***The Mystery (Secret) of the Church Age

Colossians 1:25-29

COL-215***

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Hebrews 4:12: "For the Word of God is living and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of the soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart."

2 Timothy 4:2-4: "Preach the word. Be ready, in season and out of season. Reprove, rebuke, exhort with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths."

This morning we direct your attention to our study of Colossians 1:25-29. Our subject is "The Mystery of the Church," segment number 30.

**False Teachers**

The Colossian Christians were being bombarded by false teachers who were claiming to have special, superior spiritual understanding. They claimed to be more advanced in their insights about the things of God than what the apostle Paul was teaching them through their pastor-teacher Epaphras, whom Paul had instructed. To this very day, this technique of claiming superior spiritual insight, is used by Satan to deceive people. This is the reason that Satan has created extra books, beyond the Old and New Testaments, as being sacred books as repositories of advanced knowledge.

So, you had the book of Quran of the Muslims. You have the Book of Mormon, of the Church of the Latter-Day Saints of Jesus Christ. You have the religions of the East – their writings. And, in fact, in charismatic circles, you have people who are constantly standing up and claiming to give a prophecy from God. That's a message from heaven. And they love to claim (especially their leaders) that they are receiving a word of knowledge, meaning a line of direct communication from God. Now that's scripture! These are claims, then, upon which these people will base superiority to the Scriptures themselves.

This is the way the devil works. He cannot deny access to the true Word of God, but he can sidetrack people, both believers and unbelievers, by pretending to have something more. And there are always little groups, rising up here and there, to run little Bible studies, and little "churchy" groups, on the basis of having something more and something special in their approach.

However, God has a system. He has put it together. It's the local church. It's the Word of God – the complete Old and New Testament Scripture, inspired and inerrant, and fully capable, such that a pastor-teacher, who will take the trouble to learn it; to understand it; and, to convey that spiritual food to the people of God. And that is the truth.

This is, in the high priestly prayer of John 17, what Jesus prayed for. He asks that the people of God would be sanctified (set apart) to the truth. And then, in John 17:17, he said, "Thy word is truth".

So, when you go beyond the Scriptures (the Old and New Testament Scriptures), you're out in the world of human viewpoint thinking. Do not be drawn off by those systems. They're always based upon appeals to your sin nature. They're always based upon the appeals to your emotion. And if you can get people drawn by emotion, then you have them. To come to a church service, like you have here at Berean church: there are no jokes; there's nothing funny; and, there's nothing cute. Even the preacher isn't particularly good looking. There's nothing to come for. All you have is the Word of God.

However, next week the power of the Word of God can again be here. So, you have another reason for coming. If we soup you up emotionally, and get you thinking that we've got something really hot, and bigger, and more here, then next week, we have to up the ante, or you won't come back. But the Word of God – that is where the truth is.

So, this is what Paul faced in Colossae. Here were Christians. They were gung-ho for the Lord Jesus Christ. But in came the Judaizers. In came the subtle false teachers: the gnostics of that day – the people who used the name such that they had superior knowledge. And they were telling people, "Paul is right. But he hasn't gone far enough. We have something more."

Now that might be a familiar phrase to you. The charismatic use it all the time. Their final argument, that they have an in with God, is that they have something more. And in truth, the oddity is that what they have is *something less* than the true doctrine of the Holy Spirit, and what God has for them as members of the church age.

So, unbelievers are easily led astray from God's truth. And untaught and carnal believers are tempted to get into heresy, by following these advanced revelations that other people claim to have.

So, the apostle Paul, here in the book of Colossians, is simply alerting these Christians in the city of Colossae that they're the ones who possess great spiritual secrets, and advanced spiritual insight, into the revelation of the mystery of the church. The false teachers do not have it, but they have it.

The average member who has attended Berean Church, or those who listen to Berean tapes, are infinitely head-and-shoulders above the average person in Christendom, in the knowledge of the Word of God – the deep things of the Word of God, and capable of being able to handle his life spiritually, if he follows the principles that he's been taught. You are the people who are in the know.

Well, the apostles was trying to tell the Colossians that they were the ones who were in the know – not these false teachers. It is these Christians in Colossae who have humbly subjected themselves to the instruction that Epaphras brought to them. They're the ones who possess the real way of salvation by a grace gift of God through faith in Jesus Christ, with no contaminating works added. These are the people who realize that, in past generation of believers, there was no knowledge about the secret plan of God to create a new species of human beings – the church, the body of Christ, made up of Jew and Gentile.

The apostle Paul, in Ephesians 2:14-18, points this out" "For He Himself is our peace (referring to Jesus Christ)." And the context of this passage is the fact that the Jews were God's people. They had everything. They had information. They had the Scriptures. And the gentiles were outsiders. They had nothing. In Ephesians 2:13, Paul says that the gentiles formerly were far off, they were on the outside. Now they're being brought in.

So, in Ephesians 2:14-15, he says, "For He Himself (Jesus Christ) is our peace, who made both groups (Jews and gentiles) into one, and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh, the enmity which is in the law of commandments, contained in ordinances, that in Himself, He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace." There was an enmity between Jews and gentiles. The Jews had the commandments. They had the information of God. And there was no peace between them. Along comes the Lord Jesus Christ, and He said, "Nobody has ever been able to keep the 613 rules of the Mosaic Law, but I have. Therefore, I have fulfilled the Law, and I've done that for everyone. Now we're going to bring Jews and gentiles into one new relationship.

Ephesians 2:16-18 says, "And might reconcile them both, in one body, to God, through the cross; by it, having put to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you (you gentiles), who were far away, and peace to those who were near (peace even to the Jew who did not have it). For through Him (Christ), we both have our access in one Spirit (one Holy Spirit) to the Father."

No one in the past generations (the past dispensations) ever experience a spiritual power of the filling of the Holy Spirit, or the full knowledge of doctrinal truth, to be able, thereby, to possess the very mind of God.

1 Corinthians 2:16 says, "For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he should instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ." We Christians have the very mind of God. How do you have that? Because you are wiser, or more determined, or more emotional? No. You have it because somebody has taught you the principles of Scripture. No one in the past knew of the intimate relationship of the church saints to God's Son, nor of their special eternal union with Him in the form of a bride to her husband, or a head to the body. Never before the church age was the grace of God carrying believers to super-grace levels of spiritual maturity, so that the person could live a magnificent life of godliness.

Every Christian who is ever honest with himself, will admit that there is always that temptation within his soul. There is always those worst-of-all-sins (those mental attitudes sins) – these violations of the moral code of God, that no one sees until they break out into the open. But God always sees. All of us know that kind of a struggle that is potentially there. And the Jew was always victimized. He had no power to do right. I don't care how determined he was; how sincere he was; how elevated in position he was; or, how lowly he was – he couldn't beat the game.

So, you must not take lightly the fact that God said, "I'm going to create a special group of human beings, out of Jews and gentiles, who will have such magnificent relationships to My Son, and such magnificent relationships to God the Holy Spirit, that they will live lives that no one ever dreamed possible in generations past. And if you never catch onto this, and if you don't understand this, then you're going to be one of these people, as they had some in Colossae, who were running off after these false teachers, who were promising them "something more."

**The Mystery (Secret) of the Church Age**

Now, Paul is alerting these Colossian Christians that they should not do that. He is reminding them that they know infinitely more about a very special thing that God is doing in the mystery (the secret) of the church, than these false teachers ever did. The Colossians were the people who were really in the know in spiritual matters – not those arrogant teachers trying to mislead them.

**Spiritual Defeat Begins with the Dirtiness of the Mind**

Through the apostle Paul, the mystery (secret) of the church age was revealed to the saints in Colossae. The Colossian Christians, therefore, already knew all that they needed in order to be able to live a life of victory. When a person goes down in spiritual defeat, it didn't have to be. It's not just one of those things. It is a progression, by certain steps, that you come to that. And it begins with the dirtiness of the mind. The filthiness of the mind expresses itself outwardly. It begins with playing with God on an emotional basis, and that emotion comes out of the sin nature. We're not condemning emotion, but that emotion has to come from the Word of God, and your relationships to the person of Christ. Then there will be an elation that you can enjoy, and that will be real.

**Spiritual Maturity**

The Colossian Christians already knew how they needed to live their lives for victory over sin, with the spiritual power of the Holy Spirit to produce divine good works, so that, someday, God would reward them for that, and that they would be able to grow in their lives in spiritual maturity.

**Christendom Today**

This is the great tragedy of Christendom today. Christians never grow up to spiritual maturity. They never develop a super-grace level of living. So, they just muddle along in their lives. But once that happens, suddenly, the inner person is transformed. God takes hold of you. And, suddenly, you realize that all the finest things you've ever dreamed of doing, you're capable of doing. All the things that God tells you to do, you're very happy to do. You lose your greed. You lose your self-centeredness. You lose that emotional orientation (domination) of your soul. And you stop being a sitting duck for all the winds of doctrine that come flowing around, about us constantly.

John Gutenberg did us a great service when he invented the movable type, so that we could print things. But at the same time, it opened the floodgate to a mass of misinformation. And unless you have the frame of reference of the Word of God, you'll get in with some group, and you'll roll high, and think that you're having a wonderful time. And then, pretty soon, you see lives cracking up in that group. And you say, "Whoa, wait a minute. What's going on here? These were supposedly wonderful people who had more in the know. They were really hot for the Lord."

This is a very subtle and tricky thing. And the devil always approaches it by telling you that he has something better for you than sitting under the instruction of the Word of God.

**The Rapture**

The destiny of the Colossian Christians was the rapture of the church, which would take them all to heaven. The Colossian Christians had it all. So, Paul said, "They should not be sidetracked from their rich spiritual heritage, by Satan's agents of deceit – and neither should we.

This morning, we look at Colossians 1:27. Paul says, "To whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery (among the gentiles) which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." "To whom" refers back to Colossians 1:26, to the word "saints:" "manifested to His saints" – people in the body of Christ. "God," in the Greek language, has the word 'the' (not translated in the English verse). It is "The God," which indicates to us that it is God the Father Who is the author of this magnificent plan. He chose to do something.

Paul connotes a divine purpose, and says, "God willed." The Greek word looks like this: "thelo". And this word connotes a divine purpose. It is a word for an act of divine sovereignty. God Himself decided to do this. And He proceeded to carry out a decision relative to gentile believers. It was a decision that was made way back in the original (in eternity past) conference of the Godhead, and the establishment of the decrees of all that was going to be done. At some point in time, the Godhead decided: "We're going to put together (during a certain era of time on earth) the most magnificent group of human beings – a new species of human beings, and they will be called the body of Christ, the church. They'll be called Christians. They'll have relationships to God, and power systems, and knowledge of the Word of God, that no one ever has before or ever will after them. And they will have an intimate relationship to God throughout all the millennium, and throughout all creation in eternity future."

To these saints, God the Father made a decision, at a point in time, to make a revelation. That point in time was after the crucifixion; the resurrection; and, the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a sovereign act of God. And He timed it – when He would make the revelation of this particular information.

Then we're told that what He had decided was to make something known. The Greek word looks like this: "gnórizó" (gno-rid'-zo) – to make something known. This word means to give a piece of information to these saints, in Colossians 1:26, about something that God had been keeping to Himself. This divine revelation had something to do, relative to the mystery which is spoken of in Colossians 1:26. That is the mystery which has been hidden from past ages.

At some point in time, God began unveiling this to the apostles. In fact, Jesus Himself gave the first indication that God the Father had now decided to make this secret known.

It was in Matthew 16:18. Jesus was speaking with His disciples. He has crossed the border, out of Israel, and He's standing on gentile territory (in Caesarea Philippi) when he says this. Peter has just said to Him, "You are the Son of the Living God." And this was a great statement. This was a great boulder-like thing: "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God." This was because Jesus had said to them, "Whom do you say I am?" People had all kinds of ideas. And Peter steps up and says, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

In Matthew 16:17-18, Jesus said, "Blessed are you Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to this to you (it's not because you're so smart), but My Father Who is in heaven (the fountain of information). Then, Jesus said, "I say this to you" that you are Peter." And the Greek word for Peter is "petros" (pet'-ros). "Petros" means "a little pebble:" "And upon this rock." And that Greek word is different. It is "petra" (pet'-ra), and it means "a boulder." That rock is what Peter has just said: "You art the Christ, the Son of the Living God. Then Jesus said, "Flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, Peter. Upon this 'rock' I will build My church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it"(overpower it).

**"I Will Build My Church"**

So, here Jesus suddenly said, "I will build my church." The disciples look at one another: "Church? Assembly? We know what the word means, but what is that? There's no assembly in Scriptures. We know the Scriptures well. What is he talking about?" And the light began to be turned on about this secret.

Now, this is what Paul is talking about in Colossians: "These men are walking around, telling you they have something very special, and something much better for you. Forget it. They have nothing. You are the people who have everything, because you know about this great secret which God has now made known."

**The Riches**

"To whom God willed" means "sovereignly determine to make clear:" What is the riches? The Greek word for "riches" looks like this: "ploutos" (ploo'-tos). The word is "ploutos," from which we get our English word "plutocrat" – somebody who has a lot of money. And because he has a lot of money, he has a lot of power. But this word "ploutos" connotes something of immense value, and in great quantity. And what is he talking about? It is the wealth of knowing Jesus Christ in a relationship that no believer, from Adam on down, has ever known God before. This is a closeness that was beyond human comprehension.

On the human level, we have this a little bit. There are people that we are very close to. There are people that we have a great compatibility and affinity for. There are people that are very dear to us. And they move in a very close and inner circle. And suddenly, God, who is always distant from people in the Jewish era, suddenly is going to be so close to them that He's going to live inside their bodies? So, that there's no more external temple? But they become the temple of the living God. To us, this is commonplace. To them, it was a staggering thought that was almost incomprehensible.

In Colossians 2:2-3, Paul says, "That their hearts (these believers) may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and attaining to all the wealth (there it is again – the riches) that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God's that is in Christ Jesus." What is the wealth that they had? They had the wealth of knowledge concerning a relationship to the second Person of the Trinity – the mystery (the secret) of the church, about Jesus Christ Himself, and how they would be related to Him.

Paul, in Ephesians 1:7 says, "In Him (Christ), we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses according to the riches of His grace." So, Paul says, "There is a wealth, and it is the result of the grace of God. It's not because you deserve it. It is because God has chosen to give this to you. He didn't choose to give it to the Jews.

Ephesians 1:18: "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling; what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints." How rich is a glorious inheritance that you church people have entered into.

Well, that's the next word that Paul uses in Colossians 1:27" "the riches of the glory". The word "glory" is the word "doxa" (dox'-ah). "Doxa" means "the blazing splendor" (the light) of the holy character of God, such as Jesus demonstrated on the Mount of Transfiguration. It connotes the magnificence and the greatness of the church mystery.

In Colossians 1:27, please notice that you have two words connected: "riches;" and, "glory," to describe the great power relationship of the body of Christ to the living God: "To Whom God will, to make know what is the riches (of the) glory." That is a glorious enrichment.

In Ephesians 3:16, the apostle Paul says, "That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man." Here is a glorious wealth. Do you want something valuable? Here, Paul says, "Oh, how I pray for you people in Ephesus – that you'll be able to rise above the crowd; rise above most Christians; and, enter into the rich glorious power of the Spirit in the inner man:" to live by means of the Holy Spirit, and never to grieve Him with moral sin, and never to quench Him by refusing to obey what He asks you to do, in the leadings (the burdens) that He places upon your heart, but to rise to the moment that God would grant you according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man.

That was what the Jew never had. He never had power. The best of them wanted to do right. They just wanted to walk with God, and they failed. They couldn't do it. You can't do this on a human plane.

Some Christians think that they can be saved by the grace of God, and then they promptly proceed to want to live a godly spiritual life on the basis of rules they keep. So, suddenly we get these legalistic Christians that believe that they're gaining merit, and favor, and spiritual power with God, by what they do. No. You will become spiritually powerful as you operate under the control of God the Holy Spirit. It is He that develops a spiritual life in us. It is our confession of known sin that keeps us under His guiding authority.

So, you go ahead and play with your mental attitudes sins. You go ahead and regurgitate that on other people, and God help you if you do that towards some young person that God says, "I won't tolerate that. I'll shut you up if I have to, by taking your life, but you will not contaminate one of My little ones. Go ahead and put on that millstone, and dump yourself in the lake, before I do it for you." God help you if you take your mental attitude sins, and let them spew out over other people, so that people everywhere are contaminated by what you do. God says that only the Spirit of God can protect you from that. How much better it is to be strengthened with power through His Spirit within the inner man. That is the glory of His riches. The Jew could not do that, but we Christians have the power to be able to do that, unless we just undermine ourselves.

"The riches of His glory" refers to the church, spiritual, dynamic system, where doctrine is learned; you say "Amen" to it; it is stored it in your human spirit; and the Holy Spirit is free to teach you, because you're in fellowship with the Father, with all known since confessed. And grace gives you the power, then, to have the Spirit of God bring up to your mind, principles of truth. And He changes your taste.

Now, if you have a taste for garbage, there's something wrong. . . . In the past, I've had dogs that had a way of throwing up. And then, as the Scripture says, the dog eats his vomit, just to be sure that there wasn't something good in there that he might have missed the first time.

Well, as the Scripture says, "You can go ahead and live like this as a Christian, regurgitating and eating your own moral evil, and then spewing it out on other people to contaminate them. At least, in God's Name, keep it to yourself." That is because it is the pattern of the Word of God that our lives should be characterized by the character of Christ. It is what He is that we are to do. And the thing about this is that if we're not, it is because we choose not to be.

If we let the devil destroy our lives, he'll do it. He'll let you eat your own regurgitation. And you may think that's really fun. But just remember, people, there is coming a report card day at the Judgment Seat of Christ. It's all going to come out. It's all going to be very clear then.

So, it is this mystery, here in Colossians 1:27, among the gentiles. That is this great secret. This word in the Bible, in the Greek, for "mystery" looks like this "mustérion" (moos-tay'-ree-on). And I note that, so that you will know that we're talking about Holy Spirit words. We're not talking about a Bible that has been paraphrased, like some parts of the NIV are, and others even more so, so that they're words of man, and not the words of God the Holy Spirit in the original text. This "mustérion" is a very important word. It means "a secret." It's a mystery. It's a secret which has been hidden, and that's what Paul is talking about: "You people in Colossae are infinitely ahead of the false teacher gang, because you know the great mystery that God has now revealed. And He has revealed it especially to the gentiles, because it particularly deals with us. God has exercised glorious special favor upon the gentiles.

The apostle Paul referred this to this in Romans 9:23: "And He did so in order that He might make known the riches of His glory." There you have it again: "The gloriousness of the riches of Christ, upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory." We are the vessels of doom. But God has said, "I'm going to get you ready for a glorious relationship to Me for all eternity."

Romans 9:24: "Even us (we Christians), whom He also called. And remember: if you are a person who has believed the Lord Jesus Christ, it is because God called you, and enabled you to do it. Otherwise you'd be out there, muddling around with the unsaved, just like anybody else. But He touched you – "not from among the Jews only, but also from among the gentiles." This is a very special group.

Then notice Romans 10:12-13: "For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek. For the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call upon Him. For whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved." How do you call upon the name of the Lord for salvation? Acts 16:31: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved."

So, here is the magnificence of the rich glory of the church secret. The rich glory of the church secret is the enormous grace of God, focusing, primarily, on gentiles, but Jews included, in the form of doctrinal truth, and the spiritual power system of the filling of the Holy Spirit. No one, ever, in the past, anticipated such a divine arrangement; such a power system; or, such a capacity for people to live magnificent lives.

Knowing this, it is understandable that we feel like weeping when we see a Christian who muddles off into spiritual disaster; and, into becoming a spiritual casualty. This is what you could be. It causes me to cringe when I see people who are in royalty (in physical, earthly royalty) positions around the world, and they act like common dogs. It makes me cringe. They are people who are in positions of great elevation of esteem and honor, and they act like dogs. It makes us weep. And it makes us cringe to see something like that.

Here is the rich glory (the secret of the church) with all of its enormous grace privileges: full knowledge of the Word of God; and, a spiritual power system. All you have to do is let the Spirit of God do His work. No one ever anticipated this in the Old Testament. There is no secret in the Old Testament, however (please understand), that the gentiles were going to be saved. The Jews knew that the gentiles were going to be saved along with the Messiah Savior. If you were to read commentaries on this passage, and others, that deal with the mystery of the church, you'd be amazed at how many teachers (and sometimes good Bible teachers\_ say that the mystery (the secret) was that gentiles were going to be saved. And when they do that, they lose the whole point of what it is to be a Christian under the power system of the Spirit of God.

The people of the Old Testament were clearly informed that the gentiles were going to be saved. So, don't make that mistake. Please notice Romans 15:9-12: "And for the gentiles to glorify God for His mercy, as it is written, 'Therefore, I will give praise to You among the gentiles, and I will sing to Your Name.'" And again, he says, "Rejoice, O gentiles, with His people." And again: "Praise the Lord, all you gentiles, and let all the people praise Him." And again, Isaiah says, "There shall come the root of Jesse, and he who arises to rule over the gentiles: in Him shall the gentiles hope." Hope? Hope for what? Hope for salvation. The gentiles were told: "There's hope for you."

Compare that with Isaiah 49:6. He says, "It is too small a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel." God the Father says to God the Son, "It's not enough that a Person of Your Stature, and Who you are, and what You'll do, should simply raise up Israel to fulfill My promises to them, and to provide salvation for them."

So God goes on and says, "I will also make you a Light to the nations (the gentiles), so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth." It's going to go beyond Israel, to the ends of the earth. Now that sounds to me like God is telling people in the Old Testament that the gentiles are going to be saved, as well as the Jews. They're not going to have the Jews' special relationships to God, but they're going to be saved. That's not the mystery.

In Luke 2:32, the old man Simeon is in the temple. They bring the baby Jesus for His dedication and circumcision. And God has told Simeon, "You will not die until you see the Messiah Savior." In Luke 2:32, Simeon, in the midst of his praising God that he has seen this Messiah, says, "A Light of revelation to the gentiles, and the glory of Your people, Israel." This is the light of revelation of salvation, and of the full counsel of God, to gentiles, as well as to Israel."

Then in Acts 13:47, this same principle is again established. The gentiles have a promise: "For thus, the Lord has commanded us. I have placed you as a Light for the gentiles, that You should bring salvation to the ends of the earth."

At the very beginning of the Bible, as a matter of fact, in Genesis 22:18, God has made it clear that gentiles would be included in salvation: "And in your Seed" (speaking to Abraham). And the New Testament points out that that word "seed" ("zera") (zeh'-rah) is singular – Jesus Christ: "And in your Seed (the Messiah Christ), all the gentiles of the earth shall be blessed because you have obeyed My voice."

The apostle Paul picks this verse up in Galatians 3:8-9. And you can see that we have to connect the Old and New Testaments together. Then we get the picture of what's going on: "And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, 'All the nations shall be blessed in You.' So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham (the believer)." Yes, we do share Abraham's faith in the Messiah. We do share his faith in Christ. And we do have that common ground. We don't share the earthly blessings promise to the people of Israel. But this much we do share.

So, it was no secret that gentiles were going to be saved in the Old Testament. But what God did not reveal about the gentiles in Old Testament Scripture was the marvelous, special, distinctive, unique relationship to God personally, that they would enjoy as part of a new body of saints: the church. That was never made known. And that is what Paul is telling these Colossian Christians: "This is what is true about you. Why do you listen to these clowns who run around, running their own little spiritual operations, and telling you that they've got something to offer you? And so you drift off." People drift off, and they wander around from one religious group to another, trying to find that "something more."

Here's a way of life in the church that is superior to anything the Jew ever had under Judaism. All Judaism had was a system of rituals and works, with no power. And it is amazing how many churches in the Protestant denominations still have their altar upfront; they still have their robed priests; they still have their rituals; they still have their candles; they still have their incense; and, they still have everything they could possibly have. And the Catholics even say, "We pretend to sacrifice Christ again, every time in the Mass. And all of those are symbols, which have gone dead, because it has been fulfilled. And they want that as their way of life. But they have no power, and no capacity to do right. Then they wonder why on earth their marriages are breaking up; why on earth they're experiencing their illegitimacies; and, why on earth they're running around frazzled, exhausted, and finding themselves more and more in things and activities of the world, and less and less in things and activities of God. It is because you're in a system, as were the Jews, that has no power to it.

Church believers are the recipients of a wealth of God's glory through doctrine, and through the filling of the Holy Spirit. Anything that the Old Testament Jew enjoyed in his relationship with God is beggarly by comparison to what you and I, as Christians, have today, in our relationship to God.

People in one emotional way or another (and sometimes whole congregations) use the technique of singing to try to get close to the Lord, and they never do. It all breaks down. And when they're confronted by the sin nature, and when they're confronted by the devil, they can't resist. But the Christian who operates on feeding his soul with doctrine; the Christian who operates on maintaining his temporal fellowship, because he cleans up those mental attitude sins that can hurt him, family, friends, and children; the Christian who makes his confession, and ceases, and desists; and, the Christian who walks by means of the Holy Spirit, that Christian has great power. That Christian stands firm when the worst of things of life come his way. The Jew was unable to do right. So, He always failed, in spite of his efforts.

Yet, here we have these Christian groups going through all the rituals, and all the motions, and all the setup, as if that's where it was at. And when I'm in a service like that, and I see that pastor turn with his robes and face that altar, I really cringe. I'm embarrassed for him in the presence of God. Why do you turn to an altar and look up? You're pleading with God to be propitious toward this congregation, and to be merciful toward their sins. That's an insult. That's blasphemous, because Christ has already done that for us. God has propitiated His justice. His wrath against us has been satisfied by Christ. Why are you standing before an altar, upon which animals were sacrificed, to be able to do this symbolically until Christ did it once and for all, to satisfy the wrath of God – to hold it back? God has no more wrath toward you, or toward the worst of sinners. All that God has is the opportunity to receive Christ, and to enter the dynamic power system of life in the Holy Spirit.

Church believers are the recipients, then, of a wealth of God's glory through the Word of God, and the filling of the Holy Spirit. Jews never had the power to do right. The Jews could not conceive, however, of gentiles having a special spiritual relationship and favor with God, which was closer than their own. That's what got them. It really creamed them. It really irritated them.

When the apostle Paul would talk about the privileges of this new species of human beings (mostly of gentiles), they were really angry about this. And, in fact, the apostles themselves were very slow on grasping the mystery of the church. Finally, this became such a big issue in the New Testament church. I mean, years were passing by, and they were wondering what to do with the gentiles, because the gentiles were getting saved on them. And then, Peter is brought up there to that experience where God says, "You're calling something unclean (the gentiles) which I'm calling clean."

Well, suddenly, in the house of Cornelius, the gentiles give the sign of being baptized by the Holy Spirit (which was in operation then, but not now), which was speaking in foreign languages. And Peter is preaching to these gentiles, and he is taken aback: "They're doing exactly what we did, seven years earlier, on the day of Pentecost." They showed that a great work of God had come. What had come? Jesus had gone to heaven. And he said, "If I don't go, the person you need cannot come. The Spirit of God has to come and replace Me now. He'll be in each one of you. I can only be in one place at a time. He's going to be everywhere."

So, He went to heaven. And ten days later, down comes the Holy Spirit. And the power of God bursts out in these people. And here is this dramatic experience that God was doing His new work. Seven years later, they see it irrefutably, with compelling evidence. They couldn't deny that this was happening to gentiles.

So, finally, they said, "We have to talk this over." And they gathered at the Jerusalem conference. And they sat down, and the Judaizers got up, and they pounded the pulpit, and they said, "You cannot go to heaven unless, if you're a male, you must be circumcised, or you will go to the lake of fire. You cannot be saved without keeping the Law of Moses."

Well, boy, there was a stillness in that room. All the apostles (all the big guns) are there. And then things really began to unravel, and this issue was now settled: is the church something special? Is there a real power system here that even the gentiles (and gentiles more than anyone) can enter into on an ordinary Joe, day-by-day basis?

Do you know what happened? Please join us at the service tonight, and we'll give you all the magnificent details. You'll be knocked back on your pins.

God, our Father, we do thank You for this, Your word, and for Paul's reminder of the Colossians (who they were), and thus reminding us what it means to be in Christ. Oh, Father, help us, whether we're young or old, not to listen to the siren voices that are drawing us off from a sober ministry like Berean Church, and it's expository preaching faithfulness, to telling people what the Word of God says, on the basis of the original Word of God, so that what we have is the mind of Christ, and not the trickery of the mind of man. We pray for this in Christ's Name. Amen.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1995

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