1:16) today is according to Paul's mystery gospel that He received from the ascended Christ. His is the gospel that actually changes lives in a genuine way. Carrying the message of "*the dispensation of the grace of God,*" and "*the revelation of Christ according to Paul's mystery gospel*" (Rom 16:25) that points men to receive the indwelling "*Spirit of Christ*" (Col 1:27) is the way to make our personal work relevant to the realities and needs of people in our time.

We are here to be used of God in the saving of souls from the wreck that this world's secular and religious systems, which are doomed to destruction. We are not here to fix a doomed world, or the church system that has turned away from Paul's grace gospel. Both the world system and the religious organizations of men are destined for the wrath of God and judgment. True believers are saved, but the corrupt religious systems of apostate Christianity are doomed along with all the other religious systems of men. These religious systems have become

How to Approach the Bible

reduced to a mere “*form of godliness*” just as Paul described they would when he wrote to Timothy.

2Timothy 3:5 (KJV) Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.

Sadly, many churches and denominations today are but a shell of what God had once done in the past. God, being living and purposeful, has moved on, while they hold to the empty “*form*” of what once was, and thus they are powerless.

Tragically, when the need is greatest, the church has become totally irrelevant and ineffectual in our floundering and confused religious and secular cultures.

Seemingly aware of its impotence, all kinds of Christian movements have emerged. They seek social and political power in order to gain attention to the causes dear to them – they most often miss the mark of our real cause. For all their effort in everything from political action to new contemporary methods and programs, the world around us rushes forward largely untouched by the truth deposited in the care of Paul for “*the body of Christ*.”

Why is this? What is the problem? Some answers they consider are these; a lack of prayer, the absence of holy separated living, an indifference to the lost, the need of world evangelism, a disregard for the earthly needs of those around us, etc. But these are really only the *symptoms*.

What’s the core cause of the churches impotence today?

The principle cause isn’t really that difficult to identify. It’s the departure of the church from God’s message and program for today as revealed through the epistles of Paul that is the root of the trouble.

It was Israel’s departure from Moses’ law that constantly got them into trouble, today it’s the church’s departure from Pauline truth. Just as sure as the Law dispensation was committed to Moses, surely “*the dispensation of the grace of God*” was committed to Paul (Eph 3:1-9) for us to this day and until the rapture of “*the church, which is His body*.”

Only when the church returns to the truths Paul’s “*gospel of the grace of God*” for today will it be able to fulfill its true role as “*the pillar and ground of truth (1Tim 3:15)*”. This is the true path to the revival so desperately needed and the only avenue that can lead to a genuine spiritual awakening for the *individual people* of our nation and the world.

Part 20 of 24 – Common Erroneous Teachings Taught By Various Christian Groups Today

As we seek to “*rightly divide*” the Scripture we may note these following points of contrasts. They bringing to light some of the erroneous teachings promulgated in the church at large.

These are some of those erroneous teachings.

1. The idea that we today are to follow Jesus of Nazareth according to His earthly life and ministry.

Jesus Himself said “... I (Jesus) am not sent but (only) unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” **Matthew 15:24.** How much more obvious could it be that Jesus’ ministry was **Not to the masses** or Gentiles, but only **to Israel.** Paul confirms Matt. 15:24 writing; “*Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision (Israel) for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers.*” **Romans 15:8**

The Gentiles have no such father’s as Israel had in Abraham, to whom God made promises concerning the kingdom to come to earth for Abraham’s seed, the children of Israel.

2 Cor. 5:16b (Paul to “*the body of Christ*”) ... though we have known Christ after the flesh (in His earthly ministry), yet now henceforth know we him no more. Jesus was a minister to Israel. Paul here says we of “*the body of Christ*” are not to know or heed the words or teaching of Jesus of Nazareth who came in the flesh to minister only to “*the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*” Paul never once, in his thirteen epistles to “*the body of Christ,*” refers to anything Jesus of Nazareth said or did in His earthly ministry to Israel.

Rather, Paul wrote prolifically of the revelation he received directly from the ascended celestial Christ (Gal 1:12) concerning the full meaning of Jesus’ incarnation, death, burial and resurrection for both the body of Christ and for the nation Israel. This is why Peter in 2Peter 3:15-16 commends “*the scattered*” of Israel (*1Peter 1:1*) to read and heed all of Paul’s epistles or risk “*their own destruction.*”

2. The idea that Jesus of Nazareth preached Christianity to Israel.

This idea is absolutely false. The so-called New Testament could not have occurred until at least after the death of its Testator at the cross. **Hebrews 9:16** *For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator.* Even then, the “*church, which is the body of Christ*” could not and did not begin until Israel was blinded and set aside (Rom 11:25). Christianity for “*the body of Christ*” was first revealed to Paul some several years after the cross and Pentecost.

The ordinances, the commandments and the precepts of “the Law,” under which Jesus was born, were given to Israel and to nobody else. Jesus preached and continued Judaism. Jesus said the Messianic Jewish Kingdom “*was at hand,*” for God’s earthly people – the Jews. Jesus came to Israel to offer them the Kingdom that had been long promised to the children of Abraham. **Romans 15:8** *Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers.*”

Jesus was born under the law and continued to support the Law that was given only to Israel. **Galatians 4:4** *But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law.* He came perpetuating “the Law.” **Matthew 5:17** *Think not that I am come to destroy the law...* **Matthew 5:18** *For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.*

Some insist upon following Peter and that the church is based upon apostolic succession, failing to see that Peter's authority concerned the now-rejected kingdom of Christ to come on earth, under which Peter and the twelve would rule Israel and the nations. Our Lord had said to His twelve apostles: "Verily I say unto you, that ye which have followed Me, in the regeneration, when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of His glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt. 19:28).

Surely, there are no twelve tribes in the Church today, nor was any provision, specific or implied, made by our Lord for "apostolic succession." This dogma is built upon the unscriptural assumption that the Church today is the kingdom which Christ established when on earth, and that our ministry today is but a perpetuation of that which the twelve began.

The fact is that the ministry of "the twelve" was halted when Israel finally rejected the King and His kingdom. The apostles themselves then finally agreed to turn their proposed Gentile ministry over to Paul while they restricted their Messianic ministry to "*the circumcision.*" Paul was called to be the Apostle to the Gentiles, and to whom the ascended Christ committed an entirely new gospel called "*the gospel of the grace of God*" (Read carefully, Gal. 2:2-9 and Acts 20:24).

If only the confused church at large could see that when Israel joined the Gentiles in rebellion against God, when the world's sin had risen to its height and all was ready for judgment, God revealed "*the exceeding riches of His grace*" by saving Saul, the chief of sinners, sending him forth as both the messenger and the living example of His grace! Thus, Paul writes: "*Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound, but where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: that as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign, through righteousness, unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord*" (Rom. 5:20, 21).

3. The idea that the writings of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John present Christianity because they deal with the earthly life of Jesus of Nazareth.

Jesus was definite in His commission to His twelve disciples in defining the object of their ministry. "*These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go NOT into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: ⁶ But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel*. Matthew 10:5-6

Christianity is **not** built upon Jesus' earthly instructions to "the Twelve" or His teachings that were given to "*the lost sheep of the house of Israel*," as recorded in the synoptic gospels.

Christianity is built upon the cross, the offering of Jesus as our Savior, and to become "*the head*" of "*the body of Christ*," as the indwelling life of each member. Today we are to live under grace "*by the living law (the operation) of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus*" (Rom 8:2) as our inner governor, to rule our living from within. Paul, in his epistles, never refers to anything Jesus of Nazareth said or did – only to "the cross" of Christ.

4. The idea of a Judeo-Christian heritage.

Christianity is not an outgrowth or extension of Judaism. Jesus of Nazareth was a Jew as to His incarnation, as the son of Mary; the daughter of Heli, Jesus of Nazareth has become the "Christ," whose Spirit now indwells every believers. Yes, spiritual truths may be seen and learned by reading the Biblical history and experience of Israel and its characters; but Christianity for today is based upon a spirit-birthed relationship with God quite apart from Judaism.

Israel was **dealt with as a "Nation,"** as "**a people,**" according to Moses Law. **We, as children of God by grace, are regenerated one at a time, just as every human comes out of the womb one at a time.** As the reborn children of God, we were rebirthed individually, by God placing

How to Approach the Bible

His “Spirit-Seed,” which is Christ (Gal 3:16, 1Peter 1:23), into the womb of the human spirit of each individual believer (1Cor 6:17, John 3:6). We today are “***saved by grace, through faith,***” **totally apart from works of the Law that was given to Israel** (Eph 2:8-10).

While the Roman Church has a priesthood and great cathedrals (as temples), Christianity today is entirely separate from Judaism. Unlike Israel, we have no temple building, no priesthood, no “*holy days,*” no “*Sabbaths,*” or special “*dietary laws*” to be concerned with (Col 2:16) or to fulfill in order to be saved, or to stay saved (see Col 2:6).

5. The idea that there is only “one gospel” in the Bible.

The Bible never states there is only one gospel. “***The gospel of the grace of God***” (Act 20:24) is **far different than the “*gospel of the kingdom (Messianic)*”** (Matthew 4:23; Matthew 9:35; Matthew 24:14; Mark 1:14) **preached to the circumcision.** Those that preach the Gospel of the Kingdom as Christianity are misleading their hearers, for they are really preaching Judaism based upon *the promises God made to Abraham and that will yet be fulfilled to Israel.* Christianity is based upon the truths of “*the dispensation of the grace of God*” (Eph 3:2), as revealed to Paul.

Paul here lists two contrary gospels. ***Gal 2:7*** But **contrariwise,** when they saw that **the gospel of the uncircumcision** was committed unto me, as **the gospel of the circumcision** was unto Peter (for Israel)

Part 21 of 24 – Common Erroneous Teachings Taught by Various Christian Groups Today (Continued)

6. The idea that “the Law of Moses” is also for the Gentiles.

One of the chief reasons why so many sincere religious people are left in doubt and uncertainty as to their salvation is because the organized Church clings to “the Law of works” for God to count one as righteous. This makes one’s salvation uncertain because nobody then knows how much works must be successfully completed in order to assure salvation.

Many have rebelled against a distinct and important revelation from God to us, for we who live in this present age. This revelation is found only in the inspired words of the Apostle Paul. **“For I (Paul) speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles. I magnify mine office” (Rom. 11:13).** Paul writes the members of “the body of Christ” at Rome; **“..for ye are not under the law, but under grace” (Romans 6:14b).**

Paul tells believers they are delivered from “the Law” and its ordinances by Christ’s cross. **Colossians 2:14 (KJV) Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross. Romans 6:14 For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. Romans 7:6 (KJV) But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter.**

“The body of Christ” is also delivered from 1) the penalty of sin by Jesus’ substitutionary shedding of His blood on the believer’s behalf (1Cor 15:4, Gal 1:4), and 2) from the power of Sin-nature by the believer’s co-death with Christ (Rom 6:3, 6, 7:4), and by the impartation of His resurrection life (Rom 6:3, 8:13).

Paul writes concerning a new kind of law, which is a “living law.” This law works spontaneously, operating within the believer to guide and govern our lives. This is the normal operation of Christ’s life that is able to overcome the operation of the Sin nature that is within the “flesh” body of believers (Rom 7:23).

Romans 8:2 (NASB) For the law (Gk, nomos, normal regulatory operation) of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law (normal operation) of sin and of death.

The believing child of God, under the grace dispensation, has the power of Christ’s death and resurrection life operating within their spirit to empower them in overcoming Sin in their flesh, and to ultimately to overcome death itself.

7. The idea that abiding in Paul’s doctrine and practice is an “extreme interpretation” of the Bible

Paul told the early Gentile believers to “follow me even as I follow Christ” (1 Corinthians 4:16; 11:1; Philippians 3:17). Paul’s written words are “the commandments of the Lord” (1Cor 14:37) and men will be “judged according to my (Paul’s) gospel” (Rom 2:16). **Romans 11:13 For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles...** To follow Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, is to follow Christ “according to the revelation of **the mystery**” (Rom 16:26). That revealed “mystery” is the gospel program that the ascended Christ gave to Paul. It is for “the body of Christ” to live by during the time of “the dispensation of the grace of God” (Eph. 3:1-2).

8. The idea that “the works of the Law” and “Grace” can be mixed together in some proportion in order to make believers strong in the Lord.

Actually, when the law is preached and promoted the preacher is enabling the Sin nature to become manifested. **1 Corinthians 15:56b** ...the strength (Greek, *dunamis*, power) of sin is the law. When one attempts to keep the law it ends in sin because the law is the tool that empowers sin, giving it the power of dynamite. Paul says this was his experience. **Romans 7:8 (AMP)** *But sin, finding opportunity in the commandment [to express itself], got a hold on me and aroused and stimulated all kinds of forbidden desires (lust, covetousness). For without the Law sin is dead [the sense of it is inactive and a lifeless thing].* See also Rom. 7:9, 13)

Mixing law and grace is absolutely contrary to Paul's grace gospel. **Romans 11:6** *And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works (at all), then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.* Nobody can keep the whole law. **1 John 1:8** *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.* Rationally, when one lives under the law then they never know if they have kept enough of the law. Thankfully, "**Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.**" **Romans 10:4**

9. The idea that a measure of works is required to be fulfilled to either be saved, kept, or to strengthen our salvation. This is opposed to Pauline truth as seen here.

Many Christians have a hard time letting go of the requirement of "works" for being counted as righteous, but Paul's words are clear.

Romans 4:4-5 *Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. ⁵But to him that WORKETH NOT, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.*

Ephes. 2:8-9 *For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: ⁹NOT OF WORKS, lest any man should boast.*

Titus 3:5 *NOT BY WORKS of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.*

Paul says we are to conduct our walk in the very same way that we received Christ, which was "by grace through faith... not of works." **Colossians 2:6 (KJV)** *As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him:*

They miss the fact that salvation is not simply forgiveness of sins as a legal or justifying fact. Much more, salvation is by the fact that we have become partakers of Christ's resurrection life. Our salvation is our organic union with God via His Seed – Jesus Christ (1Peter 1:234, Gal 3:16). Christ is the birth Seed of the Father, by whom our new life was conceived. Can a man become unborn? Does Christ's Spirit jump out of us if we cease to perform to some standard – NEVER.

Ephesians 2:8-9 *For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: ⁹Not of works, lest any man should boast.* Surely these words of Scripture bolster our salvation as our "helmet of salvation" (Eph 6:7) – helping us to keep our head in times of trouble and even in times of our failing. Being secure "in Christ" assures us of His salvation.

10. The idea that the Bible prophecy reveals God's one changeless plan.

God's character and some of God's principles are eternal and unchanging. However, it is the revelation of His eternal plan that is manifested through the differing Biblical dispensational relationships between God and men that makes all the difference for us today. Each dispensation has had and will have a differing set of requirements or expectations for men as the dispensations progress toward eternity.

In this day of “*the dispensation of the grace of God,*” the outer law principles have been replaced by the inward regulating capacity of the life of Christ within the believer. “*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:*” (*Colossians 1:27*)

The law has gone from being external to being internal “*For **the law** (nomos, regulating operation) **of the Spirit of life [which is] in Christ Jesus [the law of our new being] has freed me from the law of sin and of death.***” *Romans 8:2*

Today, as a believer, God’s work now is “*in you.*” *Philip. 1:6* *Being confident of this very thing, that he (God) which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ: Philip. 2:13* *For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.*

While God’s character has not changed, we know that God has changed in several important ways as we see here. “*The word became flesh (John 1:1)” to redeem us, and “*the last Adam (Jesus) became the life-giving spirit (1Cor 15:45)” to enable Him to bring His limitless resurrection life into our spirit.**

11. The idea that “Judaism under Law” and “Christianity under grace” are to be harmonized into one religion.

As stated earlier, “the Law” is absolutely contrary to Paul’s “grace” gospel. *Romans 11:6* *And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works (at all), then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.* Nobody can keep the whole law. *1 John 1:8* *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.* Rationally, when one lives under the law then they never know if they have kept enough of the law. Thankfully, “*Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.*” *Romans 10:4*

Law and Grace are two distinctly different dispensations or economies of relationship with God, they *differ*. The “*gospel of the Kingdom*” was foretold, being “*spoken by all the prophets since the world began*” *Act 3:21*. Quite differently, the gospel of “*the mystery,*” also called “*the dispensation of the grace of God,*” was “*kept secret since the world began*” *Rom 16:25*. One relationship had been “*kept secret since the world began*” while the other had been “*spoken since the world began,*” thus, these then **cannot** be the same message.

To try to follow the God given commands of the whole Bible at one time is impossible due to the differences between His commands for various dispensational times. Let’s consider the dietary requirements of God have changed from “*vegetarian only, in the garden,*” ...

- then “*vegetables plus any meats,*” after the flood, ...
- then “*vegetables plus only certain (clean) meats and fishes, under the Law of Moses,*” ...
- then “*all foods may be eaten if sanctified by the word of God and prayer,*” according to Paul’s “*gospel of the grace of God.*”

To this list of dietary instruction we may add many other detailed points of *change* that came with “*the dispensation of the grace of God*” for “*the Church, which is the body of Christ.*”

- Jesus of Nazareth, to the Jews, said “*you must forgive in order to be forgiven.*” Under Paul’s grace gospel forgiveness from God is unconditional. Forgiveness of others has changed to “*we forgive because we **have been forgiven...freely** (<< **already**).*”
- The 4th Commandment to “*Keep the Sabbath Holy,*” which calls for stoning the Sabbath breaker has been eliminated entirely (Col 2:16).

Part 22 of 24 – Common Erroneous Teachings Taught by Various Christian Groups Today (Continued)

12. The idea there is Prophecy concerning “the church, which is His body.”

All Biblical prophecy speaks only of that which concerns **Israel** and its **Messiah**. Peter said this at Pentecost. *Acts 3:19-21 (KJV) Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; ²⁰ And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: ²¹ Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began*

By contrast, **NOTHING** concerning “the mystery” (Greek, musterion, secret plan) of “the gospel of the grace of God” and “the church, which is His body” had ever been prophesied.

Romans 16:25 Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my (Paul’s) gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began...

So, that which concerned Israel has been “spoken by all the prophets since the world began,” while Paul’s “mystery” (secret) gospel had been “kept secret since the world began.” Under Paul’s mystery gospel there was a new dispensational God/man relationship, based upon the pure grace of God, that had been kept secret until it was first revealed by the ascended Christ to the Apostle Paul (Gal 1:12).

Ephesians 3:1-3 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: ³How that by revelation he (Jesus Christ, v1) made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words)

This “mystery” had “been hid” in God. *Ephesians 5:32 This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church (the body of Christ). Colossians 1:26 Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints:*

13. The idea that “the church which is His body” started in Acts 2 at Pentecost.

Having now understood that the definition of the Greek word “*ekklesia*,” **only sometimes** means “the church, which is His body,” (see Part 18 of 24) helps us to always take note as to which church is specifically being spoken of when we read reference to “church.” “The church which is His body” is different that church or “assembly” of “ye men of Judea,” “men of Israel,” which is “the circumcision,” to whom Peter was called to preach at Pentecost (Matt 10:5-6, Gal 2:7).

Today, “the church” is “the body of Christ” (Eph 1:22b-23a), which was first revealed to Paul. “The body of Christ” could not possibly begin until Paul was called, saved, and received “revelation of the mystery” from the ascended Christ. Paul received this gospel from Christ and then taught it (Eph 3:1-5).

For the “church, which is His body” to come into being, Israel first, as a nation, had to reject not only Christ but also the Holy Spirit, which it did in Acts 7. Israel not only rejected the Father, as it did by rebelling against God and killing the God-sent prophets of Israel, but they also rejected and crucified the Son of God. Then Israel rejected the witness of the Holy Spirit through Stephen (Acts 7:51), by stoning Stephen to death in Acts 7:58. Only then does God “cast away” Israel, for a time (Rom 11:1, 15). Only then did Christ save Paul to reveal to him the mystery “gospel of the grace of God,” and give him unique ministry to the mainly Gentile “church, which is body of Christ,” under “the dispensation of the grace of God” (1Cor 12:27).

Only Paul explains the detailed information of the mystery gospel that he received from the risen Lord. Paul reveals the cross, with its **full meaning**. In contrast to Peter on the day of Pentecost, when he scolded the Jews for “*killing the Prince of Peace*,” Paul tells us that it is by virtue of Christ’s death and shed blood that we have justification, propitiation, redemption, liberation from Sin’s power. Paul goes on to tell us of Jesus’ resurrection, by which we have His “*Spirit of life*” indwelling every member of “*the body of Christ*.” No Bible writer but Paul uses the term “*the body of Christ*.” All of the other Bible writers are principally concerned with Israel of the past and/or Israel’s future. By contrast, only Paul uses the term “**but now**” speaking of today under “**the dispensation of the grace of God**.” The only way revival can come to the individual and “*the body of Christ*,” in this day of “*the dispensation of the grace of God*,” is to get back to the Pauline truth of the pure grace of God. This has happened to a degree beginning with Martin Luther in the early 1500’s as a prime example, as he saw the light on Paul’s presentation of “**justification by faith**” **in Christ alone, apart from works**, as taught by Paul in Rom 11:6. Then John Nelson Darby, the father of modern dispensational theology, C.I. Scofield, Charles Ryrie, and others recovered the truth of “the rapture of the body of Christ” during the early to late 1800’s.

Still, most of the church at large today marginalizes Paul’s thirteen epistles for “*the body of Christ*,” preferring to mix law with Paul’s grace gospel. They confuse Pentecost as being for “*the body of Christ*,” when in fact the body of Christ came into being some several years later.

14. The idea that “*the church which is His body*” is destined for the earthly “*kingdom of God*”.

Genesis 1:1 *In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. Ephesians 3:15* *Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named...* God has and will have family in both heaven and on the earth for eternity.

Israel, as the descendants of Abraham, has been promised “*a land*” upon the earth as an “*everlasting inheritance*” (Gen 17:7). This land extends from the river Nile to the river Euphrates, encompassing the whole Fertile Crescent. Jesus gave His Jewish disciples a prayer in accord with that promise, “*Thy kingdom come...thy will be done...on earth*.” The focus here is **the kingdom from heaven coming to be upon the earth**.

By contrast, Paul clearly says those of “*the body of Christ*” have their **citizenship in heaven**. Paul writes this to the members of “*the body of Christ*” at Philippi. **Philippians 3:20** *For our citizenship is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ:* We of “*the body of Christ*” are destined for the eternal paradise of heaven as our home forever. The earth is not our home. Paradise has been relocated from the place “below” that Jesus and the thief on the cross descended to. It now is located in heaven, where Paul later was “*caught up*” (2Cor 12:2). “*The body of Christ*” is a heavenly people (Eph 1:3, 20), living now as ambassadors of Christ (2Cor 5:20) while we are upon this earth. With our home in heaven, and we currently being on earth, then we today are His ambassadors on earth (2Cor 5:20), currently in a place that is **not** our home.

Thus, it is by these two people groups, “*the body of Christ*” and the nation of “*Israel*,” that Christ will thereby fill those things which are **in heaven and on earth**. He will be “*all and in all*” to the two groups who receive Him and become His expression in their two spheres; “*the body of Christ*” in **heaven**, and Israel on **earth**. **Ephes. 1:10** *That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him:*

Part 23 of 24 - Common Erroneous Teachings Taught by Various Christian Groups Today (Continued)

15. The idea that “water baptism” is still important today for “the body of Christ.”

The Apostles, as seen in the gospels and the early Acts period, preached to Israel that they needed to *“repent and be baptized for the remission of sins”* (Acts 2:38). Yet Paul, under his gospel, simply says this. *Acts 16:31 (AMP) ...Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ [give yourself up to Him, take yourself out of your own keeping and entrust yourself into His keeping] and you will be saved, [and this applies both to] you and your household as well.*

Paul tells us not only is there One God and faith, but also *“one baptism”* (Eph 4:5). Under Paul’s mystery gospel, which is in accord with 1Cor 12:13, all believers have been baptized or placed into the one *“body of Christ”* by the work of the Spirit the very moment they received Christ. *1 Corinthians 12:13 For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.* This baptism is a dry baptism. Water baptism is a strictly Jewish God-ordained rite as a demonstration of repentance and promoted by John the Baptist, Jesus of Nazareth and the 12 Apostles – of whom Paul was **not** one. While Paul baptized in his early ministry as He still attempted to draw Israel, he ceased that effort, as he said this. *1 Corinthians 1:17 For Christ sent me not to baptize...*

Today, our *“one baptism”* for the members of *“the body of Christ”* is *“by one spirit... into one body”* (1Cor 12:13). **1)** This is a waterless baptism. Today the baptizer is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit places believers into Christ’s body. **2)** This then also **cannot** be the same as the so-called *“baptism in or with the Holy Spirit,”* whereby Jesus was the baptizer of the 120 Jews when the Holy Spirit came UPON them at Pentecost. This *“baptism in the Holy Spirit”* was only for Israel and only for the time of the offering of the kingdom to Israel during the Apostle’s ministry, which has ended.

Today, the members of *“the body of Christ”* are *“in Christ”* by the *“one baptism”* in accord with Paul’s mystery gospel that he received directly from the ascended Lord, and taught. This dry baptism is the basis of our being identified with Christ, in His death as our death, His burial as our burial, and His resurrection as our resurrection to new life. We identify with Christ’s cross as the basis of our new life *“in Christ,”* into whom we have been *“baptized spiritually.”*

16. The idea that we must forgive others first in order for God to forgive us of our sins.

The contrast is significant when we compare Jesus’ words to Israel concerning forgiveness with Paul’s gospel to the uncircumcision, as Paul received it from the ascended Christ.

Let’s now look at forgiveness of sins under the two paradigms and dispensations of 1) the *“Law”* and 2) the *“gospel of the grace of God.”* **Still under “the Law,”** Jesus gave the Jews the so-called Lord’s Prayer, which included the conditional requirement that **a Jew had to forgive first** in order **to receive God’s forgiveness.** *Matt 6:12 (God) forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.* While still under the dispensation of *“the Law”* (see Matt 5:18), Jesus here presents this **conditional requirement for Jews to be forgiven of sins.** Any preacher who preaches this conditional requirement for forgiveness of sin today preaches *“Law,”* not *“grace.”*

We today, under *“the dispensation of the grace of God,”* are **unconditionally** and **freely** *“justified.”* *Roman 3:24 Being (continuing) justified (diction, rendered innocent) FREELY (Gk. doreen, without cause, unconditional) by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:* The believer enjoys a continuing grace standing by having been immersed or placed *“in Christ.”*

How to Approach the Bible

Paul here writes, telling the Ephesian members of “*the body of Christ*” how they are to forgive each other.

*Eph 4:32 be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, **forgiving one another**, even **as God for Christ's sake hath** (already, past tense) **forgiven you**. Having this as our standing by being “in Christ,” we are *then equipped to forgive* others in the very same way - “**freely**.” *Col. 3:13 Forbearing one another, and **forgiving one another**, if any man have a quarrel against any: even **as Christ forgave** (already, past tense) **you, so also do ye**.**

Then how is it that we can forgive others, and even ourselves? Reminding us of this truth, Paul encourages us **to forgive others** in the same way that **we have been forgiven** – *and that is freely*. So, we now forgive others *freely*. We must see that God not only forgave us freely, but He also then *freely gave us His life and His love to be* on the **inside of us**. It is only by His life and love that we can genuinely love and forgive others. Thus, He has equipped believers to *forgive their selves, and others freely* – no matter how they may have wronged us. God has already forgiven us freely, *before* we forgive anyone.

17. The idea that the so-called “Lord's Prayer” is for the Body of Christ

Having noted that Jesus Himself said “... **I** (Jesus) **am not sent but** (only) **unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel**.” *Matthew 15:24*, we must consider that the prayer He gave to those Jews was for them and concerned Israel only. (This fact does not negate the fact that His cross-work was on behalf of *all* mankind.)

Religious leaders love to have their people recite the so-called Lord's Prayer. It's been the religious thing to do for centuries. The so-called Lord's Prayer is one of the most beautiful, meaningful, and touching prayers in the prophetic Scriptures, but those who recite it today are committing a major error.

The Lord Jesus warned the disciples that they were not to pray this prayer, or any prayer for that matter, **repetitiously**. *Matthew 6:7-8 But when ye pray, use **not vain repetitions**, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. ⁸ Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.* Prayer is not a religious exercise, but rather communication with God; therefore, it should always be spoken from the heart.

Actually, the Disciples Prayer, which would be a better name for this prayer, was given as a model for those who Jesus knew would one day be called upon to endure the Great Tribulation. Since the Body of Christ is “*delivered... from the wrath to come*” (*1Thes 1:10*), this prayer does not apply to us under this grace dispensation since we are “*not appointed to wrath*” (*1Thes 5:9*). The prayer that should correctly be called the Lord's Prayer is seen in John 17 – as Jesus prayed to the Father for Israel.

The Disciples' Prayer: We must note that Jesus of Nazareth had come only to and spoke only to and of the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matt 15:24). Jesus offered His Jewish disciples a prayer concerning their needs in the light of the destiny of Israel during the Tribulation. What is commonly referred to as “the Lord's prayer” is actually the prayer the Lord gave to His disciples, knowing Israel was destined to face and have to endure the judgments of the Great Tribulation. This prayer must be seen and considered with this understanding of His purpose, while noting to whom He is speaking – those of Israel.

“*Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be **Thy name**.*” The reference here to “*our Father*” is to the God and Father of Israel - the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In prophecy, heaven was His throne and earth His footstool. His name was so holy or hallowed that the Jews feared

they might inadvertently speak it in vain; consequently they changed it from Yahweh to Adonai – meaning Master, Ruler (Isa. 66:1).

“Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done *in earth, as it is in heaven.*” The hope of every Israelite was the establishment of the Davidic Kingdom. God's will for the earth is to overthrow the kingdoms of this world and establish the millennial kingdom of His dear Son (II Sam. 7:8-17; Luke 1:68-72; Rev. 11:15; 20:6), as promised to Abraham's seed, the children of Israel.

“Give us *this day our daily bread.*” In the future Tribulation, God will set a table in the wilderness for His people, as He did in time past. The saints in that day will find it necessary to pray for their daily provision of food, since they will be unable to buy or sell without the Mark of the Beast. Subsequently, God will supernaturally nourish the chosen nation (Rev. 12:14 cf. Rev. 13:13-18).

“And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.” As stated earlier, under the **kingdom gospel** for Israel, **forgiveness was conditional** based upon a like-spirit (Matt. 18:21-35 cf. Eph. 4:32). Today, under the **grace gospel we are to “forgive others, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven us” – “freely.”** We forgive because He has already forgiven us;

“And lead us not into temptation (trials), but deliver us from evil (Gk. noun: evil one). ***For Thine is the***

kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.” The sense here is, “*Lord, lead us (the believing ones of Israel) not into the Great Tribulation, but deliver us from Satan, who brings death and destruction in his wake*” (Rev. 6:7-11; 12:12; 13:1-10).

Part 24 of 24 - Jesus of Nazareth, Resurrected and Declared to be the Son of God

Romans 1:3-4 Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; ⁴ And **DECLARED TO BE THE SON OF GOD** with power, according to the spirit of holiness, **BY THE RESURRECTION FROM THE DEAD:**

Hebrews 1:5 (AMP) For to which of the angels did [God] ever say, You are **My Son, TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU** [established You in an official Sonship relation, with kingly dignity]? And **AGAIN, I will be to Him a Father, and He will be to Me a Son?**

In Rom 1:3-4 (above) Paul refers to the crucified and resurrected Jesus of Nazareth as “**Son of David according to the flesh** (in His humanity).” Paul says the human Jesus in the flesh was now “**powerfully declared to be the Son of God... by the resurrection from the dead**” (Rom 1:4). In Heb 1:5 Paul confirms this from prophecy. “And **again, I will be to Him a Father, and He will be to Me a Son?**” Jesus was originally, from eternity past, “*the Son of God,*” then He became “the Son of man” via His incarnation. But now, out of His resurrection, we see that **Jesus as the “man”** is “**declared to be the Son of God.**” Thus, **Jesus the God/man now is the risen Lord** in His Spirit-form (2Cor 3:17). We could say this Jesus’ humanity has been added to the divinity of the Godhead, in the person of the resurrected Jesus Christ.

In Psalm 2:7, we see Christ in prophecy: “**I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto Me, Thou art My Son; this day have I begotten Thee.**” Our Lord was of course eternally one Son of the Father. The word “*begotten*” here comes from Israel’s laws, referring to the time when *the child was officially declared to be the father’s full-grown son.*

But which day was “*this day*” that is referred to in Psalm 2:7? On what day did the Father officially proclaim: “**This day have I begotten Thee?**”

The answer is found in Acts 13:33, where the Apostle Paul states that **God “RAISED UP JESUS AGAIN; as it is also written in the second Psalm: THOU ART MY SON, THIS DAY HAVE I BEGOTTEN THEE.**” Therefore, “*this day*” in Psalm 2:7 was prophetic of the day of Jesus’ resurrection. So, our Lord Jesus was then officially and powerfully **declared to be God’s grown up “Son”** at His resurrection from the dead. I use the word grown up in the sense that Jesus only then was completed as the God/man.

Let’s now consider what Paul means here. “**Remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead according to MY GOSPEL.**” (2Tim. 2:7-8)

The twelve Apostles (not Paul) had proclaimed Christ as the Messiah, who was to be the **Son of David (Matt 21:9)**, destined to sit on David’s throne as King of Israel. The twelve were commanded by Jesus to preach and proclaim “*the gospel of the kingdom,*” to Israel only (Matt 10:5-6). But Israel rejected the King and His kingdom by killing Him (Acts 3:15). Then later, they rejected the Holy Spirit in Acts 7:58 with the stoning of Stephen. With that, God set Israel aside (Rom 11:1, 25), and with that the kingdom was also set aside.

God then raised another Apostle, Paul (Acts 9), who was both a Roman citizen and a Jew. Paul was to proclaim a heretofore hidden “mystery” or secret gospel “*the gospel of the grace of God*” (Acts 20:24). Paul proclaimed a new dispensational relationship with God was now available to all believers, based upon the pure grace of God, calling it “*the dispensation of the grace of God*” (Eph 3:2).

Christ was raised from the dead to one day sit on David’s throne in the Messianic Millennial **kingdom on the literal, physical, earth;** as had been promised to Abraham’s seed. Regardless of Israel’s rejection of Christ 2,000 years ago, this *will yet come to pass* in the Millennium. This though is in stark contrast to Paul’s gospel and “*dispensation of grace*” that is applicable for us

right now, while Israel has been set aside. This current period will extend for an unspecified time period – “*until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled*” (Rom 11:25); until the last “*member*” is added to “*the church, which is the body of Christ*” (Eph 1:22b-23a).

Though Paul never once in his 13 epistles mentions anything the human Jesus of Nazareth did or said Paul is the one who received and introduced the preaching of the cross as the basis of God’s entire provision for those who believe and have believed in all ages. **Paul is the one who first received the revelation of and wrote of the meaning of the incarnation, death, burial and resurrection of Jesus as Christ and Lord.** Paul’s gospel was that **Christ was crucified and raised from the dead as the God/man to “certify” our justification; also to become the Head of “the Church, which is His Body.”**

The “*body of Christ*” had never been spoken of or prophesied before Paul. But is the object of that “*mystery*” or secret plan of God revealed to Paul. The ascended Jesus Christ returned to earth to reveal “the mystery” (God’s eternal secret plan). **The “*body of Christ*” for this day first required that its “*Head*” be raised and declared to be “*the Son of God.*”**

Since we, the members of His “*body,*” are joined to Christ as the Head of “*the body*” **we are partakers with Him in His new Sonship.** We enjoy our “*inheritance*” that is of Him, and all that He now is as the God/man indwelling our spirit.

This is all very meaningful because, though Jesus Christ had always existed as the Son of God, **Jesus of Nazareth referred to as the “*Son of Man,*” was the first “*man*” to be “*begotten of God.*” This declaration by the Father was evidenced by Jesus being raised to Sonship as God’s first genuine human offspring,** as the glorious expression of God the Father’s fully processed life (Rom 6:4a). In this way, **by His resurrection through the power of God the Father, Jesus of Nazareth became the “first of many (human) brethren” to be ascended to the third heaven as God’s first literal human offspring to bear His divine and eternal life.**

Thus, this declaration by God the Father applied to “the human” Jesus of Nazareth, who was also called “*The Son of Man.*” He now, as the resurrected and ascended Christ, still bears His resurrection “*spirit-body,*” a body that still bears the marks of His humanity; His scarred hands, feet and side. This is Jesus as He now exists. It is by the wounds He still bears that we know there is a very first “*man*” who dwells in heaven. Christ’s resurrection to heaven is our guarantee that our sins are forgiven and washed away; and that we, the creatures in whom He has invested His resurrection life, also are destined for heaven.

1 Corinthians 15:12-19 (NASB) Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³ But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; ¹⁴ and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. ¹⁵ Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. ¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; ¹⁷ and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. ¹⁹ If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.

It is the Spirit of this resurrected God-man, Jesus of Nazareth, who now is both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:38). His resurrected “*Spirit of life*” (Rom 8:2a) indwells every believer’s spirit as their new and eternal life (John 3:16, 1John 5:11-12). It can now be said as Paul wrote, that every rebirthed believer **has already been “*raised up together*” with Jesus to “*sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.*”**

How to Approach the Bible

Ephesians 2:4-7 But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, ⁵ Even when we were dead in sins, **hath quickened us (made us alive) together with Christ**, (by grace ye are saved;)⁶ And **hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus**:⁷ That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of **his grace** in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

Appendix to “How to Approach the Bible”

1. Biblical Canon:

It would be helpful to the Bible student to consider and note the specific order of the books contained in the Biblical Canon. In their God-ordained order the books of the Bible serve to reveal the unfolding of the ages; uncovering the unique place of Paul’s “mystery” gospel in God’s eternal plan. The Books in the Bible are not at all listed according to the chronological order of their writing. They are set in the order of the unfolding of the dispensations and ages; past, present, and the ages to come.

The index of our Bible (i.e., the Authorized Kings James Version) reveals the uniqueness of Paul’s epistles, and the fact that “*the dispensation of the grace of God*” given to Paul for “*the body of Christ*” appears to be inserted as a parenthesis in the ages. God’s eternal plan includes an interruption in God’s ultimate plan for Israel, which will yet be fulfilled. After Paul’s thirteen (13) epistles to “*the church, which is body of Christ,*” the focus of Hebrews picks up from the Gospels, still being upon Israel, as though “*the dispensation of the grace of God*” had not occurred. Only then, the truth of the cross revealed to Paul is added for Israel to see and receive in “the ages to come.”

Let’s now consider the specific order of the books of the New Testament, noting to whom they are addressed and intended.

- **The four Gospels** are set in what Paul calls “*time past,*” while yet under “*the Law*” and the Old Covenant **for Israel.**
- **The Book of Acts** begins in “*time past*” and then we note the transition to “*but now*” (“*the dispensation of the grace of God*”) with the stoning of Stephen in Acts 7 and the salvation of Saul of Tarsus in Acts 9. Saul Paulus (Paul, the Apostle to the gentiles) then received “*the mystery*” gospel under the “*the dispensation of the grace of God*” from the ascended Christ for “*the body of Christ.*”
- **Paul’s thirteen (13) epistles to “the body of Christ”** (Romans-Philemon) follow the transition recorded in Acts. These are inserted as an interruption of God’s plan for Israel. These Pauline epistles, for “*the body of Christ,*” present the entirely new truth of the new “*dispensation of the grace of God*” called “*the mystery,*” which “*had been kept secret since the world began*” (Rom 16:25).

NOTE: All the books from “Hebrews to Revelation” are non-Pauline, written to and/or of Israel. They concern God’s provision for meeting Israel’s needs in the Tribulation, and Israel’s position in “*ages to come.*” God knew these truths would be needed to teach, encourage, and guide Israel’s believers in their reliance upon God, so as to equip them, such that they may endure the Tribulation. “*The body of Christ*” will already by then have been “*raptured,*” to be with the Lord forever in heaven (1Thes 4:17).

- The **Epistle to the Hebrews is written by Paul** to present the truth of the cross of Christ as only he received it. It will be needed if the believers are to endure the Tribulation period. Paul here reveals the cross, blood, death, and resurrection of Christ; citing many of Israel’s historical events and Patriarchs as allegory or metaphor of these truths. Hebrews is written in a way that the Hebrews could better come to understand the truths of the cross. The law of “*conditional blessing*” (Heb 3:6, 14, 6:6, 10:26, 12:25) for Israel is still present in Hebrews, which is entirely contrary to “*the dispensation of the grace of God.*” Thus, God’s clock will then have moved ahead from Paul’s “*time past*” for the lost Gentiles (Eph 2:2) to Paul’s “*but now*” *the body of Christ* (Eph 2:13) and onto “*the ages to come*” (Eph 2:7) that focuses upon Israel. Confusion

How to Approach the Bible

and insecurity occurs in “*the body of Christ*” when Christians try to apply these conditions of blessing given to Israel. These requirements do not fit the grace dispensation for “*the body of Christ*.”

Before we look at the remainder of the books from Hebrews to Revelation we need to note that in **Gal 2:9** “**James, Cephas (Peter), and John**” restricted their ministry “**to the circumcision**,” while Paul was to go to the Gentile “**uncircumcision**” with his new unique gospel. It is obvious then that “**James, Cephas (Peter), and John**” would be addressing “**the circumcision**” (Israel) in their epistles that followed.

- **James’ epistle** is plainly addressed to “*the lost sheep of the house of Israel*” (James 1:1)
- **Peter’s 2 epistles** are addressed to Israel’s diaspora – Israel’s “*strangers (in the world) scattered (sowed)*” abroad (1Pet 1:1). 1Peter 2:12 speaks of being “*among the Gentiles*” – then the recipients of this epistle must **not** be Gentiles, but Jews. 1Pet 2:9-10 quotes Ex 19:5-6, a promise of God to Israel.
- **John’s 3 epistles** are addressing Israel’s diaspora – the scattered of Israel.
- **Jude’s epistle** is concerns Israel. Jude was “*the brother of James*” (v1) and Jude was one of “*the twelve*” Apostles of Israel who were told to go only to “*the lost sheep of the house of Israel*” (Matt 10:5-6). Jude in verse 17 refers the recipients to “*words spoken by the twelve*” – not to the Apostle to the Gentiles, Paul.
- **The Book of Revelation**, written by John, concerns Jesus Christ’s appearing is **unto Israel** at His return to earth. It reveals the happenings of the time of “*the ages to come*” when Christ will return to set up the physical, literal, earthly, kingdom of heaven as was promised to Israel. It is primarily about Israel.

2. A Closing Word

I end this study series by clearly stating my consistent focus and ultimate goal in writing these studies. That objective is that every believer might personally come to learn of Christ through the written word and then, most importantly, come to experientially know the indwelling Christ as their life and governing Lord.

There is a time when we only know about the Lord, but we must go on to know “*Christ who is our life*” (Col 3:4a).

Paul tells us there is “*much more*” for the believer than being reconciled to God through Christ’s cross. **Romans 5:10** *For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, **MUCH MORE**, being reconciled, we shall be saved (sozo, completed) **by his life**.*

We should note that it is not the Bible that gives us Christ’s resurrection life; only the “*Spirit of life in Christ Jesus*” gives us real life. All life is organic and only God’s pro-creative eternal life begets genuine life. **2 Corinthians 3:6** *...the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.* Jesus of Nazareth has been processed via the cross to become “*the life-giving Spirit*” (1Cor 15:45). He may now indwell every believer’s spirit as “*the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus*.” If we do not possess His Spirit we are not His (Rom 8:8-9, 1Cor 6:17).

The great need of Christians everywhere is to come to know the truth of the indwelling Christ, and then to enjoy the provision of the rich deposit of the very life of the resurrected Christ as the inheritance already possessed within them. We each have already received all of His all-sufficient life-supply.

How to Approach the Bible

Most Christians are simply deficient in the knowledge of who they now are by Christ in them as their new life. See their great need, Paul prayed for *revelation knowledge* of this truth to come to the believers at Ephesus.

Ephesians 1:16-18 (I Paul) Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; ¹⁷ That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you THE SPIRIT OF WISDOM and revelation in the KNOWLEDGE OF HIM: ¹⁸ The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance IN THE SAINTS,

The Bible, studied in its context and revealed by His Spirit (1Jonh 2:20, 27), leads us to see the riches of the gift of our indwelling inheritance, and that this inheritance is ours as the fruit of the cross of Christ. “*The (resurrected) Spirit of life in Christ Jesus*” now is our real life. This is the Spirit of the crucified, resurrected, and ascended Lord Jesus Christ. He has become the life-giving Spirit (1Cor 15:45) who now indwells our human spirit (1Cor 6:17) to be “*our life*” (Col 3:4, Gal 2:20).

The written word of the Bible is God’s gift to us that is used of His Spirit to give us the light we need to see Christ as He is today – as **our all-sufficient indwelling life-supply**. Being in and one with us, Christ now is so close at hand and so available. “*The Spirit of life in Christ Jesus*” is both our life and our enlightener that we might come to know Him who is our indwelling life, to guide our living in an intimate way (1John 2:20, 27).

My prayer is that the study tools and understandings presented in this study series may be used of Him to aid you in your approach to Bible Study and in your walk; that *you as a believer might come know Him “in you,”* in that ever deepening way that God desired and has made possible for each of us.

2 Timothy 4:22 The Lord Jesus Christ be (is) WITH THY SPIRIT. Grace be (is) WITH YOU. Amen.

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