

## **Part 6 of Dispensations.**

In this sixth session, I want to push on with the general outline of how the Word of God has been divided. It is suggested that in order to ‘rightly divide the Word of the Truth’, as per 2 Tim 2v15, we have to see that each member of the Godhead has revealed something for us. That means that we have three God given portions of the Word, each, in turn, witnessed to by God-chosen vessels. Are we able to find these?

In the case of God the Father, we find that the facts that He revealed were confirmed by what the Old Testament Prophets taught. This brought us up to John the Baptist, who was the last of those Prophets. As **Prophet** of the Most High God, he introduced the **Son** of the Most High God, their two earthly lives overlapping by some thirty years.

In the case of the Son, His message is to be found in the Gospels. In His case the message was confirmed by the twelve disciples who were referred to as ‘them that heard Him’ – see Heb 2v3. There we have the first two Members of the Godhead and the confirming witnesses as required by law – Deut: 19v15, etc. What we cannot fail to notice at this point is that one of the twelve witnesses that went in and out with Jesus was now dead and needed to be replaced. As we’ve seen earlier, many have suggested that the apostles got it wrong and should have chosen Paul. This is wrong thinking for the condition that is laid down by Peter and found in Acts 1v21-2, precludes Paul, who wasn’t even converted at that time. He most certainly did not qualify for being with the Twelve the whole time that the Lord was with them..

There is one other very important fact to take note of, and that is that the Lord Jesus fulfilled two vital positions during His life and death. The first, as we have seen, was that He was the rightful King of the Jews. If you figure it out, a king had to receive the acknowledgement of Rome in those days, and that is exactly what Pilate stuck his neck out about. The representative of Caesar insisted that Jesus was King of the Jews, and yet yielded to the Jewish will on all other points. The Jews crucified their King! The second point to note throughout all of this is that He was also ‘the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world’. This, you will recall, came through the Prophet of the Most High, so, as we saw, this is TOP LEVEL stuff.

What seems to throw people about all of this is the amazing kindness of God. Look carefully at Acts 3v18-26. There we see two things that we need to grasp. The first one is seen in v19, namely that even though they had crucified their King, even now, if they would repent, God would forgive them and send them seasons of refreshing. That is GRACE. Secondly, this had been prophesied by all of the Prophets – v18 – and in no way could it be ‘the mystery hid from the ages and the generations’ that Paul speaks of in Col 1v26 etc.:

During this extended grace to Israel, the twelve continued to witness of Christ, and the Lord poured out the most amazing miracles as a confirmation to this nation of Jews, who ‘require a sign’ – 1 Cor 1v22 – and as such helps to confirm why Paul’s miracles seem to stop later, after he had turned to the Gentiles, having fulfilled his first commission, and where we read that he left a colleague called Trophimus ‘sick’ at Miletus. Whilst we have seen many healings and miracles in our ministry, I still ponder over the second half of that verse.

Anyway, to keep the apparent pattern running, we should expect to see the third Member of the Godhead’s message to the world coming forth. However, as John the Baptist lived alongside the Lord for about thirty years, we might have to look for someone, associated with the third message, that would be from the Holy Spirit this time, and that someone to be alive, alongside the witnesses of Jesus’ message, for a similar length of time. That isn’t difficult to do, nor should it surprise us if he is found to be living along with them for a season,

as did Jesus and John the Baptist, for, no matter what the message was that he would have to bring, he too would have to be firmly founded on the message being preached by the twelve, for there is 'no other name under heaven whereby we must be saved' – Acts 4v12. At this point, I want to make it very clear that in 'dividing' the word of the Truth, I am not suggesting that we dump the rest of the Bible when we see a third revelation – should it turn out that this is the case. However, I am suggesting that one of the two aspects revealed by the ministry of Jesus, i.e. His position as King of the Jews, has been suspended whilst the 'Mystery hid etc.' is brought into the open. As I've pointed out, this Mystery seems to be opened up in what are known as the Prison Epistles, and as I read them – and remember that the purpose of these studies is to open discussion on the subject, for once one has taken sides, there will naturally be a bias, and I want truth, not opinion – there is an emphasis upon another work. That work has to stand upon what God has done at Calvary and the Resurrection, which resurrection began the second stage of man's creation, with all that that implies.

One of the incidents that is totally out of character with the general run of conversions is that of Saul of Tarsus. Yet in the light of the Mystery that is to be revealed later, it would open our minds to the idea that we aren't told anywhere in scripture of a human being who had any say in his or her birth. Certainly this would seem to be the case in the matter of the creation of Adam. In fact we are told that mankind began to increase in the fallen image of Adam – Gen: 5v3 – but no one but the parents had any say in it. (I know very well that this raises an issue about Cain, but that isn't what I'm driving at here.) We do find in the scriptures that quite a number of people were chosen by God. So, what was different about Saul? (You should know that I believe firmly that all scripture is God Breathed and, therefore, that nothing is there by accident.)

Having said that, it is no coincidence that Saul is first drawn to our attention at the death of the first martyr, Stephen. He is not one of the witnesses but he is 'consenting to his death' and actually minds the garments of those who 'throw the first stones'. At this stage he is in his youth. He hates Christians and everything that they stand for. However, this guy is anything but passive. He is highly intelligent and very well connected. He obtains letters from the High Priest and creates havoc in the synagogues at Jerusalem, throwing every Christian he can find into prison. Having cleaned up the capital city, he obtains letters, again from the High Priest, to repeat the operation in Damascus. Just before he arrives there, a light shines from heaven and a voice speaks to him. This light blinded him and the voice convinced him. He knew, I'm sure, that it was the Shekinah glory and that only occurs when God is present. His question is quite revealing because of the way in which he constructed it, i.e., 'Who art thou LORD.' Remember, he was on the ground, blinded, and being asked why he's persecuting this person he is now in conversation with. The reply must have really hit him. Everything he had done – see Acts 8v3 – was against God's Christ. (It always amazes me that Jesus associated Himself with every violent thing that Saul had done – Acts 9v4. Christ and His church are truly one.) It's Acts 9v6 that I want you to be aware of. It is a command. 'You'll be told what you **MUST** do' 'Must is defined as 'necessary, (as binding)'. So he did, and he was given his orders through Ananias. I doubt if we are told everything that the Lord said to Ananias, who at first was in no mood to come into contact with Saul, but it certainly changed his mind, for when he got to him, he referred to him as 'Brother Saul'.

Now, I used to be of the opinion that when Paul, in writing to Timothy – 1 Tim 1v12-6 – said that he was the 'chief of sinners', that it was a kind of mock modesty. However, I don't think that any more, because he just about broke the whole law in one go, when he persecuted the church – see the earlier vvs in 1 Tim 1v3-14 – and what he did comes under a fair portion of that. However, as the account continues, we see that what

happened was that he was chosen **because** of how bad he was. He was more opposed to the gospel, it would seem, than any other one was. So the Lord showed forth the extent of His longsuffering toward Saul, not to mention the GRACE shown to the nation in the ‘even now’ pouring out of blessing and refreshing, as an example to others of the wonders of God’s Grace. He states his position and the gospel as he was then preaching it, in 1 Cor 15v3-11. What I’d like to put firmly into our minds is his attitude to himself and the others. He saw himself as the ‘least’ but recognised how gracious the Lord had been to him. It’s important that we grasp this. He didn’t sit back and bask in his salvation, making the grace void, or empty, “but I toiled more abundantly than they all; yet not I, but the grace of God with me.” Think of that as you will, but Paul’s salvation certainly reveals the scope of our Lord’s death. ‘Whosoever’ sums up its all-encompassing range. We see Paul’s thinking once again expressed in Eph 3v7-8.

This, briefly, sums up the foundation into which the ‘Mystery Hidden from the Foundation’ was committed. A man, obviously wealthy, who sat at the feet of Gamaliel, very well connected, for he had no problem getting letters from the High Priest, and probably having a brilliant future in the Jewish system. Not the least of his benefits was to turn out to be his Roman Citizenship, which was his by birth. All of this was lined up AGAINST THE CHURCH. This person, raging against God, was CHOSEN by God to be His ambassador. From what the Lord said in Matt 22v14, this would place Saul/Paul in the ‘fewer’ group. This is a special group with a special privileges, if Jn 15v16 is anything to go by. The main thing in Paul’s favour was that he did it all in ignorance - 1 Tim 1v13. I suggest that the main thing for us may well be to grasp that God is doing something **very special**, and, being a ‘Mystery’ it was not intended, right up through time, to that point, to be known by anyone, including the Prophets. As the message of salvation was being very clearly preached, - even though the preachers tended to limit its scope at first, - it **cannot** be that. That information had become very widely known. There is another very important point to my mind, and that is that Paul was a very religious man. He was by no means an atheist, in fact his knowledge of what were then the scriptures, was impressive, as we see in some of his later arguments. What bearing this has on what was to come, I am not sure, but it could be weighty. Anyway, in Acts 9v15, we learn that Saul is a chosen vessel, and this would seem to put him on the same level as the apostles – Jn 15v16. Once again I would like to repeat the definition that is given regarding grace. It is that someone bends down to do something for you that you cannot do for yourself.

Anyway, it doesn’t take long after his conversion, before Saul gets active and in no time he is ‘amazing’ and ‘confounding the Jews at Damascus’, his purpose being to prove that Jesus was the Christ. In this we see a prime example of the Grace of God. Though it doesn’t say so, you can imagine that he hadn’t taken long to ‘catch on’, or he wouldn’t have stood a hope with them.

Earlier in these studies, I spoke to you about Dispensations, and showed that a dispensation is really the management of a household. If we go back to Acts 15, we find that a special meeting was called at Jerusalem because some Jews who had turned up amongst some of the gentile converts and tried to get them to be circumcised, on the grounds that without that being done, they couldn’t be saved. The Pharisees at the Jerusalem church back this angle, indicating that they should also keep the whole Mosaic law. Now, I understand that in the Temple there was a wall beyond which no gentile could pass, on pain of death. But Peter stood and reminded them what had happened when he went and preached to the gentiles, and how the holy Spirit fell upon them, uninvited by Peter, who hadn’t really wanted to be there in the first place. Thus, the nations heard the Gospel, and God filled them with His Spirit. In Peter’s words, ‘and He made no distinction

between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith.’ This settled the matter and it was accepted that it was salvation to the world. The gentiles now stood upon the same foundation as the Jews. The ‘middle wall of partition’ was gone. All this was by the decision of the Twelve. All this therefore, lay within the scope of Calvary. None of it could therefore have been part of the Mystery.

As I said, I believe everything that God has said and done. I don’t believe there is any irrelevant information, even though we don’t always see its point. One such point may well be Paul’s association with Timothy. Timothy was not a true Jew, having a Jewish mother and a Greek father. He was, if you like, what some folk would call a ‘half-breed.’ See Acts 16v1-2. The reason I point this out is that it is, in itself, a sort of type of the Church, which was, itself, a mixture of Jew and Gentile. His reputation was well reported of to Paul in the nearby cities, and so Paul took him onboard. But He does something strange. Although Gentile converts were excused circumcision by headquarters, Paul circumcised him for the sake of the local Jews. Being led of the Spirit was Paul’s daily walk. But, he was free. Let’s finish by reading 1 Cor 9v19-23. He was free to be bound if the Gospel required it.