

Most folks find the Bible to be confusing and unavailable to their understanding, and therefore reject it out of hand as just a conglomeration of myths and allegories that no one could ever comprehend or decipher, thus offering no real benefit to them. I embraced this view prior to my acceptance of Christ as my Savior in 1985. After that monumental event, I changed my mind about it, as I was told that it was the blueprint from which Christians were to pattern their lives. Most folks who read the Bible read it as they would any other informational book, from beginning to end. I was told, by my new Christian friends, that this was okay, but what I really needed to concentrate on was the New Testament section of the Bible, particularly “the gospels,” Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, as this constituted the primary blueprint of instruction for the Christian “church”[1], and even more particularly to the “red letters,” as these were the actual words spoken directly by Jesus himself. **So that is where I concentrated my reading/study. But as I progressed, I began to encounter passages in these four books that troubled me, e.g., one of the red letter passages, where the Lord told a Gentile woman seeking his blessing:**

1

Whoa! Was he saying what Paul wrote in his thirteen epistles wasn’t the same message the Lord gave to his church in the gospel accounts? He said yes, that is exactly what he was saying.

At first I rejected this idea out of hand, because I couldn’t bring myself to believe that the Lord would give one set of instructions to one group of believers, and a different set to another. Wouldn’t that be tantamount to duplicity? No, my new acquaintance said. In fact, he said, the Bible itself says to divide the messages, pointing out a passage in Paul’s second letter to Timothy:

“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” (my emphasis)[8]

He went on to explain that Paul’s gospel was hidden (kept secret) from those who came before him (e.g., the Lord’s 12 disciples) until he revealed it:

“Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest....” (my emphasis)[9]

4

“I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”[2]

Since I was told that the gospels were the primary books for the Christian church, this perplexed me, because I knew I wasn’t “of the house of Israel” (a Jew). So I sought out clarification from a Christian friend who had attended a seminary, and he assured me that this was not a contradiction, that is, “Israel” in this context was one and the same as the Christian church, pointing out that in another passage in Matthew[3], the Lord referred to his disciples, who were all Jews, as “my church.” He went on to explain that the Christian church is actually “spiritual Israel.”

That made sense to me, but more confusion came in chapter 19, where the Lord told a young man seeking to become a disciple, that in order to do so he must **“keep the commandments, and.....sell that thou hast, and give to the poor.”[4]**

Wow! For sure I desired to be a disciple of the Lord, but did I really have to sell all[5] my material possessions in order to qualify? My seminary friend assured me that this was written solely for the obedience of this young man, because he had “great possessions.” I was relieved by this, as I certainly did not have great possessions; actually, I was quiet poor at that time in my life.

2

The Dispensation of the Grace of God

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul named his mystery, “the dispensation of the grace of God,” and says God gave it exclusively to him “for you Gentiles.”[10] Earlier, in chapter two of that letter, he said these Gentiles were “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel,”[11] establishing a clear distinction between them and Israel. In fact, never once does he refer to them as “spiritual Israel,” the “little flock,”[12] “lost sheep,”[13] a “nation,”[14] “the kingdom of heaven,”[15], “a royal priesthood,”[16] or any other designation that makes reference to Israel under the New Covenant in Scripture. Moreover, he never tells anyone in any of his letters to keep the commandments, sell out, or forsake their earthly families, as the church in the gospels was instructed to do. In fact, he says those who failed to provide for themselves and their families were “worse than an infidel.”[17] Nor were they told to go “unto the Jews only”[18] as were the disciples in the church the Lord established in the gospels.

5

But my fears quickly returned, when down in the chapter, Peter makes the claim, “we (he and the other eleven disciples) have forsaken all.”[6] After this I heard a popular radio preacher claim in a sermon on Matthew 19, that the Lord was not telling anyone to sell all their material possessions (It is a well known fact that this man had substantial material possessions), but was only requiring that Christians “sell out in their hearts.”

While I wanted to believe these claims, they still left me unsettled, as I also believed that the Lord “meant what he said, and said what he meant.” I remained in this unsettled state for several years, until one day a Christian man I had become acquainted with asked me if I knew “the mystery.” I responded, “do you mean “the mysteries of the kingdom?”[7] He said, “no, I’m talking about Paul’s mystery.”

Paul’s mystery? I had read the apostle Paul’s letters, and was familiar with his references to the mystery, but I always assumed this was one and the same as the mystery of the kingdom the Lord made reference to in Matthew 13. But he claimed that these mysteries were two totally different programs, given to two different sets of believers.

3

But the most important distinct of all– between what the Lord gave Paul for the Gentile church he was building, and what he gave to his disciples in the gospels to deliver to Israel–was the different requirements for salvation. Those under the kingdom program had to endure unto the end to be saved.[19] that is, they had to fulfill all of the requirements given them, keeping the law of commandments, selling out, etc., to their death to gain salvation. On the contrary, Paul’s gospel required just the opposite; that is, those who would be saved must cease from their efforts (works), and simply believe that Christ’s sacrifice at Calvary paid the price of their sins, and his resurrection from the dead was the proof of it. In Romans 4 he wrote:

“Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.....Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.”[20]

He went on to say in his letter to the Ephesians, that **“the Gentiles** (“them that believed”) **should be fellow heirs...with the saints, and of the household of God”[21]** in a spiritual entity referred to as **“the body of Christ.”[22]**

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