

Berean Messages

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by

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No. 1

Did “the Church” begin at Pentecost?

A consideration of the attitude of Peter toward Cornelius and its bearing upon this important question.

The following pages are reprinted from an expository monthly entitled *The Berean Expositor*. It is re-issued in the present form in the hope that it will cause the reader to examine afresh the teaching of the Scriptures as to the place that Pentecost occupies in the purpose of God, and to consider the unique character of the revelation of grace to the Gentiles as found in the epistle to the Ephesians, a revelation made to Paul when Pentecostal conditions were suspended at the setting aside of Israel in Acts 28.

The vision that Peter had of the great sheet, and his subsequent visit to Cornelius, form part of the great movement that we see taking place in Acts 8 to 11, which prepares the way for the work of Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles. It will be found that there is nothing in Acts 10 to warrant the idea that Peter had a ministry among the Gentiles, for the vision of the sheet and the visit to Cornelius were exceptional. They accomplished their purpose, but Peter was left free to pursue his ministry among the circumcision.

The subject before us falls into four parts :

- (1) THE VISION OF CORNELIUS (Acts 10:1-9).
- (2) THE VISION OF PETER (Acts 10:9-24).
- (3) THE MINISTRY OF PETER (Acts 10:24-48).
- (4) THE EFFECT UPON THE CHURCH (Acts 11:1-18).

Just as we find that the burning words of Stephen anticipates the wider ministry of the apostle Paul, so it is possible that the way was partly prepared for Peter, by the work done among the Samaritans and in the interview with the Ethiopian by Philip. Speaking humanly, it is most certain that, had Peter not received this revelation from heaven, and had he not been instrumental in the conversion of the Gentile, Cornelius, the opposition that met Paul’s emancipating message would have been even more bitter and intense than it was. The God of grace is all-sufficient, and Paul would have endured to the end, whatever had happened to Peter, but God in His grace uses means, and Stephen, Philip and Peter were used to prepare the way for this new and wider ministry. There is a most marked contrast between the character of Cornelius and that of the heathen to whom Paul was sent. Cornelius is described as:

“A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway” (Acts 10:2).

Paul’s converts are described variously as:

“Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led” (1 Cor. 12:2).

“When ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods” (Gal. 4:8).

“At that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world” (Eph. 2:12).

Yet it is abundantly clear from Acts 10 that had he not had the vision of the sheet Peter would have called the devout, prayerful Cornelius “common and unclean”. How is this attitude possible if it is true that the Church began at Pentecost? Many commentators incline to the opinion that Cornelius was a proselyte, and it will be of service if we pause here to make sure that all our readers appreciate the status of a proselyte.

The word “proselyte” is made up of *pros* “towards” and *eleutho* “to come”, and is used by the LXX for the stranger or foreigner who came to dwell among the Jews and embraced their religion (Exod. 12:48,49; Lev. 17:8). In the New Testament the word refers to a convert from heathenism, but does not necessarily imply that the convert actually lives among Jewish people. These proselytes of Acts 2:10 came up to Jerusalem to keep the feast.

The initiation of the proselyte involved the observance of three rites. He must be circumcised; he must be baptized; and he must offer a sacrifice. The Jew looked upon the proselyte as though he were a newborn child. Maimonides says:

“A Gentile who is become a proselyte, and a servant who is set at liberty, are both as it were new-born babes, and all those relations which he had while either a Gentile or a servant, now cease from being so”.

There is a possibility that our Lord in His conversation with Nicodemus referred to this initiation. Calmet and his followers distinguish two kinds of proselytes, namely, the *Proselyte of the gate* - these observed the seven precepts of Noah, but were not circumcised; and the *Proselyte of righteousness* - these were converts to Judaism, who were circumcised and observed the whole law. Cornelius was “uncircumcised” (Acts 11:3), and therefore was not a proselyte, yet he is called “a devout man, and one that feared God”. The dispersion of the Jew throughout the Roman world had of necessity influenced Gentile thought, and there were accordingly some who, though uncircumcised and outside the Hebrew pale, were nevertheless worshippers of the true God. Lydia, a woman of Thyatira, is said to be one who “worshipped God” and is found at the place of prayer (Acts 16:13,14). At Thessalonica there were “a great multitude of devout Greeks” (Acts 17:4); at Athens Paul disputed with devout persons (Acts 17:17); and at Corinth Paul found a refuge in the house of one named Justus who “worshipped God” (Acts 18:7). It was to this class that Cornelius belonged, for if he had been a proselyte he would not have been looked upon by the Jew as “common and unclean”. This conclusion is further strengthened by Peter’s confession :

“Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: *but in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him*” (Acts 10:34,35).

If preachers and teachers had perceived the truth which the latter part of verse 35 enunciates, in connection with the status of Cornelius, no problem would have arisen concerning justification by faith, and the fact that by works of righteousness no man can be saved.

We must now turn our attention to the vision given to Peter, which produced so great a revolution.

Joppa! Did Peter ever think of Jonah? Was not Peter’s name “Simon bar Jonah”? Did not Jonah remonstrate with God because of His mercy to Gentiles? Were the problems of the expanding gospel forcing themselves upon Peter? We are not told, but we believe that he would have been neither human nor an apostle, if such were not the burden of his thought.

Falling into a trance upon the housetop he saw a vessel descending from heaven, and containing all the fourfooted beasts, reptiles of the earth, and fowls of the air, and a voice said to him: “Rise, Peter, slay and eat”. It is hardly possible for any Gentile to enter into the thoughts that would fill the mind of a Jew, whether Christian or otherwise, who received such a command. We can, however, acquaint ourselves with the law that governed this matter of clean and unclean animals and see what is written:

“These are the beasts which ye shall eat among all the beasts that are on the earth. Whatsoever parteth the hoof, and is clovenfooted, and cheweth the cud, among the beasts, that shall ye eat” (Lev. 11:2,3).

Then follows the long list of prohibited animals, with the recurring sentiment:

“They are unclean to you” (11:8).

“Ye shall have their carcasses in abomination” (11:11, see also 11:20,23).

Not only so, but:

“These are unclean to you among all that creep: whosoever doth touch them, when they be dead, shall be unclean until the even” (11:31).

All this prohibition is because Israel were a separated people,

“For I am the LORD your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I am holy ... this is the law of the beasts, and of the fowl, and of every living creature that moveth in the waters, and of every creature that creepeth upon the earth: TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE between the unclean and the clean, and between the beast that may be eaten and the beast that may not be eaten” (11:44-47).

This instruction to “make a difference” is reiterated in the corresponding section of Leviticus, namely, chapter 20:

“I have said unto you, Ye shall inherit their land, and I will give it unto you to possess it, a land that floweth with milk and honey: I am the LORD your God, which have SEPARATED YOU from other people. Ye shall therefore PUT DIFFERENCE between clean beasts and unclean ... which I have SEPARATED from you as unclean. And ye shall be holy unto Me: for I the LORD am holy, and have severed you from other people, *that ye should be Mine*” (Lev. 20:24-26).

It was in this atmosphere that the Jew was born, lived, moved and had his being. Practically from cradle to grave, from morning till night, waking or sleeping, marrying or giving in marriage, buying or selling, he was continually reminded that all the Gentiles were unclean, and that his own nation alone was holy unto the Lord. This separation to the Lord was seriously enforced upon his conscience by the scrupulous observances of the Levitical law.

If we observe the words that are used in the passages cited as translated by the LXX into Greek, we shall perceive many a connection with New Testament teaching that may have passed unnoticed. “Make a difference” in Leviticus 11:47 is *diasteilai*, and is found in Romans 3:22 and 10:12, where it occurs as the noun *diastole*. While accepted by us today as obviously true, Paul’s statement, “There is no difference”, regarding either sin or salvation, was, when first uttered, revolutionary in its effect. In Leviticus 20:24 and 25 the LXX uses two related words to translate “I have separated you”. In the first of the verses the word is *diorizo*, and in the second it is *aphorizo*. The word *aphorizo* is also used to translate the words “put a difference” in Leviticus 20:25. *Diorizo* does not occur in the New Testament, but *aphorizo* does. An examination of the ten occurrences of *aphorizo* in the New Testament will enable us the better to understand Peter’s attitude to Cornelius:

“The angels shall come forth, and *sever* the wicked from among the just” (Matt. 13:49).

“And before Him shall be gathered all nations: and He shall *separate* them one from another, as a shepherd *divideth* his sheep from the goats” (Matt. 25:32).

“Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall *separate* you from their company” (Luke 6:22).

“The Holy Ghost said, *Separate* Me Barnabas and Saul” (Acts 13:2).

“He departed from them, and *separated* the disciples” (Acts 19:9).

“Paul ... *separated* unto the gospel of God” (Rom. 1:1).

“Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye *separate*, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you” (2 Cor. 6:17).

“When it pleased God, Who *separated* me from my mother’s womb” (Gal. 1:15).

“For before that certain came from James, he (Peter) did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and *separated* himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision” (Gal. 2:12).

The last reference reveals that Peter had been attracted by the freedom enjoyed by the converts of Paul's gospel, and had ventured even to eat with them, but the old upbringing was too strong for him, and the coming of those of the circumcision caused him to separate himself once more, his dissembling causing even Barnabas to be carried away.

There are many passages in the Gospels, Acts and Epistles that show what an hold these Levitical laws had upon the Jewish conscience. Take the word *koinoo*, which means "to make common". This is sometimes translated "to defile" as in the following passages:

"Not that which goeth into the mouth *defileth* a man" (Matt. 15:11).

"To eat with unwashen hands *defileth* not a man" (Matt. 15:20).

"And when they saw some of His disciples eat bread with *defiled*, that is to say, with unwashen, hands, they found fault. For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands oft (margin *with the fist ... up to the elbow*, i.e. a ceremonious washing, not a washing that is required for ordinary cleanliness), eat not" (Mark 7:2,3).

The following quotation will give some idea of the intensity of feeling that arose in connection with this matter of eating with a Gentile:

"He who eats with an uncircumcised person, eats, as it were, with a dog; he who touches him, touches, as it were, a dead body; and he who bathes in the same place with him, bathes, as it were, with a leper" (*Pirke Rabbi Eliezer*, 29).

The bearing of all this upon the words and attitude of Peter in Acts 10 is most evident from the following references:

"Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is *common or unclean*" (Acts 10:14).

"... What God hath cleansed, that call thou not *common*" (Acts 10:15).

"... Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man *common or unclean*" (Acts 10:28).

Here are the words of Peter himself. If we accept the chronology of the Authorised Version, this incident occurred *eight years after Pentecost*, and Peter is still by his own confession "A man that is a Jew". He, at least, did not believe that "the Church began at Pentecost". Not only was he still a Jew, though a believer, but he was still under the Law. "It is an unlawful thing" said he. How then can we tolerate the tradition that the Church began at Pentecost? He told Cornelius to his face that he would have treated him as "common and unclean", for all his piety and prayers, had he not received the extraordinary vision of the great sheet. Yet at Pentecost:

"All that believed were together, and had ALL THINGS COMMON" (Acts 2:44).

When taken with Acts 10 this is absolute proof that *no Gentile* could have been there. *Yet the tradition that the Church began at Pentecost persists!*

Peter, moreover, makes manifest his state of mind by adding, "Therefore came I unto you *without gainsaying*, as soon as I was sent for" (Acts 10:29). Can we imagine the apostle Paul speaking like this even to the most abject of Pagans? No, the two ministries of these two apostles are poles apart. Further, Peter continued: "I ask therefore *for what intent ye have sent for me?*" (Acts 10:29). Can we believe our eyes? Do we read aright? Is this the man who opened the Church to the Gentile on equal footing with the Jewish believer? He asks in all simplicity, "What is your object in sending for me?" Again, we are conscious that such words from the lips of Paul would be not only impossible but ridiculous. He was "debtor" to wise and unwise, to Jew and Gentile, to Barbarian and to Greek. Not so Peter. He was the Apostle of the circumcision (Gal. 2:8), and therefore the call of Cornelius seemed to him inexplicable.

“*For what intent have you sent for me?*” - Can we imagine a missionary in China, India or anywhere else on the broad earth, asking such a question, or asking this question in similar circumstances? Any Mission Board would ask such a missionary to resign his post, and rightly so. No! every item in this tenth chapter is eloquent of the fact that Peter had no commission to the Gentiles.

At last Peter “began to speak” (Acts 11:15). Let us listen to the message he gives to this Gentile audience:

“... Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons (first admission): but in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him (second admission). The word which God *sent unto the children of Israel* (note, not as Paul in Acts 13:26), preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (He is Lord of all:) (third admission) ... published throughout all *Judaea* ... in the land of the *Jews*, and in *Jerusalem* ... preach unto the *people* (i.e. the people of Israel) ... whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins” (Acts 10:34-43).

One cannot but be struck with the attitude of Peter. He does not preach directly to the Gentile audience, he rehearses in their hearing the word which God *sent to Israel*, saying nothing of a purely gospel character until the very end.

But for the further intervention of God we cannot tell how long Peter would have continued in this way. It is doubtful whether he would have got so far as inviting Cornelius and his fellows to be baptized, as his own words indicate:

“Can any man *forbid water*, that these should not be baptized, which *have received* the Holy Ghost *as well as we?*” (Acts 10:47).

The upshot of this work at Caesarea was that even Peter was called upon to give an account of himself:

“The apostles and brethren that were in *Judaea* heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. And when Peter was come up to *Jerusalem*, they that were of the circumcision contended with him, saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and *didst eat with them*” (Acts 11:1-3).

We find no remonstrance from Peter to the effect that seeing that the Church began at Pentecost, the conversion of Cornelius should have been anticipated and be a matter for rejoicing. No, Peter patiently, and humbly, and apologizingly, rehearsed the matter, even to the pathetic conclusion: “What was I, that I could *withstand God?*” (Acts 11:17). Why should Peter ever think of withstanding God, if he knew that the Church began at Pentecost? It is abundantly evident that neither Peter, the other apostles, nor the brethren at Jerusalem had the remotest idea of any such thing:

“When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, THEN hath God ALSO to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life” (Acts 11:18).

We learn from Acts 15 that the response of Peter to the call of Cornelius played a considerable part in stopping the extremists at Jerusalem in their attempt to shackle the Church of the Gentiles, and proved to be a preparation for the great ministry of Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles. In this we rejoice, and see how the purpose of grace gradually unfolds as the narrative proceeds.

We commend this study to the reader, and ask him particularly to weigh the words of Pentecost: “All things common” with the words of Peter: “Common and unclean”, and their bearing upon the question: Did “the Church” begin at Pentecost?

No. 2

The keys of Peter and the doors of Paul

If the keys of a row of houses were mixed together, it is very probable that not one of the housekeepers would be able to pick his own from the rest. The law of permutations and combinations, that troubled us at school, enables the locksmith to make so many variations in the wards of the key, that for practical purposes they can guarantee that a duplicate is impossible. When we think of a key therefore, we remember "*To every door its key*". True, in large business houses, the head of the firm holds a "master key" that opens all locks, but this is not surrendered to servants. A key moreover, is a small affair. Its importance is sometimes not appreciated until the safe door refuses to give access to the much needed money, or the house (where warmth and comfort can be enjoyed) cannot be entered by reason of the loss of the key.

Turning to the Scriptures, we find that the Lord Jesus Christ holds the master key. Standing in all the triumph and glory of resurrection He declares:

"I am He that liveth, and was dead: and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death" (Rev. 1:18).

He Who holds the keys of death holds the master key. This the Lord has surrendered to no man. He has two prominent servants, however, Peter and Paul. To Peter He gave the keys of the kingdom of heaven, while to Paul He opened many doors of service, and the question we ask and seek to answer in this pamphlet is, "*Do the keys of Peter fit the locks of Paul?*" which shorn of figures of speech means, "*Is the Church of the Acts as ministered to by Peter all one and the same with the church ministered to by Paul!*" The importance of the enquiry lies in the fact that Paul is continually emphasizing that he had a dispensation and an apostleship to the Gentiles, and the confusion that exists in the church as a whole, and in the minds of individuals as well, looks very much like the result of getting into a wrong house, and seeking to bring together things that by nature are far apart.

Christ is the Head of every department in the purposes of grace. He holds the master key; that we gladly acknowledge, and do not here question. Let us, so far as space permits, look at the keys of Peter and the doors of Paul, to see whether the keys of the one fit the locks of the other.

The keys of the kingdom of heaven.

It is common knowledge that the gospel according to Matthew deals very specially with the kingdom of heaven. In the opening beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount we have two statements that bear upon the sphere of this kingdom:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN" (Matt. 5:3).

"Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit THE EARTH" (Matt. 5:5).

If the kingdom of heaven means that its subjects will one day "go to heaven", upon what principle of righteousness and equity has God acted in deciding that the poor in spirit go to *heaven*, while the meek stay on *earth*? Should we not be nearer the truth if we said that the kingdom of heaven is a kingdom on earth which will be ruled by the same Lord and laws as now obtain in heaven? and would not the prayer of Matthew 6:10 confirm this?:

"Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, *as it is in heaven*"?

John the Baptist, in the spirit and power of Elijah (Luke 1:17), and Abraham, Isaac and Jacob sitting in that kingdom (Matt. 8:11), strengthen this view. It is in Matthew 16, at the close of the first section of Matthew's Gospel (indicated by the parallel words of 4:17 and 16:21), and after His rejection in His three Messianic offices,

shown in Matthew 12:6,41,42, that the Lord speaks of His church (a called-out company) as distinct from the nation as a whole, and gives the keys of the kingdom of heaven to Peter (Matt. 16:18,19).

The point we seek to press is that Peter used these keys in the Acts of the Apostles, and they are strictly confined to the church of the kingdom of the heavens, that remnant of faith which in apostolic times anticipated the full glory of the kingdom yet to be. This we can test by reading the Acts, the following notes drawing attention to outstanding features.

The sphere of Peter's ministry.

In Acts 1:8 the Lord indicated the sphere of the ministry of those associated with Pentecost, and in the Authorised Version it appears to spread from Jerusalem to the uttermost parts of the earth. *Rotherham's* version reads, "the uttermost parts of the *land*", which removes all necessity for accusing Peter and the twelve of unfaithfulness, and reveals the true extent of their commission. The word is translated in the Authorised Version "land" 42 times, and "country" twice, and in the Acts itself it is rendered "land" 14 times.

On the day of Pentecost, after the baptism of the Spirit, and in the opening words of this new ministry, we should surely expect truth without prejudice. Let us watch Peter turning the key of the kingdom of heaven, and note some of the special wards of the lock that his key must fit. The first item that strikes us is that the objects of his address are always and only Israel:

"Men of JUDAEA, and all that dwell at JERUSALEM" (Acts 2:14).

"Men of ISRAEL" and "All the house of ISRAEL" (Acts 2:22,36).

"Ye men of ISRAEL ... ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you" (Acts 3:12-14).

"Ye are the children of the PROPHETS, and of the covenant which God made with OUR FATHERS" (Acts 3:25).

The God of Pentecost is:

"The God of ABRAHAM, and of ISAAC, and of JACOB, the God of OUR FATHERS" (Acts 3:13).

The resurrection of Christ and the shedding of the Spirit are focussed upon the "throne of David" (Acts 2:30,33). Such was the "church" of Acts 2:47, a fulfilment of the prophecy of Joel (Acts 2:17-21).

We still find the same wards of the lock in other chapters. In Acts 5:30,31 Christ is said to have been raised up by "The God of *our fathers*, to give repentance *to Israel*", and lest the reader should be tempted to say that this is but the outworking of Jewish prejudice, the passage continues:

"And we are His witnesses of these things; AND SO IS ALSO THE HOLY GHOST" (Acts 5:32).

which makes criticism a serious thing, and so far as the charge of his having acted under Jewish prejudice is concerned, Peter goes on to say that this holy spirit has been given by God to "all that OBEY Him" (Acts 5:32).

The first turn in the lock of the Gentile door was made by Stephen, who was promptly destroyed by the evil one, and Saul who heard his burning words and saw his shining face was destined as another Seth to bear that message on to its glorious consummation. Chapter 11 finds missionaries as far as Phenice, Cyprus and Antioch, who however were:

"preaching the word to NONE but unto the JEWS ONLY"(11:19).

We must, however, retrace our steps, for Acts 9 and 10 are critical. In Acts 9 the same Lord Who chose Peter to bear the keys of the kingdom of heaven, now chooses Saul of Tarsus to bear His name before the Gentiles. Here we have for the first time in the Acts the Gentiles as an object of mercy. In chapter 10 Peter receives a warning, which

was used later to prevent the Jerusalem church opposing the new ministry of Paul. Peter makes his own attitude very plain. To Cornelius, a pious man, who prayed and gave alms, he said:

“Ye know how that it is an UNLAWFUL thing for a man that is a JEW to keep company, or come unto one of another NATION; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man COMMON or unclean” (Acts 10:28).

Peter here makes a series of important admissions:

- (1) He was still a man that is a Jew.
- (2) He was still under the law that made Israel a separate people.
- (3) He still looked upon all men of any other nation as common and unclean.

Each item is diametrically opposed to the teaching of Paul who taught that in the church to which he ministered:

- (1) There was neither Jew nor Gentile.
- (2) That the whole machinery of the law gave place to the new creation in Christ.

Those who continued in the apostle’s doctrine “had all things *common*” (Acts 2:44), yet they would not be seen in the company of a Gentile, and called him “common” instead. The words “keep company” indicate fellowship with disciples, as Acts 9:26 shows, where it is translated “join himself”. If Peter acted as he did when obliged to go to Cornelius, one wonders what would have happened to him had Dionysius the Areopagite “*clave* (same word) unto him” (Acts 17:34). By all tests it appears evident that Peter’s keys which fitted the doors of the kingdom of heaven (the kingdom of God on earth) would not turn the locks of the doors opened by the Lord for Paul.

As the outcome of a special call by the Spirit of God, and in entire independence of Jerusalem, the apostles Paul and Barnabas take the gospel to the Gentiles upon their return to Antioch:

“They rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how He had OPENED the DOOR of faith unto the GENTILES” (Acts 14:27).

Peter’s experience with Cornelius enabled him to break down the opposition exhibited by the apostles and brethren at Jerusalem by reminding them how that:

“A good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe” (Acts 15:7),

which James explained as being in harmony with the prophecy of Amos, and related to the restoration of the tabernacle of David. Peter did no miracle when he stood before Cornelius, for miracles were signs of apostleship (Gal. 2:7,8, and 2 Cor. 12:12), and he was not the apostle to the Gentiles. Paul and Barnabas, however, declared:

“What miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them” (Acts 15:12).

A great door was opened for Paul at Ephesus (1 Cor. 16:9), and another at Troas when he crossed over with the gospel to Europe proper (2 Cor. 2:12), but Peter’s keys were of no service here. Then, when Israel were set aside, and Paul was made a prisoner of the Lord for the Gentiles, he prayed for the opening of another door, connected with his “bonds” and the “mystery” (Col. 4:3), which it is the aim and object of these papers to explain.

No. 3

“The chief corner stone”.

There are many evangelical Christians who take their stand upon the threefold presentation of the gospel, viz., “Christ *crucified*, Christ *risen*, Christ *coming again*”, and they would be horrified to be told that they had omitted the one phase that completed the whole. That omission is nothing less than “Christ *ascended*”. Now we are

prepared to find the reader say, “But the ascension surely cannot rank with either the death or the resurrection of Christ!” nevertheless we believe that, small as our space is, we shall be able to produce sufficient evidence from Scripture to more than justify our statement.

The only Gospel of the four that omits the ascension is Matthew, but this is in harmony with its teaching concerning the kingdom of heaven. Should any think that the ascension is omitted also from John by the fact that it does not occur in the last chapter, we commend a reading of chapter 20. Not only did the Lord Himself make reference to His approaching death and resurrection, He also spoke on more than one occasion of His ascension:

“No man hath ascended up to heaven, but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven” (John 3:13).

“... I am the bread which came down from heaven. And they (the Jews) said, Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? how is it then that He saith, I came down from heaven?” (John 6:41,42).

“... Doth this offend you? What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where He was before?” (John 6:61,62).

Here we touch the most vital subject of the Scriptures, nothing less than the very mystery of godliness. That this is not simply the figurative expression of an enthusiast, turn to 1 Timothy 3:16 and note the opening and closing items, “Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh ... received up in glory”. It will be seen that by comparing John 6:42 with the Lord’s own answer and this revelation in 1 Timothy 3:16 that the deity of Christ, His assumption of flesh, the finishing of His work, and His resumption of glory are deeply involved. To omit this consummation of the mystery of godliness is to give place to the satanic mystery of iniquity, which with blasphemous pretensions likewise places a “man” upon the throne of deity (2 Thess. 2:3-12).

The ascension of Christ was the grand testimony of Scripture to the fact that His work was finished:

“I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do ... and I COME TO THEE” (John 17:4,11; see also 13:3).

The ascension of Christ is the basis of the believer’s victory during the present conflict:

“Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, Who is EVEN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD, Who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ... Nay, in all these things we are *more than conquerors* through Him that loved us” (Rom. 8:34-37).

The fact that Christ has ascended enables the believer not only to triumph over such mundane things as famine or nakedness, but “death, life, angels, principalities and powers” also, for Peter declares of Christ that He “is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him” (1 Pet. 3:22). The finished work spoken of in John 17 in connection with the ascension bulks large in the epistle to the Hebrews. In two of the references the mystery of godliness is in view:

“Hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son (*in Son*) ... when He had by Himself purged our sins, *sat down* on the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Heb. 1:2,3).

“... *A body* hast Thou prepared Me ... this man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, *sat down* on the right hand of God” (Heb. 10:5,12).

In both of these passages the same sequence is observable as in 1 Timothy 3:16, “manifest in the flesh ... received up in glory”. Hebrews 8:1 says:

“Now of the things which we have spoken THIS IS THE SUM (PRINCIPAL THING): We have such an high priest, Who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens”.

Connected with this ascended position is the blessed assurance of an “uttermost salvation”:

“Wherefore He is able also to save them to the *uttermost* that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:25).

The key-word of Hebrews is “perfect”, and the great exhortation (Heb. 13:20,21) is found in the words of Hebrews 6:1, “Let us go on unto perfection”. The word “perfect” is allied to the word “end”, and the scriptural conception of perfection is not that which goes by the name of “sinless perfection”, but of reaching the end for which one has been saved, as Paul puts it in Philippians 3:12, “Not as though I had already *attained*, either were already *perfect*: but I *follow after*, if that I may *apprehend* that for which also I am *apprehended* of Christ Jesus”. We have said all this because the “uttermost salvation” is that which goes to the full “end” or “all the way”, and without the ascended Christ this full salvation would be in jeopardy. While it suffices for Acts 1:9 to say, “He was taken up; and a cloud received Him out of their sight”, this is not sufficient for the epistle to the Hebrews. That epistle says:

“Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is PASSED INTO (THROUGH) the heavens” (Heb. 4:14).

“For such an high priest became us, Who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made HIGHER THAN the heavens” (Heb. 7:26).

“For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into HEAVEN ITSELF, now to appear in the presence of God for us” (Heb. 9:24).

While it may not be possible to fix the date of the epistle to the Hebrews, its very title, “to the *Hebrews*”, as well as its references to the people of Israel, tell us that dispensationally it does not belong to a period that is peculiarly Gentile in character. Right through the Acts of the Apostles we see a controversy that necessitates the clear cut teaching of Hebrews to prevent a Judaized form of Christianity swamping the truth. In Romans and Galatians the opposition comes from the Jew, with his works of law. In the last chapter of the Acts we reach a crisis. Israel in the dispersion act precisely as Israel at home had acted, and there in Acts 28 we witness the removal of that people, “until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in”. It does not require a profound knowledge of Scripture to realize that the removal from the scene of such a people as Israel must precipitate a crisis, and involve very drastic changes in God’s dealings with men. It is here where the *ascension* of Christ becomes of such fundamental importance. Rejected by Israel, He now rejects Israel, and His claims upon the earthly sphere of God’s purposes are temporarily suspended, being put into force when the “mystery of God” shall be finished (Rev. 10:7) in a yet future day.

We now know, through the revelation given in such epistles as Ephesians and Colossians, that God in His wisdom had fully provided for Israel’s defection, and in direct connection with the ascended Christ He revealed, after Acts 28, in those epistles which are called for convenience “The Prison Epistles” (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and 2 Timothy) a mystery or secret which was planned and purposed “before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:4), and “before age times” (2 Tim. 1:9), which mystery concerns a company of believers taken mainly from among the Gentiles, who were “chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world”, and made a “joint body” (Eph. 3:6), blessed with all spiritual blessings “in heavenly places” (Eph. 1:3), created as “one new man” (Eph. 2:15), and with no middle wall of partition to perpetuate the distinctions between Jew and Gentile (Eph. 2:14). All these blessings are intimately and inseparably connected with the ascended Christ. “Heavenly places”, the sphere of these new blessings, is defined as the place where Christ ascended after His resurrection, “Far above all principality and power”, etc. (Eph. 1:20,21), and this unique company of believers are told that not only are they “raised up together”, but made to “sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:6). A new ministry, with a definite work in connection with this new company, was given by the ascended Christ:

“When He ascended up on high, He ... gave gifts unto men ... and He gave some, apostles ... for the edifying (building up) of the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:8-12).

We make no pretension to have done justice to this great theme of the mystery; all that a pamphlet of this size can do is to awaken interest and inquiry.

No. 4

“Comparing spiritual things”.

Science divides the whole field of research into three great kingdoms, and all things must belong either to the *animal*, *vegetable* or *mineral* kingdom. Sub-division is continued until at length we reach the individual of the species, and this classification depends upon observing likenesses and differences. In this leaflet we wish to draw attention to the value of the principle of “trying the things that differ”, as the marginal reading of Philippians 1:10 suggests. Before proceeding to the Scriptures we desire that every reader should appreciate the value of this principle, and ask him to notice the difference in the two definitions of man given below:

1. Man is an animal that eats, drinks and sleeps.
2. Man is an animal that reasons, speaks and wears clothing.

In the first description man differs nothing from the household cat; in the second, with three items of difference, he stands out in marked separation from all creation. Many of God’s children have no clearer views of the teaching of Scripture than No. 1 above gives of man. If they read the word “gospel” or “apostle” in Matthew and Ephesians, it is all one and the same to them. We propose therefore considering a very well-known passage in this light, and believe that by trying the things that differ the purpose of God for ourselves will be more clearly seen:

“When He had called unto Him His twelve disciples, He gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease. Now the names of the twelve apostles are these; The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip, and Bartholomew; Thomas, and Matthew the publican; James the son of Alphaeus, and Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus; Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Him. 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: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils (demons)” (Matt. 10:1-8).

We have here the following items that will repay attention:

1. A GOSPEL.- The apostles are sent to preach.
2. A DEFINITE ORDER OF APOSTLES.- The twelve are appointed.
3. A RESTRICTION.- Go not into the way of the Gentiles.
4. AN ACCOMPANIMENT.- Miraculous powers over disease and death.

1. THE GOSPEL.- The gospel which the twelve were sent to preach was “the gospel of the *kingdom*”. This gospel, accompanied by the self-same signs, was preached by the Lord Himself before this commission, as a reading of Matthew 4:23 and 9:35 will show. We quote the latter passage:

“And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the *gospel of the kingdom*, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people” (Matt. 9:35).

Before proceeding we would ask the reader a question. It is this: “Would you consider a gospel, which knew nothing of Jesus Christ crucified and risen, to be the gospel of God to be preached today?” We trust that the reader will say “No! A gospel without Christ crucified and Christ risen has no message of salvation to sinful men, and could not be owned of God”. Well then, without binding ourselves to any existing chronology of gospels, we shall

all agree that Matthew 16 must come after Matthew 10, and that a subject revealed in Matthew 16 *for the first time* could not possibly have formed a part of the gospel preached earlier. Now in Matthew 16 we read:

“*From that time forth began* Jesus to shew unto His disciples, how that He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day” (Matt. 16:21).

When Peter heard these words he gives added proof that they were heard for the first time. There is but one conclusion, and that is that the *gospel of the kingdom* must be kept distinct from the *gospel of the grace of God* as preached by Paul to the Gentiles.

2. THE APOSTLES.- We read in Galatians 2 that after the apostle Paul had been preaching the gospel without reference to Jerusalem for fourteen years, he went up by revelation and communicated to them that gospel which he preached to the Gentiles:

“When they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter; (for He that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles)” (Gal. 2:7,8).

Here there is a difference acknowledged not only in gospel, but in apostleship. Not only is a distinction observable between the apostleship of Peter and Paul, but this distinction is definitely stated as between the *earthly* ministry of Christ, and His *heavenly* ministry through His servant Paul:

“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: and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy ... That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God” (Rom. 15:8,9,16).

That the apostle Paul must be distinguished from the twelve, his own words in 1 Corinthians 15:5 and 8, “of the twelve”, “of me also”, are evidence. The most conclusive proof however of a different order of apostles to those of Matthew 10 is found in Ephesians 4:8-11, “When He *ascended* up on high ... He gave gifts unto men ... and He gave some, *apostles*”. Here is an order of apostles, the gift of Christ, “when He ascended on high”, which cannot possibly refer to those appointed before He had even revealed his death and resurrection.

3. THE GENTILES.- Both in Galatians 2:7,8, and in Romans 15:16, also in Ephesians 4, the gospel and the apostleship of Paul is most definitely directed to the Gentiles. In Matthew 10 the way of the Gentiles was forbidden, and, moreover, the Lord declared that He had been sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. This limitation to Israel is not confined to Matthew 10. We find it repeated in Matthew 15: 21-28, also at Pentecost and after.

Some reader may be under the impression that Pentecost altered all this exclusiveness, so we must turn to the passage to see. Pentecost was a feast of the Jews. No Gentile, unless a proselyte, had either the right or necessity to travel great distances from home to keep the feast. Although the assembled multitude were astonished to hear men speak in their own tongues, they were not Gentiles, but Jews who had been born in or migrated to these other lands. “Jews, devout men, out of every nation” (Acts 2:5) is their title, and Peter addresses them as “Men of Judaea” and “Israel” (Acts 2:14,22,36). *See also* Acts 3:13 and 25 in this connection. Peter’s attitude toward Cornelius in Acts 10:28, and the parallel attitude of “the apostles” and church at Jerusalem (Acts 11:1,2), completely dispel the idea that under Peter’s ministry and at the day of Pentecost Gentiles equally with Jews were “added to the church”.

God, by the hand of Paul, opened the door of faith to the Gentiles (14:27), and it is Paul who was commissioned to show that the believing Gentile, being “Christ’s”, was “Abraham’s seed” as much as was the believing Jew (Gal. 3:29). Later, Paul received the dispensation of the grace of God to the Gentiles (Eph. 3:1,2), and then both Jew and Gentile pass away in the creation of a new man (Eph. 2:11-22).

4. MIRACULOUS GIFTS.- If God never interposed in the affairs of His children now, prayer itself would be useless. We do not say that *miracles* have ceased, but we do say that miraculous gifts as “signs” do not belong to the church of the one body, nor to the dispensation of the mystery. When we read of the miracles that were wrought by Peter and Paul, and those with them during the Acts period, not even an enemy could call one miracle into question. We have such miracles as raising the dead, giving sight to the blind, cleansing lepers, immunity from the effects of poison, etc..

Much that passes for miracle today comes under the heading of psychology and hysteria. We are not, however, writing to criticise others, but merely comparing Scripture with Scripture. The church at Corinth had a plenitude of these gifts (1 Cor. 12), and Paul exercised them up to the last chapter of the Acts (28:1-9). A handkerchief even sent from Paul effected a cure. Yet Trophimus is left at Miletum sick (2 Tim. 4:20), Epaphroditus is mourned as sick in Philippians 2:25-27. A prescription, not a handkerchief, is sent by Paul to Timothy in 1 Timothy 5:23. The reason is not far to seek. While Israel remained as a nation before God, “signs followed” the preaching; when they were set aside in Acts 28:23-28 signs ceased.

We find, therefore, that by trying the things that differ, such terms as “*gospel*” and “*apostle*” may imply widely differing messages and commissions, and the absence of sign gifts are thereby scripturally explained.

No. 5

Sundry times and divers manners.

The epistle to the Hebrews opens with the following words:

“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son” (Heb. 1:1,2).

These words contain one or two principles that are of the greatest importance to all who would seek from the Scriptures to know the will of God for themselves:

“*God ... hath ... spoken*”.

Unless we are assured of two things, both mentioned in this epistle, we can go no further. The one is, “He that cometh to God must believe that *He is*” (Heb. 11:6), and the other is, “God hath *spoken*” (Heb. 1:1,2).

God has not dealt with each man individually, speaking to him audibly and personally, for such intimate communion was broken in the garden of Eden by sin. God has spoken down the ages through the instrumentality of men chosen by Himself:

“God ... spake ... by the prophets” (Heb. 1:1,2).

“If the word spoken by angels was stedfast” (Heb. 2:2).

“Wherefore (as the Holy Ghost saith, To day, etc.)” (Heb. 3:7).

The angels were instrumental in the giving of the law at Sinai (Gal. 3:19 and Acts 7:53). “The prophets” cover every witness for God through all times “since the world began” (Acts 3:21). The reference in Hebrews 3 to “the Holy Ghost speaking” gives a quotation from the Psalms. We have therefore, “The Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms”, the threefold title of the complete Old Testament as accepted by the risen Son of God (Luke 24:44). The New Testament is covered by the next expression:

“*God hath spoken ... by His Son*”.

The Lord Jesus Christ said:

“I have not spoken of Myself; but the Father which sent Me, He gave Me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak” (John 12:49).

This covers the four Gospels. Mark 16:20 and Acts 1:1,2 indicate the continued ministry of the risen Christ according also to John 17:14-18:

“I have given them Thy Word ... As Thou hast sent Me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world”.

Peter links the testimony of both Old Testament prophets and New Testament apostles, by saying:

“That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by *the holy prophets*, and of the commandment of us *the apostles* of the Lord and Saviour” (2 Pet. 3:2).

God hath spoken. It is His Word we read, whether in Law, Prophet or Psalm, whether in Gospel, Epistle or Apocalypse. Here we have an organic whole, inspired and authoritative.

We will now consider another feature of almost equal importance. This principle is contained also in the passage quoted from Hebrews 1:1,2 :

At sundry times, and in divers manners, in times past, and in these last days, unto the fathers, and unto us.

God did not reveal the whole of His mind and will at one time, but “at sundry times”; neither did He adopt the same methods, but “in divers manners”. These differing “times” and “manners” must be remembered in all our efforts to arrive at an understanding of the truth. Paul reminded the Athenians of this difference, contrasting “the times of their ignorance”, when God “winked” at their ways, with the gospel period that had set in, wherein, “Now, God commandeth *all men everywhere* to repent” (Acts 17:30). Again, speaking of the Gentiles, the same apostle said:

“*At that time* ye were without Christ, being aliens” (Eph. 2:12),

and follows this reference to a past period of alienation with the glorious contrast:

“*But now* in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ” (Eph. 2:13).

The recognition of the “sundry times” are therefore of vital importance. If we read the *past* into the *present*, we may fall into the error of confusing “law” with “gospel”, or “kingdom” with “church”. If we read the *present* into the *past*, we shall blunt the edge of the testimony of Ephesians 3, which speaks of a new revelation given through Paul for the Gentiles, and called “the mystery”, which had been “hid in God” until the apostle received the commission to “enlighten all”.

What is true concerning “times” is in its degree true concerning “manners”. The command of the law, the entreaty of Paul, the hiding of truth by parable, the manifestation of the truth by epistle, all differ, and must be treated accordingly. Not only times and manners must be remembered, but the Word of God is addressed to different people. A very clear sub-division is suggested in 1 Corinthians 10:32 :

“JEWS ... GENTILES, and ... CHURCH OF GOD”,

and so we read in Hebrews 1:1,2 :

“God hath spoken ... unto the FATHERS ... and unto US”.

While it is impossible for any child of God to have no interest in the hopes and fears, the victories and failures of the men of old, nevertheless the primary obligation resting upon each of us is to see to it that any word spoken by

God “unto us” shall not go unheeded, and shall not be dimmed nor dulled by wrong blending with any word spoken at other times to other people.

We, Gentiles by nature, have had a message sent especially “unto us” by one equipped and commissioned to bear the name of the Lord “before the Gentiles”.

“Unto us, Gentiles”.

Paul said:

“I am the apostle of the GENTILES” (Rom. 11:13).

“For He that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the GENTILES” (Gal. 2:8).

“I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you GENTILES, if ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward” (Eph. 3:1,2).

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

“Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, was this grace given, to preach unto the GENTILES the unsearchable riches of Christ; and to make all men see what is the dispensation of the mystery which from all ages hath been hid in God Who created all things” (Eph. 3:8,9 R.V.).

Here is a messenger and a message, a special “time” and “manner”, and a special people - “you Gentiles”. This surely concerns you! This pamphlet has been written in the hope that God will direct its distribution so that many may be led to see the glorious calling revealed “unto us” now, at this present time.

Closely linked with the ministry of the apostle Paul is the witness of yet one more passage in Hebrews that deals with the fact that God hath spoken. We have seen that God hath spoken by prophets and by angels in times past, and that in these last days He has spoken by His Son. The apostle when comparing the word “spoken by angels” with that which was “spoken by the Lord” says, “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?” (Heb. 2:3). Toward the end of the epistle he carries this idea forward another step, again instituting a comparison, and again warning against the impossibility of “escape”:

“See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused Him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from Him that speaketh from heaven” (Heb. 12:25).

In the *Gospels* we have the words of Him that spoke “on earth”. In the *Epistles* we have the words of Him that speaketh “from heaven”. Throughout the whole of Paul’s ministry he made it plain that he was but the mouthpiece of the risen and ascended Christ. He is called “a chosen vessel”, “an earthen vessel”, one “sent to preach”, whose words were “not the words of men, but of God” (1 Thess. 2:13). Further, he goes so far as to say:

“Though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we Him no more” (2 Cor. 5:16).

The ascended Christ has spoken “from heaven” (Eph. 4:8-12); Paul as “His prisoner” has passed on the message (2 Tim. 1:8). What is YOUR attitude to it in view of Hebrews 12:25?

No. 6

“Try the things that differ”.

What would you think, my reader, of the following argument?

“Englishmen eat, drink and sleep. Frenchmen eat, drink and sleep, therefore Englishmen are Frenchmen”.

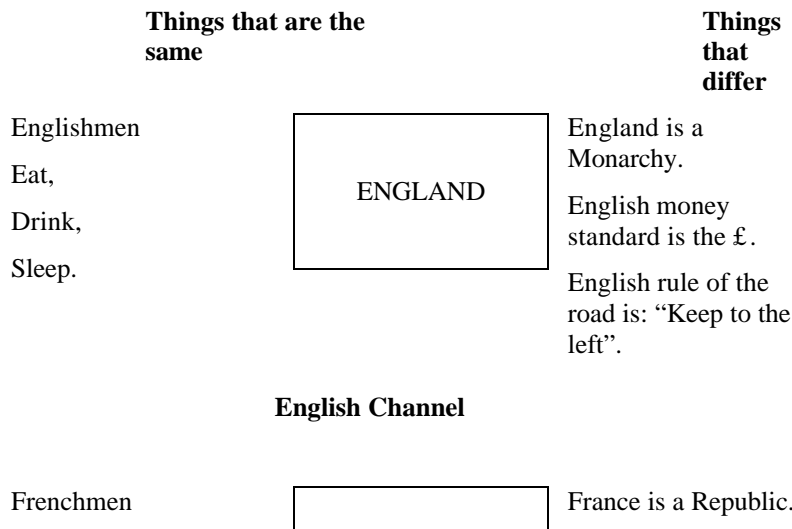
You would not think very highly of the intelligence of anyone who would put forward such trifling statement as a serious argument. You would need no training in formal logic to set it aside as ridiculous. You might even go further and say, “Why waste precious time by speaking of it at all?” The reason is, that the truth of God in one great particular is sometimes attacked with as foolish an argument as that given above.

You may have been exercised in your reading of the Scriptures as to the evident differences that are to be found in the Gospels, the Acts, the Epistles and the book of the Revelation, for example, differences as to spheres of blessing, such as: “The meek shall inherit the *earth*”, and “All spiritual blessings in *heavenly* places”. You may have discerned a real difference between “The Kingdom” and “The Church”, or between “The Bride” and “The Body”, and then someone has demolished the whole of your conception of truth by saying something like this:

“All the redeemed are saved by the same precious blood, they receive the same gift of life, they read the same inspired book, they worship the same God, they own and are owned by the same Father, therefore all these so-called differences are fanciful and highly dangerous”.

Now while you readily perceive the fallacy in the argument about Englishmen being Frenchmen because both eat, drink and sleep, you may not so readily perceive the self-same fallacy in the argument that denies all the differences concerning different companies of the redeemed taught by the Scriptures, simply because such companies have some things in common.

Let us see whether this figure of the two nationalities will help us in appreciating what is known as “dispensational truth”.



Eat, Drink, Sleep.	FRANCE	French money standard is the Franc. French rule of the road is: "Keep to the right".
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It is most obvious that the similarities noted on the left-hand side cannot neutralise the most evident differences that are recorded on the right-hand side. Let us set out the case for dispensational truth in exactly the same way, using the two countries to represent two dispensations, and using the English Channel for the dispensational boundary, noting on the left-hand some things that are similar in both dispensations, and on the right some things that are different.

Things that are the same		Things that differ
The Word of God. Redemption by the blood of Christ. God the Father.	<hr/> The Dispensation covered by the ACTS <hr/> Acts 28 <hr/>	The people of Israel a present factor. The presence of miraculous gifts. The hope of Israel.
The Word of God. Redemption by the blood of Christ. God the Father.	<hr/> The Dispensation of the Mystery EPHESIANS <hr/>	The people of Israel absent. The absence of miraculous gifts. The hope of glory.

The reader will not need a lengthy discussion to prove the truth set out on the left-hand side of the diagram. We will therefore turn our attention to the opposite side. How far are these items substantiated by the Word of God? The diagram assumes that at the end of the Acts there came a definite dispensational change, as definite as is the change from a Monarchy to a Republic. The diagram suggests that the presence of Israel during the Acts and the absence of Israel since the end of the Acts are most important features. Let us search and see:

Israel a factor until Acts 28

"I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 15:24).

"Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers" (Rom. 15:8).

"If thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be *grafted* into their own olive tree?" (Rom. 11:24).

Throughout the Acts of the Apostles and the epistles of the period, the Jew is “first” (see Rom. 1:16). The Kingdom of Israel is ever before the mind (see Acts 1:6); when the apostle Paul reached Rome, he did not visit the Church so far as we are told, but sent for the elders of the Jews. After an all-day Conference, the people of Israel were solemnly dismissed by the quotation of Isaiah 6:9,10, and, for the first time since the call of Abraham, the salvation of God was sent to the Gentiles without reference to the people of Israel.

Upon examining the epistles written by Paul during his imprisonment (that is, after the change of dispensation had been made) we discover that the people of Israel, the fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, are all conspicuous by their absence. We have crossed the English Channel as it were, and have left a “Kingdom” for a “Republic”.

The second feature we have indicated on the diagram is the presence of miraculous gifts. The apostle - who worked miracles during the Acts of the Apostles - sent Timothy a prescription for his “often infirmities” in the dispensation that followed, and many are the wrecks that have resulted from the attempt to live as though the miraculous gifts of the Acts period were today still the rule and not the exception.

When we cross the Channel and step onto the shores of France, we find ourselves at once surrounded with a set of circumstances that differ from those obtaining in our own country. If we should be so foolish as to persist in ignoring, for example, the change in money, we should put ourselves and others to a great amount of trouble, and soon find life impossible; while if we were so foolish as to attempt to ignore the change from “keep to the left” to “keep to the right”, we should probably pay for our foolishness with our lives, and most certainly endanger the lives of others.

Lastly, what is “hoped for” is a good index to a calling. The reader will remember the phrase “the hope of your calling”. The epistle to the Romans was the last to be written before the Acts came to a close, and whatever was the hope of the Church then will represent what was its hope right through the period:

“There shall be a root of Jesse, and He that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in Him shall the Gentiles *trust* (hope R.V.). Now the God of (that) *hope* fill you with all joy and peace in believing” (Rom. 15:12,13).

The apostle refers to Isaiah 11, which speaks of the millennial reign of Christ, when the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and when the Lord will set his hand the second time to recover the remnant of His people Israel. This is in line with the statement of the apostle in Acts 26 and 28:

“The *hope* of the promise made of God unto our fathers: unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, *hope* to come” (Acts 26:6,7).

“For the *hope* of Israel I am bound with this chain” (Acts 28:20).

In the prison epistles of Paul, Israel has gone, and with Israel the *hope* connected with that nation. In its place is “the hope that is laid up in heaven”, “which was preached unto every creature under heaven” (see Col. 1:5,23,27; 3:4).

Those possessing the true *Berean* spirit (Acts 17:11) will not be misled nor overawed by those who use arguments similar to those mentioned at the commencement of this leaflet, but will desire, at any cost, to know what is their calling, so that they may enter into their possessions, and walk worthy of their vocation.

No. 7

Dispensational truth and common sense.

Quite a number of earnest believers object most strongly to any attempt rightly to divide the Word of truth, out of a mistaken idea that such “division” is an unsanctified attack upon the unity of the faith, robs the child of God of his portion in the Lord, and generally plays into the hands of the enemy. Yet, if one

were to become acquainted with the everyday life of these same folk, one would find that the principle of “right division” was practised by them all day and every day. Are such so opposed to the principle of “right division” that they would tolerate being served with their luncheon in the following order:

Lentil Soup with Pineapple and Custard. Roast Beef, Yorkshire Pudding and Marmalade. Coffee and Mayonnaise.

Or, if you accompanied them to business, would they wear flannels or a bathing costume at the Board Meeting? Would they ruin their business by mixing up all the Departments, failing to divide aright between buyer and seller, between the manufacturing and the financial Departments?

Would you expect that, apart from sheer necessity, your business friend (who so strongly condemns the “right division” of the Word) would sleep in the bathroom? or would execute his motor repairs in the drawing room? You most certainly would not, and we will not multiply examples further otherwise this page will read like sheer lunacy.

By what process of faith or reason therefore can we say, that where “right division” is the one common principle observed by all men at all times and in all spheres, yet in the matter of understanding the Word of God this basic principle must be looked on with suspicion, and they who use it treated as “dangerous”? Let us put aside any prejudice we may entertain, and just face this matter of “right division” afresh. We will look at the matter from the following points of view:

- (1) This principle of *right division* is a command written in Scripture, and therefore binding upon everyone that nameth the name of Christ.
- (2) The expression “rightly divide” was clearly understood in the days of Paul, being found in the common Version of the Old Testament of his day.
- (3) Every Protestant preacher of the Gospel must, and always does, make one clear application of “right division”, however he may condemn its further application by others.
- (4) Christ Himself has left us an example that we must in all common honesty respect and follow.

The consideration of these four items will be limited to the space available, and then only in a very simple way.

(1) The Command

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

To be (a) approved unto God, and (b) unashamed of one’s work are so important that no one will set aside lightly any honest attempt to comply with this command, however much in so doing some items of one’s creed may need re-adjusting.

(2) The Meaning

The reader may be thankful that, in this particular, he is independent of dictionaries and doctors, grammar or Greek. All that he needs to know is:

- (a) Timothy was the son of a Jewess and a Greek (Acts 16:1).
- (b) He lived in Asia Minor, and would naturally read the Septuagint Version of the Old Testament Scriptures.

(c) In Proverbs 3:6, he would find (and doubtless already knew) the simple meaning of right division: “In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths”. (So reads the Authorized Version. Timothy’s Bible, however, would read, “*rightly divide* thy paths”).

Right division therefore is as simple and as sane as to follow intelligently the directions on the signpost that one meets at the fork in the road. All the redeemed are walking along the road of life, but all are not necessarily journeying to the same destination. Some will inherit the earth (Matt. 5:5); some will walk the streets of the New Jerusalem (Heb. 11:10; Gal. 4:26; Rev. 21:2,24-27); others will find their inheritance far above all principality and power, in “heavenly places” (Eph. 1:3,20,21). Surely it is a commendation of “right division” that those who practise it accept these three Scriptures simply as they are written, and feel no desire to alter (even mentally) “earth” in Matthew 5:5 to “heaven”. Yet, they who oppose this division of Scripture and claim the Sermon on the Mount, as well as Hebrews 11 and Ephesians 1 for the same company, must explain satisfactorily this evident difference.

As the believer comes to the fork in the road, he looks at the signpost and reads: *Kingdom* ☺☺☺ *Church*, and acts accordingly. Or he reads: *Peter* ☺☺☺ *Paul* (as Gal. 2:7,8); or: *Body* ☺☺☺ *Bride*. By believing what he reads and acting upon that belief, confusion is avoided and a clear conception of his particular calling is attained.

(3) A Protestant Principle

Every true believer in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ has no hesitation in “rightly dividing” the Scriptures under the headings “Law” and “Grace”, “Works” and “Faith”, “Moses” and “Christ”. Whole chapters and indeed whole books of the Old Testament are thereby set aside as undispensational by those who thus believe. The principle is conceded by those who oppose it most. We only take it to its legitimate conclusion, whereas they stop after having made a good commencement.

(4) The Example of Christ

If the believer can see this principle of “right division” applied by Christ Himself in the course of His ministry, no further argument of our own will be necessary. For by our attitude to His teaching we must all at last be judged.

In Luke 4:16-21 we have the record of the opening ministry of the Lord. He stood up in the synagogue of His native village and commenced to read Isaiah 61. He had not, however, concluded the verse which is the second in our version, when He closed the book, sat down, and said:

“THIS DAY IS THIS SCRIPTURE fulfilled in your ears” (Luke 4:21).

There was something unusual in our Lord’s procedure. Why did He so abruptly stop? Why did He not even read to the end of verse 2? The explanation is that He was “rightly dividing the Word of truth”! Had He read one sentence more in Isaiah 61 He could not have said to them at Nazareth: “THIS DAY IS THIS SCRIPTURE fulfilled in your ears”, for the next sentence says: “and the *day of vengeance* of our God” (Isa. 61:2). A comma merely, in our English Version divides the two sentences - “the acceptable year” and “the day of vengeance”. Yet this comma represents at least 1900 years. The first sentence refers to the first advent of Christ, the second sentence refers to His second advent. How easy it would have been to have read straight on, but the last sentence was not within the scope of the truth He then wished to emphasize.

Now there are some who feel that this “right division” of the Word of God robs them of much truth. This is a misunderstanding of the facts, and our Saviour’s example just referred to reveals that no part of the Word of God is laid aside by right division - all is needed, and all is accepted - for in Luke 21:22 we find the Lord placing the day of vengeance at the time of His second coming:

“These be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled”.

The following diagram may enable the reader to see how this right division of truth places the two sentences of Isaiah 61 in their dispensational setting:

Luke’s Gospel

Chapter 4	Chapters 5 to 20	Chapter 21
The acceptable year of the Lord -- 1ST ADVENT	Fulfilled <--> Fulfilled Over 1900 years represented by a comma.	The day of vengeance of our God -- 2ND ADVENT

Here we must leave the matter. In the space of this leaflet we cannot do more than seek to quicken the interest of the believer. As a consequence may many be “approved” unto God, “unashamed” of their work, realize their calling, appreciate the wondrous variety of the different dispensations, and believe, without reserve, all that God has said by:

RIGHTLY DIVIDING *the Word of truth.*

No. 8

Dispensational truth and the Fundamentals

“The advocates of what is called Dispensational Truth confine themselves to the four prison epistles of Paul, cut themselves off from the rest of Scripture, and have little or no regard for the *Fundamentals*”.

Those who adversely criticise what is known as *Dispensational Truth* speak somewhat on the foregoing lines, but in the monthly magazine entitled *The Berean Expositor* (which has recently been termed by a hostile critic as “the official organ of this teaching” in the British Isles) the following studies have appeared:

Studies. Over a period of -

- EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWSTWELVE YEARS.
- BOOK OF REVELATIONTWELVE YEARS.
- EPISTLE TO THE ROMANSFIVE YEARS.
- SYSTEMATIC STUDY OF THE O. T.FOURTEEN YEARS.

PARABLES OF THE N.T.FOUR YEARS.

How then can such a criticism be maintained when the Index of the first twenty volumes of this Magazine contains such evidence of concentrated, patient and lengthy study of so many books of the Bible other than “the four prison epistles”? Then as to the *Fundamentals*, the same Index reveals several series dealing with such vital doctrines as:

THE DEITY OF CHRIST.
 SIN.
 REDEMPTION.
 RESURRECTION.
 SANCTIFICATION.
 INSPIRATION OF SCRIPTURE.
 THE TYPICAL TEACHING OF THE TABERNACLE.
 THE OFFERINGS OF LEVITICUS, and
 THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST.

We suggest that such critics of dispensational truth are guilty, maybe unwittingly, of misrepresentation, and we believe that all readers with a sense of fairness will not allow such statements to warp their judgment. The limitation of space in a pamphlet of these dimensions will not permit a lengthy treatment of the subject, but an endeavour will be made to set forth Scriptural evidence to prove that they who hold closely to the teaching of “the four prison epistles”, will, of necessity, hold the fundamentals of the faith.

Most evangelical believers will agree that, whatever else is omitted, the following fundamentals must be included if we are to be considered sound in the faith:

- (1) THE INSPIRATION OF ALL SCRIPTURE.
- (2) THE ALL-SUFFICIENCY OF THE SACRIFICIAL WORK OF CHRIST.
- (3) SALVATION BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH, AND NOT OF WORKS.
- (4) JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH.
- (5) THE DEITY OF CHRIST.

We submit that any difference there may be between believers who hold the above fundamentals cannot arise from Christian love or faithfulness, but must be attributed to sectarian or other motives.

(1) THE INSPIRATION OF ALL SCRIPTURE.- There is one verse in the New Testament that is supreme in the fulness of its testimony to this fundamental, and it is in the prison epistle 2 Timothy:

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable” (2 Tim. 3:16).

With this passage ever before the mind, what fear is there that the reader who has discovered the secrets of the prison epistles will be lax regarding his conception of the truth of all Scripture, or will be neglectful in this respect when this very epistle declares that the whole Scriptures are profitable? If he reads the context of 2 Timothy 3:16 he will learn that these same Scriptures make wise unto salvation, and equip the man of God. Should therefore we be advised that those who follow the teaching of *The Berean Expositor* will, with the exception of four epistles, be cut off from the Scriptures, we must remember that prejudice is blinding, and act accordingly.

(2) THE ALL-SUFFICIENCY OF THE SACRIFICIAL WORK OF CHRIST.- Let us take the testimony of Ephesians and Colossians:

“In Whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace; wherein He hath abounded toward us” (Eph. 1:7,8).

“But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ” (Eph. 2:13).

“Walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour” (Eph. 5:2).

“Having made peace through the blood of His cross ... You, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath He reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouable in His sight” (Col. 1:20-22).

These passages cover a tremendous ground. Redemption is declared to be by *blood*, and essential to forgiveness. Peace and access is by the *cross*, and the presentation of the believer “holy and unblameable” is so wonderful as to surpass all understanding. Who with these testimonies before them would not study the whole of the Old Testament and New Testament Scriptures in order to gather all that has been revealed concerning this fundamental of our faith?

(3) SALVATION BY GRACE.- Do we insist that, however much we may progress in the knowledge of the Word, there should be a clear testimony maintained concerning the way of salvation? Then no passage of Scripture presents the terms of salvation so clearly and in so small a compass as does Ephesians 2:8-10 :

“For by *grace* are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:8-10).

Here we have not only the emphasis placed upon grace without works, but the balance is preserved by the closing statement that salvation, though not arising *out of* works, is nevertheless *unto* good works, a characteristic of the epistle to the Ephesians which balances doctrine with practice throughout its six chapters.

(4) JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH.- What an important epistle is that to the Romans. Every believer who has any knowledge of truth realizes the fundamental nature of its testimony to righteousness. How many of us could write a synopsis of its teaching with such certainty and such brevity as does the apostle in one verse of the epistle to the Philippians? :

“And be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith” (Phil. 3:9).

Here are five separate items, which practically cover the teaching of Romans on the subject of justification:

- (i) IT IS “IN HIM” for as Romans 8:1 says: “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are IN Christ Jesus”, and Romans 8 is in direct contrast with Romans 5, where condemnation is found in Adam.
- (ii) IT IS NOT OF THE LAW (*see* Rom. 3:20,21,28; 8:3; 10:4).
- (iii) IT IS THROUGH THE FAITH OF CHRIST. “Which is by faith OF Jesus Christ” (Rom. 3:22).
- (iv) IT IS A RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD (*see* Rom. 1:16,17; 3:21,26).
- (v) IT IS BY FAITH. “We conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law” (Rom. 3:28).

He who believes Philippians 3:9 will rejoice in the fuller exposition of the epistle to the Romans.

(5) THE DEITY OF CHRIST.- The person of the ascended Christ is the glory of the prison ministry of Paul. How can anyone who believes Philippians or Colossians ever again tolerate the language of those who so often speak of the Lord as “The carpenter’s Son”, or “The man of Galilee”? They will even refrain from using the holy name “Jesus”, for they are taught in these epistles to own Him as “Lord”. He is set forth as “The Form of God, Who

thought it not robbery to be equal with God”, and Who will one day be acknowledged as Jehovah, bearing “the name that is above every name” (Phil. 2:6-11). They will acknowledge that He is the Image of the Invisible God, that all creation visible and invisible is the work of His hands, that He is before all things, and by Him all things consist, and that in Him dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily (Col. 1:15-19; 2:9).

If these fundamentals find their exposition in the four prison epistles, then the more they are studied and valued the stronger will be the testimony to the *fundamentals* of our faith. No space remains in which to explain why these four epistles are so precious to us, but the interested reader is referred to *Berean Messages No. 9*, in which we hope to make our reason plain.

No. 9

Dispensational truth and the Epistles of the Mystery

The reader who has seen No. 8 of this series will remember that the importance of the four prison epistles came into prominence, and we expressed our intention to deal with the reason why these epistles are so valuable to us at this present time. We suppose the following questions arise in the reader’s mind:

- (1) WHY PRISON EPISTLES?
- (2) WHY FOUR PRISON EPISTLES?
- (3) WHAT ARE THESE PRISON EPISTLES?
- (4) WHAT IS THEIR DISTINCTIVE TEACHING?

To answer the first question, *Why prison Epistles?* we shall have to turn our attention to the Acts of the Apostles, in order to observe a few important items which are there made known concerning the ministry of the apostle Paul. After many years of service the apostle, in Acts 20, made it clear that he had come to the end of one ministry and was facing another. He told his hearers (in verses 17-38) that they would see his face no more, and that his future ministry would be associated with bonds and afflictions.

Later, when standing before Agrippa, the apostle revealed that when the Lord met him on the road to Damascus, He not only gave him a commission at the time, but promised that He would appear unto him a second time and give him a further commission (Acts 26:16-18). Upon his arrival as a prisoner at Rome, the apostle sent for the leaders of the Jews, and after an all-day Conference with them, dismissed them by quoting for the last time Isaiah 6:9,10, and by saying:

“The salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and they will hear it” (Acts 28:28).

We are not left to conjecture what the apostle taught consequent upon this dispensational crisis; we have written testimony. This prison ministry becomes eloquent to us in the epistles which Paul wrote as the prisoner of the Lord. These we must now discover:

EPHESIANS IS CLEARLY A PRISON EPISTLE.

“I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles” (Eph. 3:1).

PHILIPPIANS IS A PRISON EPISTLE.

“My bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace” (Phil. 1:13).

COLOSSIANS IS A PRISON EPISTLE.

“The mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds” (Col. 4:3).

2 TIMOTHY IS A PRISON EPISTLE.

“Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner” (2 Tim. 1:8).

PHILEMON IS A PRISON EPISTLE.

“Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ” (Philemon 9).

While Philemon is a precious little epistle, it is not written with any intention of manifesting the distinctive truth of the mystery, and consequently we usually speak of “the *four* prison epistles”, which should cause no misunderstanding to any believer.

We now devote the remainder of our space to setting forth the distinctive teaching of these four epistles. First of all it is interesting to perceive that they are in two pairs. One pair teaches basic truths, the other pair exhorts the believer to faithful continuance. This can be visualised if we set them out as follows:

EPHESIANS. - The revelation of the Mystery.

PHILIPPIANS. - The running for the Prize.

COLOSSIANS. - The revelation of the Mystery.

2 TIMOTHY. - The fight and the Crown.

Before we come to the question “What is the Mystery?” let us look at one or two distinctive items of these epistles.

“HEAVENLY PLACES” (Eph. 1:3). - The sphere of blessing for this church is not in the earth, nor in the heavenly Jerusalem, but in the “heavenly places”. These are at the right hand of God, far above all principality and power, far above all heavens (Eph. 1:3,20,21; 4:10). This church is said to be seated together in these very heavenlies (Eph. 2:6). No higher sphere of blessing can be conceived or is revealed in Scripture. There is nothing like it in any epistle written by Paul prior to his imprisonment during the Acts, or by any other apostle at any time.

“BEFORE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD” (Eph. 1:4). - Strictly speaking, the word here translated “foundation” should be translated “overthrow”, as it refers to Genesis 1:2, but we cannot deal with that question here. It will suffice for our purpose if we realise that this is the only place in the Word of God where any company of believers is associated with a period *before* the foundation of the world, all other companies being connected with a period *from* or *since* the foundation of the world (*see* Matt. 25:34). Here then are two peculiar features found nowhere else in the Scriptures:

(1) A SPHERE OF BLESSING “IN HEAVENLY PLACES FAR ABOVE ALL”.

(2) A PERIOD OF CHOICE “BEFORE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD”.

Now Paul, as the prisoner of Jesus Christ, claimed that to him had been given a “dispensation”, and that to him had been revealed “The mystery”. We must be clear as to the meaning of the words before we can go further.

The word “dispensation” is translated “stewardship” in Luke 16:2, and has no connection with the word “age” or a period of time. A steward was once spelt in Old English, *Sty-ward*, the Ward of the Farm. Paul therefore claimed to have been appointed by God over some special section of His great Vineyard.

The word “mystery” means “a secret”, and especially a secret purpose which is not divulged because of an enemy. God had planned the ages, but because of the great enemy of truth He purposely did not reveal every part of that plan at one time. The bulk of the Scriptures deal with that phase of God’s purpose which is connected with Israel. When Israel failed to repent, it certainly did look as though the evil one had brought the purpose of the ages

to a standstill. Here, then, was manifested the wisdom of God. When all seemed lost He revealed His secret, that during the period of Israel's rejection, He had determined to call, from among the Gentiles, a company who should be members of the Body of Christ, who though aliens from the commonwealth of Israel should be blessed far above Israel's inheritance, and beyond all that the promise of Abraham could give.

This "secret" God revealed to Paul the prisoner, and through him everyone else has learned its wondrous message. This leaves all other callings and dispensations where Scripture leaves them, and does not confuse *kingdom* with *church*, *bride* with *body*, *earth* with *heaven*.

Whilst there is much more to write, we must come straightaway to Ephesians 3, in order that we shall have, in the very language of Scripture, Paul's own statement about this new dispensation:

"For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ FOR YOU GENTILES, If ye have heard of the DISPENSATION of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: How that by REVELATION He made known unto me THE MYSTERY ... Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the UNSEARCHABLE riches of Christ; and to make all men see what is the fellowship (Revised Version *dispensation*) of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God" (Eph. 3:1-3,8,9).

As a confirmation of this claim and a further explanation of its meaning, let us quote from Colossians:

"For His BODY'S sake, which is the church: 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; even THE MYSTERY which hath been HID from ages and from generations, but now is made MANIFEST to His saints: to whom God would make known ..." (Col. 1:24-27).

Whoever the reader may be, and whatever views he may hold as to dispensational truth, here are two inspired statements in the Word of God that cannot be ignored. They challenge attention, faith and adherence. If followed, they lead to an assurance and to a fellowship which transcends anything else found in Scripture. Is it any wonder that, having caught a glimpse of the glory that is there at the right hand of God, we should set so high a value on these four prison epistles?

The fact that in these four epistles we find the revelation of the mystery does not, and cannot, mean that other Scriptures are ignored, or that fundamentals are denied. This aspect of the subject is dealt with in No. 8 of this series.

We wish we could write more fully of these precious things, but our object will have been achieved if prejudice has been removed, and the claims of these epistles upon the believer's closest attention have been vindicated.

No. 10

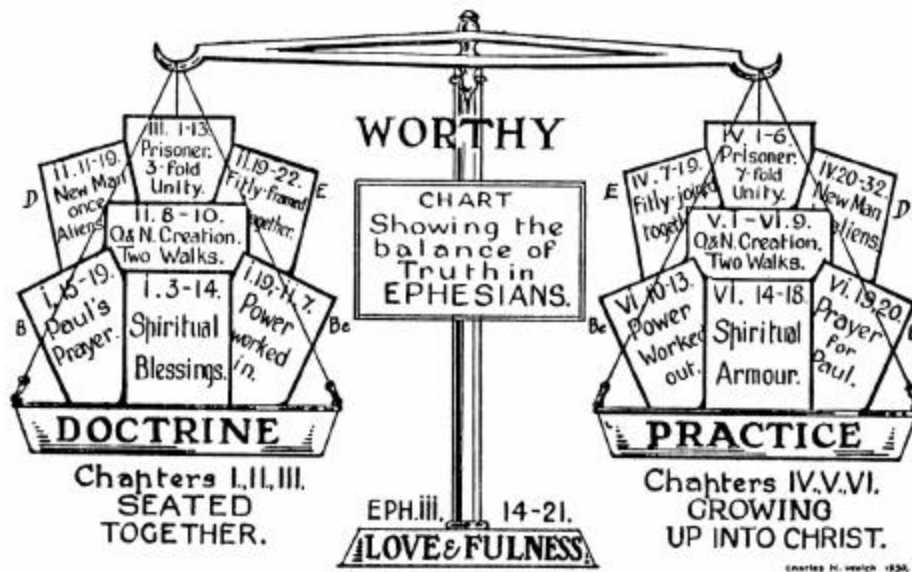
Dispensational truth and practical Christianity

Among the many charges brought against "Dispensational truth" is the one that it is so unpractical; that these folk who have their heads in the stars, who talk about "principalities and powers" and "mysteries" have no message of practical value, their teaching making men hypocritical, mystical and exclusive. Now if these charges could be substantiated they would be serious indeed. But we are glad to say that they exist only in the imagination of those who, when criticising the teaching of the mystery, are somewhat like the would-be teachers of the apostle's day:

"Understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm" (1 Tim. 1:7).

It is our object in this pamphlet to show how intensely practical these epistles of the mystery are, and we feel sure that those who desire the truth will gladly open the Book so that it may speak for itself.

First of all let us notice the testimony of the Epistle to the Ephesians to the value of practical truth. In chapter 4 we find the apostle beseeching his hearers “to walk *worthy* of their calling”, and we notice that this exhortation comes practically midway through the epistle. Upon examination we discover that this epistle is so written that there are seven sections in chapters 1 to 3 dealing with *doctrine*, and these are balanced by seven sections in chapters 4 to 6 which deal with *practice*. Further, that every section in the doctrinal portion of the epistle has a corresponding member in the practical portion. For example, in Ephesians 2:19-22, where we read of a “temple fitly framed together”, in Ephesians 4:7-19, we read of a “body fitly joined together”. The word “worthy” in Ephesians 4:1 suggests a balance, as in Romans 8:18, and the whole balance of doctrine and practice may be seen at a glance in the diagram opposite.



A detailed examination of the practical teaching of Ephesians is beyond the scope of a pamphlet of this nature; we must content ourselves with a few examples. Look how in chapter 4 the apostle not only gives the injunction to “put off” the old man and to “put on” the new, but he emphasizes the injunction with a most searching word concerning the thief who was to steal no more, but to labour with his hands: to avoid any form of corrupt speech, to put away all anger, to forgive even as God for Christ’s sake had forgiven. Who is there among those who cry the loudest for “something practical”, who would say that their manner of life compares favourably with this standard?

Again, in Ephesians 5 the “walk” which is worthy is further expanded. This walk must be “in love” (5:2); “as light” (5:8), and “as wise” (5:15), and moreover, each one of these sub-divisions of the walk are followed by the most comprehensive statements concerning the daily life and conduct. These three divisions are further expanded in Ephesians 5:22 to 6:9, and the reader is not permitted to generalise, but is forced to face particular aspects of practical truth. Wives and husbands, children and parents, servants and masters, each have their place, and we wonder to what extent those who say dispensational truth is not practical would stand the test of this practical section if it were applied to their home and ways.

Turn to the epistle to the Philippians; where else in all the New Testament shall we find an epistle like it for practical teaching? The wondrous revelation of Philippians 2 concerning the Lord Who, from being equal with God stooped to the death of the cross, was not primarily given to teach anything about the Person of the Lord, but was given as an example, that we might know what true unselfishness meant:

“Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others” (Phil. 2:4).

Where shall we find such trust and tranquillity, such *practical* faith as that of Philippians 4:6,7 :

“Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus”.

Look at the example set by the apostle:

“I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, to be independent (as the word may be translated). I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Phil. 4:11-13).

Or turn to the last epistle that Paul wrote before his martyrdom (2 Timothy) and listen to his emphasis upon not being ashamed:

“Be not thou therefore *ashamed* of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God” (2 Tim. 1:8).

“For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not *ashamed*: for I know Whom I have believed” (2 Tim. 1:12).

“He oft refreshed me, and was not *ashamed* of my chain” (2 Tim. 1:16).

Can anything be more practical than the following words to Timothy:

“God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind” (2 Tim. 1:7).

How clear cut are his words in 2 Timothy 2:4 :

“No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life (his livelihood); that he may please Him Who hath chosen him to be a soldier” (2 Tim. 2:4).

Doctrine and practice are balanced beautifully in 2 Timothy 2:19 :

“Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His (*doctrine*). And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity” (*practice*).

The apostle moreover could point to his own consistent conduct while preaching the truth to others:

“But thou hast fully known my *doctrine, manner of life*” (2 Tim. 3:10).

Would to God that all those who know something of doctrine realized more and more the necessity for corresponding practice.