***The Benediction, No. 2 (The Mystery of the Church)
RO201-01***

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Please open your Bibles once more to Romans 16. Our subject is the Benediction Segment Number 2 as we are looking at Romans 16:20b-27.

The apostle Paul has finally come to the end of his letter to the Christians in Rome, and he closes it with final greetings to them in verses 21-23. Paul, as always, prays for the grace of God to rest in a glorious way upon the believers he teaches. These greetings that he sends now are from various Christians who are in Corinth at the time that he is writing this letter. These people are associated with Paul in some way. People from all walks of life and social categories were part of the body of Christ in Corinth. They were part of that unique organism, an organization called the Church. People from all walks of life were associated with Paul and Paul values highly those who served with him in the angelic warfare day by day. He considered it an honor, as do we all, when we are associated with loyal and good soldiers of Jesus Christ in Christian enterprises. Finally now, Paul closes the great epistle to the Romans with these 3 verses in the form of an expression of praise, a benediction and a doxology in verses 25-27. A Doxology is an expression of praise to God the Father. God has the omnipotence to do what He desires, and God wants to stabilize every Church Age believers.

**God's Purpose is to Bring All Believers to Spiritual Maturity**

So, in verse 25 Paul says, "Now to Him who is able to establish you." It is the purpose of God to bring every Christian to spiritual maturity in spite of Satan, in spite of the world system, and in spite of the sin nature within us. It is not God's purpose that Christians should be left out, weak, fluttering back and forth, with every evil doctrine, and every kooky idea that comes along, but that they understand the workings and the thinking of God. God has the omnipotence to bring this about. It is the purpose of God to build every Christian up in a spiritual maturity structure in his soul through the knowledge of the Word of God, which is delivered to him through the ministry of the local church and the spiritual communication gift of the pastor-teacher. It is the purpose of God that every Christian have the spiritual maturity of grace orientation, a mastery of the details of life, a relaxed mental attitude, the capacity to love, and inner happiness. These 5 basic factors, that we read of in Scripture, form the basis of spiritual maturity. Paul has been praising God for making it possible for a Christian to live victoriously over sin in the devil's world.

But only God, he [Paul] realizes, can bring a believer into the inner circle of temporal fellowship and keep him there as a way of life. There are many people who do admire walking with the Lord. There are many people who admire walking in close communion with a living creator God. But we might as well face it, folks. There are a lot of Christians who are never brought into that relationship. Why? I don't know.

People we have found again, Mr. Gitchell is telling me last night, one parent interrogating him about the Berean Youth Clubs, amazed about what we do, asking questions, delighted, astounded. Yet this mother is off in some church system and is out of touch with the real issues of scriptural knowledge, with the real issues of Church Age privilege, doesn't know anything about it. Yet, she does not make the mental connection to say, 'I'm amazed what's been done with my boy in the areas that he's been in touch with these areas of the Berean Ministry. That must tell me that there has to be some kind of a life structure in the church that makes this possible. This isn't just because Berean Christian Academy is doing this, couldn't do that. It isn't just that the youth clubs are doing this, they couldn't do that. It is the result of something bigger. Some people make that connection. Many do not. One little boy in Mr. Gitchel's intermediate, older Bible class, we were studying about this spiritual maturity issue. He says, "You know, I don't understand why I go to church all the time and I never hear about this. This is all brand new to me. And I've been there!" This kid is, you know, he's junior high age. We have to try to be nice and not say, 'well, because your preacher is standing up in the pulpit frittering away the time of your congregation,' because we know where he goes to church, 'and you're not being taught the Word of God. You're being given inspiration, sweetness and light. But you are not walking out of church service with an understanding of what God the Holy Spirit wrote down and wanted you to know.' Some people are brought into that inner walk of temporal fellowship with the Lord and they stay there by and large. Many never discovered that there is a place like that.

**The Basis of Spiritual Stability**

So verse 25 speaks about spiritual stability. Here he gives us the basis for it. "to Him [the Lord Jesus Christ... to Him, God the Father,] who is able to stabilize you." On what basis? "According to my gospel," the apostle Paul in the Greek language here makes a very special emphasis of putting in the word "my" to stress that he is speaking about a distinct good news about salvation that he is preaching, which is not just the "euaggelion," [Greek for] the gospel of everybody. He is referring to a special gospel of the grace of God, providing a free grace salvation to the believing sinner.

We have recently made an extensive study of the current debate in Christian community that is raging fiercely between free grace salvation and a salvation that is based upon your qualifying yourself by your continuance in your good work performance. The spiritual stability in every human being has to begin with the grace gospel that Paul preached. Nobody comes to religious stability until you understand the gospel of grace. And the gospel that Paul preached, He calls it my gospel, because interestingly enough, when he was brought into salvation, he was not sent, as you might have thought he would be. He was not sent to Jerusalem. The Lord did not say, 'Now, Paul, I want you to go to Jerusalem and meet the other apostles so that they can instruct you in the doctrine of the grace of God and in basic Church Age doctrine.' The reason he wasn't sent to them was because those men did not have the full understanding of those things. God had selected Paul as the channel who would reveal the gospel of salvation on the basis of a free grace salvation, and the whole concept of the Church. So, this is indicated by Paul in Galatians 1:11-12, where he says, "For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man."

Joseph Smith of the Mormons, could not say that. Joseph Smith of the Mormons reported that he was, as a teenager, out praying, wondering what was the real truth about God. An angel appeared to him and said, 'I'm going to tell you what the real truth is. The real truth is a gospel called the everlasting gospel.' That's what the Mormons preach, the everlasting gospel, part of which is the ceremonies of masonry, the Masonic Lodge ceremonies. Which is why the Masonic Lodge symbols are all over the Mormon temple. Which is why Mormons wear underwear with Masonic Lodge symbols on them to protect them from various evil things. The Masonic Lodge had basis, fundamentally, as a Celtic organization in its origins and in its beliefs.

The apostle Paul says, 'I didn't invent this gospel.' It is so radically different, you might want to say, "Paul, this is not what we read in the Old Testament. This is something you invented!" Paul says, 'I didn't get this from some other man. I didn't go to Jerusalem and nor was I taught it by those apostles!' Galatians 1:12 says "For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ." That's tremendous. Paul says, "I do preach a gospel that is still salvation by grace through faith in Christ the Savior, which was preached in the Old Testament, but it's in a different context because it is now the gospel of the grace of God in connection with a total different way of life, the Church Age." And the apostle says, 'I preach a true plan of salvation. I do not preach the false gospels that Satan has interjected through various men into the world system.'

**NO Other Gospel**

There's no other gospel which is to be believed, even if brought by a supernatural being. It is interesting that Paul in Galatians 1:8-9 points out that even if he were to change his message, people should not believe him. He said, I am telling you what is true. If I change my message, it's only going to be false. If an angel should appear at the foot of your bed, as has happened to many of the leaders of the cults, and as many of the charismatic leaders regularly claim, and this angel says, "I'm from God and I give you this new message," and it comes out a different message from the Bible, a different gospel, don't believe it! Paul says, 'I spoke directly with Jesus Christ. He made it very clear to me how a person gets to Heaven. One of the first things you must learn is what the Jews have not learned, that you cannot add anything to the gospel of the grace of God and get into Heaven. It's all the work of God. You cannot interject infant baptism, adult baptism, Lord's Supper. Any human work will undermine the basis of grace, Ephesians 2:8-9 makes it clear, 'I'll take you to Heaven by grace,' which means 'I'll give it to you as a gift. If you try to pay me anything at all for it, then it's no longer a gift.' You have denied God the ground of saving you. So in Galatians 1:8-9 Paul says, "But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be a accursed. As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed."

So, Paul says, 'If anybody comes along and gives you a gospel, such as the Mormons do the gospel of the everlasting gospel, which is a gospel of good works, (the Mormons say you don't get anything for nothing. You pay for your salvation like everything else.), you know that they are under the curse of God and just leave them there. You know that when the Roman Catholic Church stands up and pronounces the apparitions of Mary that have given information about how to go to heaven from these apparitions, which are demonic apparitions of the Virgin Mary, don't believe it. Know that that is a curse. God has a curse upon that information that is not a true gospel! So, the apostle Paul does not without reason, in the last of his writing to the Romans here in Chapter 16, stress the word "my" gospel. It is a gospel that he distinctly received from the Lord Jesus Christ.

"Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel [of grace salvation] and the preaching of Jesus Christ." The word preaching is this word "kerugma" in the Greek language, k e r u g m a, and "kerugma" means to "proclaim something." It connotes proclaiming something about Jesus Christ. When he says, "The preaching of Jesus Christ," he means the preaching about Jesus Christ. The gospel of Free Grace Salvation is a gospel of proclaiming that Christ has paid for your sins, you accept His payment, you go to Heaven. Therefore, if you are of some religious group that will not accept Jesus Christ, like the Jews, like the Muhammadans, like many of the cultists, the Jehovah Witnesses, then you will not go to heaven. The way is on the basis of a gospel that deals with Jesus Christ. Nothing else counts with God. And the preaching, the "kerugma", the apostle Paul was a public proclamation to mankind concerning the saving work of Jesus Christ. Paul's ministry to establish people spiritually begins by telling them about Jesus Christ and free grace salvation through Him.

**Revealed By Christ to Paul**

[continuing in Romans 16:25] "According," Then he gives us a wider context of this Free Grace Salvation. He says, "According to a revelation." The Greek word is the name of the Book of the Revelation, the "apokalupsis," a p o k a l u p s i s. The "apokallupsis" is a word that refers to making something known, to revealing something that you don't know. This refers specifically to the revelation which God made to the apostle Paul about Free Grace Salvation, and then from there, the broader revelation about the Church Age. This is a revelation which was not received in detail by the other apostles. It is the apostle Paul that helps us to know why we don't have an altar up here. It is the apostle Paul direct revelation about the Church that explains why we don't pretend to have a priest dressed in a robe performing before an altar. It is the apostle Paul that enables us to understand concerning the Church Age why we don't talk about Sunday as the Christian Sabbath day and why we don't treat Sunday as if it were Saturday Sabbath day. It is the apostle Paul that helps us to understand why we don't have holy days upon which we act with certain rituals. It is the whole gamut of what constituted Judaism that the reformers never got straight, by the way. All of the churches that came out of the Reformation era missed the beat on this. Every one of them missed the boat. Every one of them hung on to the Roman Catholic concept that Judaism had blossomed out into the Church. They never could understand that Judaism was here. Judaism has been put in the postponement of abeyance. And out of God's grace came a whole new plant called the Church, and the 2 had nothing to do with one another whatsoever.

The great tragedy of the Reformation was that the reformers did not have time to get that part straight. They got so much straight on salvation, but they never got straight the Grace Age. And all of the churches that have come out of the Reformation, you can see the traces of their delusions still today. They still have the altars, they still have the candles, they still have the priestly robes. They still have the concept of approaching God through an altar on which they don't even make sacrifices. They have the concept of the Old Testament just interwoven with everything that they do. They have never caught the principle of the grace of God. The apostle Paul says, "I have received this by an "apokalupsis", God pulling the curtain back. And Paul was astounded when he saw it. It took him, scholar and educated man that he was, it took him a little bit of rearranging his thinking to be able to grasp the fact that God had walked away from Judaism on Palm Sunday and it was all over and the church age was now put into motion on the day of Pentecost.

He says, "This is a revelation of something, and here is an important word, "according to the revelation of the mystery," This word in the Greek Bible is the "musterion" m u s t e r i o n. And the "musterion" in the New Testament is a technical word. It refers to a spiritual truth, which in the Old Testament was hidden. You must understand, mystery is not like what we do at the campfire where, we read a mystery story. It's kind of scary and it's exciting to listen to. We'll be doing that again this week with the girls. A "musterion" in the New Testament means a secret, a bit of information that God has kept under cover in Old Testament times, now He reveals it at the appropriate time in the New Testament era.

It has been specifically, you see, he says, a "mystery which has been kept secret." This word secret looks like this "sigao" s i g a o, and the tense is significant. This is what we call the Greek perfect tense. The Greek perfect sense tells you this: something happens in the past that God does here and then it goes on forever. So, at any particular point in time, you keep looking back to this thing that God did way in the past. He hid something and it continued to the present point, it continues hidden. This has been done by God Himself. This thing did not hide itself. It is an act of God.

And it says that it has been hidden "for long ages past." What's he referring to? I think it is really amazing, really significant that the apostle Paul coming now to the last few lines of this letter and of all things to put at the end of the letter, he makes a declaration once more about the Church Age. Once more there's an effort to clarify what God the Holy Spirit has informed Paul is going to be an area of great confusion down the years. People are always going to try to mix the old Judaism with Christianity. They're going to constantly be mixing the Age of the Jew with the Age of the Church. They're constantly going to be mixing the Old Testament procedures with New Testament grace procedures. Though they are inimical to one another, they are mutually exclusive, but people try to keep squeezing them together.

So, the apostle Paul, having presented a book that brilliantly sets forth salvation by the grace of God, Free Grace Salvation, now associates that concept with a free grace way of life as a believer in the Church Age. When he says, "It's been a mystery for ages past, he's talking about the fact that it was never revealed in Old Testament Scripture. No Jewish prophet had the faintest inkling about this era called the Church. There was nothing to indicate that God was going to do such a thing. The main problem was that the Jew understood he was God's special people by choice. He knew that the Gentiles had been left out and therefore he called them dogs.

Now along comes this Age of the Church and God is taking Jews and Gentiles, He stops working with the Jews, He puts Jew and Gentile together into one body. Nothing could have been more loathing to the mind of a Jew to think of being put together, Jew and Gentile, into one spiritual body, it's unthinkable. That's why somebody like the apostle Paul had to get all this information because it had been a mystery, a secret up to this time: faith in Christ to be strengthened by the grace privilege of those who are in Christ, God's new work of forming a new body of saints now made up of Jews and Gentiles.

Notice 2 passages of Scriptures. How the reformers missed this is hard to understand, but they never clicked on this score. Ephesians 3:1-7, "For this reason, I, Paul the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles, [the special apostle to the Gentiles] if indeed you have heard of the stewardship [or the dispensation] of God's grace which was given to me for you; [the Church Age is a new dispensation of God's dealings]; that by revelation [direct revelation to him] that was made known to me the mystery [this mystery, the same one he's referring to in Romans about the Church], as I wrote before in brief. And by referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit [You see, there he's got the definition of mystery, never known in the Old Testament. Now suddenly, here is truth that is astounding, that God is making known, Verse 6.]; to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel [Part of the mystery was that they would be fellow heirs, fellow members of the body, fellow partakers of the promise in Christ through the gospel.], of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God's grace, which was given to me according to the working of His power. To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things;" and so on. So Paul says, "To me, to him specifically, has been given a revelation about a new body of believers made up of both Jews and gentiles.

He refers to this again in Colossians 1:25-27, "Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship [or the dispensation] from God bestowed on me for your benefit, that I might fully carry out the preaching of the Word of God, that is, the mystery which has been hidden from past ages and generations; but has now been manifested to His saints, 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."

It was not a secret that God was going to provide salvation for the Gentiles. He told that to Abraham. But it was a secret that God would raise a new body of saints that would be very close to Jesus Christ, very dear to the Lord Jesus, like a wife is dear to a husband. That would be the relationship of a bride and a bridegroom. That was a secret and that they should be mixed Jew and Gentiles in that body so that they were now Christians, and neither Jew nor Gentile. That was a secret. Once the body of Christ is complete, you do understand that God will then turn back to fulfilling his promises to Israel as a Jewish people. What he stopped doing for them on Palm Sunday will be taken up once more. This schedule of timing is clearly portrayed in the Book of Daniel. I think it's very significant indeed that Paul closes Romans with a reference to the distinctiveness of the Church Age; and it is a pity that the reformers never got this together. It caused them to miss a great deal of information that would have put Christians to this day on the right track.

**Features of the Church Called a Mystery in the New Testament**

The Church is never found in Old Testament Scripture as something distinct from Judaism. The Church in the Old Testament was a mystery, as we have just read; not something that it's hard to understand, it just wasn't made known. The Church, however, is not called a mystery in the New Testament. Only certain things that are true about the Church, features about the Church are called a mystery.

Here's a few of them: the fact of Jews and Gentiles being joined together into one body. This is pointed out in Ephesians 3. This is the extended passage that we read. And to get the picture to you, let's go from Ephesians 3:11-12, "This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him." This bringing together of Jews and Gentiles was a plan that God had from Eternity past.

And this body of Jews and Gentiles joined together is given a special name. Ephesians 1:22-23 gives us the name. "And He put all things in subjection under His feet [the feet of Christ], and gave Him as the head of all things to the Church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all." There was no such thing as the Church in the Old Testament. There was no such concept. That's why Paul closes the Book of Romans, 'Folks, I taught you the gospel of Free Grace Salvation and I want you to understand that that is the basis of your lifestyle as a member of the body of Christ, the Church, that very special group of believers. God calls it a royal priesthood, which means you're the aristocrats of all saints of all ages.

There's another thing that is called a mystery: Jews and Gentiles joined in one body. That's true about the Church. That's called a mystery, the fact of Christ indwelling every believer. It was unthinkable in the Old Testament that God Himself had lived in the body of a human being. Colossians 1, beginning at verse 24, Paul says, "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body (which is the Church) in filling up that which is lacking in Christ's afflictions. [Paul says, "I can't suffer on the cross, but I suffer in God's service and I am continuing the afflictions of Christ in that way. Verse 25 says,] Of this Church I was made a minister according to the stewardship [or the dispensation] from God bestowed on me for your benefit, that I might fully carry out the preaching of the Word of God, that is, the mystery which has been hidden from past ages and generations; but has now been manifested to His saints, to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is [Here is the mystery!] Christ in you, the hope of glory." So, there's another feature about the Church. In the Church Age, Jesus Christ indwells every believer. That was never true in the Old Testament. That is our hope of glory, our confidence of having eternal life because Christ lives in me. That's true about the Church but it was a secret now made known.

There's another thing that was true about the Church, and that is that the Church is related. We Christians are related to Jesus Christ as a bride is related to her husband: in that intimacy and in that position of authority. Ephesians 5:22 indicates that to us. Israel in the Old Testament was the disobedient wife, the adulterous wife of Jehovah. In the New Testament, the Church is viewed as a sinless, perfect bride of Christ. Here in Ephesians 5:22-31 "Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the Church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. But as the Church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself up for her; that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the Church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless. [That's the way we all will be someday in His presence, in the presence of our Bridegroom. Verse 28,] So, husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife, loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the Church, because we are members of His body. FOR THIS CAUSE A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER, AND SHALL CLEAVE TO HIS WIFE; AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH. This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the Church." See the mystery: Christ related to Christians as a husband, related to the woman who is his bride. What Jew would have ever dreamed about that kind of an intimate relationship? Not for a moment.

Another mystery about the Church is the fact of God coming someday to catch believers out of this world. We refer to that as the Rapture event. 1 Corinthians 15, The apostle Paul identifies this feature of the Church Age as a mystery. Was it a mystery in the Old Testament that people would be resurrected unto eternal life? No. Even the sister of Lazarus said, "Lord, I know he's going to be raised at the last day," but this is something different, a distinct kind of resurrection. 1 Corinthians 15:51, "Behold, I tell you of a mystery; we shall not all sleep [That is, we Christians, not all of us will die,], but we shall all be changed. [All of us will be flushed out, have the sin nature flushed out of us. We shall not all sleep. We shall all be changed.] In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed." imperishable, never to die again!

Now, we match that up with 1 Thessalonians 4 which expands on that very same concept of Gentile Christians in the body of Christ being resurrected in Christ. 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17, "For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, and remain until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. [Christians who are alive will not go to Heaven ahead of Christians who have died.] For the Lord Himself will descend from Heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ [Christians] shall rise [to meet the Lord] first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words." Paul calls this event of the catching up of believers to meet the Lord in the air a mystery, a mystery never discussed in the Old Testament, a secret now revealed only for New Testament Age believers. The Jews of the Old Testament never had such a promise.

**The Two Mountain Peaks**

So, none of these realities have been revealed in the Old Testament. The Jews were promised only that the Messiah would manifest Himself to them. He would cover their sins and He would give them eternal life in Heaven. But these distinct relationships were not known. You must remember that the Church Age fell between 2 known peaks of history, the First and Second Coming of Jesus Christ. The fact that the Church Age fell between them, these 2 events, caused the confusion to the very people who are writing the Old Testament Scriptures. 1 Peter 1:11 indicates that when Peter says, "seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the suffering of Christ and the glories to follow." And what you had was that in the Old Testament we had announced that the Messiah Savior was coming. On the one hand He was coming, it was told, in suffering. On the other hand, He was told He was coming in glory. On the one hand, He was coming as a bruised and beaten lamb, put to death. On the other hand, He was coming as a conquering lion of the tribe of Judah. The prophets who wrote that said, there's something wrong here. These analogies are contradictory. You can't say a person is going to come as a lamb and a lion: two different kinds of characteristics. You can't say a person is going to come as a suffering one and a glorious conquering one: 2 conflicts. What they didn't know was that these were mountain peaks, two points in history. But down here in the valley was the Age of the Church, 2,000 years. Once Bible scholars after the reformers put this together, they said, 'Now I see what the answer is.' They realize that what the very writers of Old Testament Scripture could not understand, the confusing reports from the Holy Spirit, they put together. Christ is prophesied, coming as the Lamb of God, coming as the conquering lion of the tribe of Judah. Contradictory images, yes. But the answer is there are 2 different comings: First coming of Christ, Second Coming of Christ, First Coming as the lamb who was slain on the cross, Second Coming where He comes to rule in His millennial kingdom as King of kings and Lord of lords. +++++++3834

The Old Testament prophecy deals with Israel only. So the Church is treated as a mystery, unrevealed. There's nothing about the Church in the Old Testament. The Church is inserted between Israel's program; because when Christ came as a lamb and was crucified by the Jews, God's program for them was put in abeyance. When He comes as the glorious conquering Lion of the tribe of Judah, God will resume His promises to the Jewish people and the Millennial Kingdom will come into effect.

If the Church is the full blossom of Israel, which was the bud, then every legalistic feature of Judaism may be imposed upon the local church believers today. And it is! [Wrongly,] The Seventh Day Adventists, for example, are so adamant about not doing anything on Saturday, the Sabbath day, that they will pay any price, those who are devoted, lest they displease God by doing something on a day when they are supposed to rest. They're not consistent in that in many ways indeed. But why do they think that? They think that because they thought that the bud was Israel and the full blossom flower was the Church. Therefore, what is true of Israel must be true of the Church. What was imposed upon the Jewish people must be imposed upon the Christians.

You remember earlier in Romans when Paul got really nasty in his language, and got very firm against those who are saying, 'unless you circumcise your males, they will never get to Heaven.' And the apostle Paul told them that if you like to cut things off, I'll tell you what to do. Very forthright, he said, 'do a good job of mutilating yourself completely and just castrate completely and you'll surely go to Heaven then.' He was putting into ludicrous context an Old Testament system that had a symbolic meaning and people were trying to carry over into a Grace Age salvation and saying that God requires this to be done for eternal life. The Church is not the blossom of Israel.

Any similarities between Israel and the Church do not prove identity of relationship. It is the differences that make the 2 mutually exclusive. If you see a horse running on 4 feet and you see a dog running on 4 feet are they the same animal? No, obviously not. The differences make them different creatures. They have certain similarities. Yes, we do obey the Ten Commandments code of God's morality, except for the one with the Sabbath day. That one was never imposed on Christians, but the rest of them are all repeated in the New Testament. We have similarities, but we had distinctions that make us different.

**The Mystery Summarized**

The Old Testament, let's summarize it as a matter of fact, left certain gaps for the insertion of the Church Age. The Church Age was never mentioned in the Old Testament or in the Gospels even. The only place the Church Age is mentioned is in Matthew 16:18. Jesus said, 'I'm going to build My Church.' He was on Gentile ground out of Israel when He said that. The other places, John chapters 13-17, that's pure Church Age doctrine. That's the only place the Church is referred to in the Gospels. You have to get to Paul's revelation and the Epistles to understand what the Church Age is all about. So, until the time of the Lord's ministry on earth, the Church was a complete mystery, as we've already read.

But in the Old Testament, there are certain passages where you come to the Church Age which are built upon the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, and the Old Testament just stops there and leaps over all that's a consequence of what He did on the cross and goes right to the Millennium. It brings you in the Old Testament to His death for the sins of the world and suddenly you're in the Millennium, it just leaps over. It never mentions this mystery, the secret of God about the Church. But, when you start looking at Old Testament Scripture, you suddenly realize there are gaps when you look back and they didn't know it. Suddenly you realize there are gaps that God left for the church to be put in.

For example, in Daniel 9:24-27, God tells Daniel that He's going to deal with the Jewish people for 490 years. The 490 years was to be counted from the day that King Artaxerxes sent the decree to rebuild Jerusalem. We know that that was in the year for 445 B.C. The Book of Nehemiah, Nehemiah 2 tells us about that. We also found that Daniel said 483 years are going to go by of this timetable of God and then the Jewish people are going to reject their Messiah King and the time clock will stop. Sure enough, in Daniel 9:26, this stopping of the time clock of the Messiah happened precisely because we can go back and figure it happened exactly on Palm Sunday to the very day, 483 prophetic years. You chronologists who like to figure this out, a prophetic year has only 360 days. Those prophetic years added up and converted to our years comes right down to that Palm Sunday when Jesus came into Jerusalem riding on the back of the donkey and people putting the palm leaves just as God predicted and said This would be your Messiah and you will shout Hosanna! Which means Lord, save us. One week later, you're going to nail Him to the cross. But when He came in, that was your last chance.' And the Jewish people said, we don't want Him! At that point, the clock stopped ticking. The last 7 years, therefore, we say of this 490 year period, have never been fulfilled. That is the period that we refer to and the Bible refers to as the Millennium. The clock stopped ticking and the Church Age inserted, the Church goes up in the Rapture, the last 7 years takes place, and then Christ comes back with us as a conquering lion and then the millennium begins.

Here is another place. This is a very impressive one. In Isaiah 61:1-2, Jesus, after His baptism, returns to the city of Nazareth, His hometown. He enters into the synagogue and He's given the scroll of Scripture and He turns to Isaiah 61 and He proceeds to read from verses one and two. You'll find this recorded in Luke 4:16-19, "And He came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath [Saturday], and stood up to read. And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book, and found the place where it was written, 'THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME, BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR. HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES, AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND, TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE DOWNTRODDEN, TO PROCLAIM THE FAVORABLE YEAR OF THE LORD.' And He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant, and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed upon Him."

Now if you read the same text in Isaiah 61:1-2, you will find something very interesting. Part of the reason that all the synagogues eyes were upon Him was they were a little startled because you know where He stopped, He stopped at a comma. If you look at the Old Testament passage and He stopped in the middle of a sentence. And everybody looked up and said, 'Whoa, you're going to stop there? You don't stop in the middle of the sentence! You go to the end of the sentence and stop.' But you see, what Jesus said was "to proclaim the favorable year of the LORD." What comes after that in Isaiah 60:1-2 could not be read by the Lord because it had not been fulfilled. It dealt with His Second Coming. "To proclaim the favorable year of the LORD." Then Isaiah goes on and says, "And the day of the vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn." The day of the vengeance of our God is right here, the seven-year Tribulation period. Therefore, Jesus could not read and could not say that had He read the rest of the verse, because the day of the vengeance is still here in the future. But the day of His suffering and bringing freedom through salvation that He could say 'has now been fulfilled in your hearing.'

So, that comma, folks, is 2,000 years stuck in between that point of His statement. This gap would not have been evident to people reading the Old Testament. This is what we mean by a Church Age mystery. Not one part of the passage in Isaiah 61:2 after the comma has been fulfilled. Not one segment of that has been fulfilled because all that awaits the Second Coming. Yet everything before that has been fulfilled.

Let me give you one more as we close: Daniel 9:26-27. I'm just giving you a couple of examples. There are many of these gaps in the Old Testament where it is obvious that the Holy Spirit was not clarifying that the Church Age was going to be inserted. Daniel 9:26, "Then after the 62 weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing [That was Palm Sunday. 483 years completed, 7 years left unfulfilled.] and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. [The Romans, who were to come, destroyed the temple and the city.] And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined." All that happened in 70 A.D. Now look at the strange thing that happens in Daniel 9:27, "And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate." Daniel 9:27 is talking about the Tribulation, 7 years. It's talking about the antichrist. Daniel 9:26 is talking about Palm Sunday, the cutting off of Jesus the Messiah. Verse 27 leaps over the whole Church Age and picks it right up here again at the start of the Tribulation, the last 7 years when the antichrist is going to set up the Jews. As is evident to us today, the Jew needs a friend. The antichrist, over the nations of Western Europe, will rise up. He will have such military power that he'll put the Arab world under control, and the Jew will feel he has a protector, but only for three-and-a-half years. Then the antichrist, this text in verse 27 says, "in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offerings." The whole religious worship system of the Jew will be restored; the antichrist will cut them off.

Isn't that interesting that from Jesus being rejected on Palm Sunday, the text leaps over all these centuries to the antichrist protecting the Jew in the Tribulation? What comes in between the Church Age? You are a privileged, aristocratic group of human beings. You should never act as commoners. You are members of the body of Christ. You are a unique creation of saints never seen before in the history of the world and never to be seen again. In the Millennium, you cannot believe what magnificent, significant people you will be. I don't care what you are in life now, you are going to be royalty like you could not imagine. You will be the wife of Jesus Christ. You will be His consort in ruling over the world. You will be with Him upon that throne. You will be the executors of everything that He does in the Millennial world. You will be the people who are in charge. The Jews will have a lesser position: a position of blessing, a position as God's people ruling from Jerusalem, but nothing like what you, the Church Age, will have.

You see, that's the tragedy of the reformers who did not grasp the significance of the grace act of God in forming the body of Christ. They kept trying to dilute it with Judaism and they messed it up for people through the centuries. And they're still messing it up. Don't let anybody ever put you back under that impossible system, that Paul, that neither he, nor his associates, nor their fathers could keep.

But God is giving you the indwelling Holy Spirit, the Church Age power plant, a structure of capacity that Jesus Christ Himself field tested and proved that a human being can live in Satan's world and please the living God. It is because, as Paul said, it started with his gospel of free grace salvation and the full gamut of revelation of the mystery of the Church Age privileged position of a believer who is in Christ, that you have this great power to do the will of God and never to let Satan bring you down.

Now, I should warn you, if you take that attitude that you are the aristocracy of the saints of all ages, that you are the child of the living God who serves that God, all hell is going to break loose around you. You will become a high priority target for Satan, and you will be brought grief and misery and difficulties in your life like you couldn't imagine. If everything is sweetness and light for you as a Christian, you're probably not giving the devil much trouble; and he backs off and doesn't bother people who are not bothering him. You start making an impact because you are the bride of Christ and you will soon get his attention. But while you get his attention, you have the resources of the indwelling Christ, the indwelling Holy Spirit, and the knowledge of doctrine that can whip Satan at every turn.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1977

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