

Progressive Revelation and the Revelation of the Mystery

“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds;” (Hebrews 1:1-2 AV)

Progressive revelation

God has revealed new information over time which has augmented and sometimes superseded the information he gave out previously.

- Adam had no real idea of the extraordinary consequences of disobeying God and listening to his wife. God revealed them after the deed was done.

“Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.” (Genesis 3:16-19 AV)

God revealed to Satan that the seed of Eve would bruise his head.

“And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.” (Genesis 3:15 AV)

- The law was not revealed in Abraham’s time. It was revealed hundreds of years later through Moses. To Abraham it was revealed that through his seed God would bless all the families of the earth.

“And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.” (Genesis 12:2-3 AV)

- Moses did not reveal the Messianic kingdom prophecies that God revealed through later prophets like Isaiah and Zechariah. The law and the coming of another great prophet were revealed through Moses.

“The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy

brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken;" (Deuteronomy 18:15 AV)

- The sufferings of a coming Messiah were revealed mostly through the prophet Isaiah.

"He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed." (Isaiah 53:3-5 AV)

- The coming of Israel's restored kingdom of God on the earth was revealed through several prophets, including Daniel.

"And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever." (Daniel 2:44 AV)

- The coming of the Holy Spirit was revealed through the prophets Joel and Jeremiah.

"But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people." (Jeremiah 31:33 AV)

"And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit." (Joel 2:28-29 AV)

- The prophesied great Prophet, the prophesied Messiah, the prophesied Redeemer, was manifest in due course. To Peter it was revealed that he is more than all these things and is the Christ, the Son of the living God. He is also the seed of the woman that bruises Satan's head, the seed of Abraham which blesses all the families of the earth and the seed of David that will rule over Israel's restored kingdom on earth. His great propitiatory sacrifice and ascension to heaven necessarily preceded the coming of the Holy Spirit.

"For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth:" (Job 19:25 AV)

"He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." (Matthew 16:15-17 AV)

"Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not

away, the Comforter (the Holy Spirit) will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you." (John 16:7 AV)

"But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God." (1Pet 1:19-21 AV)

- Paul was trying to stamp out Peter's little flock of believers until the Lord revealed that he had other plans for him.

"Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem: And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name. But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake." (Acts 9:13-16 AV)

- Peter was not keen on visiting the house of an 'unclean' Gentile (Cornelius) as late as Acts chapter 10. He agreed to go after God revealed to him in a trance that the Gentiles had been cleansed.

"And he said unto them, 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 AV)

The revelation of the mystery

God had the mystery in mind before he created heaven and earth. It was a mystery in the sense that it was hidden. It was not, and could not, be revealed to any prophet prior to the crucifixion. If the devil's earthly princes had known that God's hidden (mystery) plan was to offer salvation to the whole world by grace through faith in the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord, they would not have crucified him.

"But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, *even the hidden wisdom*, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known *it*, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." (1Cor 2:7-8 AV)

"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," (Rom 16:25 AV)

During his first coming Jesus had declared that his mission was to minister and to give his life a ransom for many.

“For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:45 AV)

But whenever he spoke of his forthcoming death and resurrection to his disciples they were bewildered and didn't know what he was talking about. Though these things had been prophesied, they were hid from his disciples (and Satan).

“Then he took *unto him* the twelve, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished. For he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on: And they shall scourge *him*, and put him to death: and the third day he shall rise again. And they understood none of these things: and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken.” (Luke 18:31-34 AV)

My earlier understanding was that because Jesus was ‘God manifest in the flesh’ he therefore knew everything the Father knew. This was an incorrect understanding. The Son always does the will of the Father but told us that there are some things that only the Father knows. For example, Jesus declared that only the Father knows the day and hour of the great tribulation and the Son's second coming to restore the kingdom to Israel.

“But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.” (Mark 13:32 AV)

The parable of the householder demanding fruit from his vineyard makes it pretty obvious that the Son knew that the Father would “let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen”. A small remnant of Peter's little flock were all that remained of Israel in the predominantly Gentile household of God within a few years of the Lord's crucifixion.

“But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son. But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him. When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen? They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons.” (Matthew 21:37-41 AV)

After witnessing the extraordinary faith shown by a Gentile centurion the Lord had also declared that the children of the kingdom (Israel) shall be cast into outer darkness and that many from the east and west (Gentiles) shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.

“The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. For I

am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Matthew 8:8-12 AV)

It is now history that these warnings went unheeded by the Jewish establishment. God's Spirit-filled apostles persevered with trying to persuade Israel for decades after the arrival of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. They would not be persuaded and so God finally gave up on them and went to the Gentiles.

"Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it." (Acts 28:28 AV)

The introduction of the mystery

Although the revelation of the mystery came later, with the benefit of hindsight it is possible to backtrack and see when the Lord actually started introducing it.

Acts 2 – the indwelling of the Spirit of Christ

I have labelled the mystery of the Lord's oneness with his church as the fourth component of the mystery revealed to Paul. Our Holy Scriptures declare that the Spirit of Christ first descended on the believers on the day of Pentecost and this is the point at which most Christians start the Church, the body of Christ. Most Pauline Mid-Acts dispensationalists try to start the Church with Paul's salvation, thereby excluding Peter, Barnabas and many others from the Church of the mystery.

It is most difficult to know the mind of God in this so we must do our best with the scriptures. It is clear to me from the scriptures that Peter and his little flock of Spirit-filled believers were Christ's body on earth – though they were not aware of the full implications of being indwelt by the Spirit until these mysteries were later revealed to Paul. So Mystery 4, Christ's oneness with his Church, was first INTRODUCED on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2 but was not REVEALED until much later.

There can be no argument against the words of the Lord himself. He considered persecution of Peter's little flock as persecution of HIMSELF.

" And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" (Acts 9:4 AV)

" And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And I answered, Who art thou, Lord? And he said unto me, **I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest.**" (Acts 22:7-8 AV)

“ And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.” (Acts 26:14 AV)

Paul was given the revelation that all members of the church are members of Christ himself. When any one of us is persecuted, God considers that it is Jesus of Nazareth that is being persecuted.

“ Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.” (I Corinthians 3:16-17 AV)

God’s PROPHECY program was still in effect in the early chapters of the book of Acts. The introduction of God’s MYSTERY program did not involve the wholesale annulment of everything involved with his prophecy program. The spiritual things of God’s New Covenant with Israel continued under a NEW AND PREVIOUSLY HIDDEN DISPENSATION of them. God’s policy and administration changed but Israel’s prophesied spiritual things were CARRIED OVER to the present Church of the mystery.

“ It hath pleased them verily; and their debtors they are. **For if the Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things,** their duty is also to minister unto them in carnal things.” (Romans 15:27 AV)

Acts 7 – the setting aside of Israel

Most mid-Acts dispensationalists agree that God’s prophecy program was interrupted and that his mystery program (the Lord’s hidden eternal purpose since before the world began) began soon after Israel’s rejection of the Holy Spirit – made abundantly clear by their stoning of Stephen, ‘full of the Holy Ghost’ (Acts 7). God’s setting aside of Israel as a vehicle for his purpose (a key component of the mystery) most likely began at that moment.

“Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men.” (Matthew 12:31 AV)

Israel stumbled at the stumblingstone of salvation by faith rather than by the works of the law.

“But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone;”
(Romans 9:31-32 AV)

Paul subsequently spoke of Israel’s fall and diminishing. Note that he always keeps their ultimate fulness in view - and so should we.

"I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but *rather* through their fall salvation *is come* unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy. Now if the fall of them *be* the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness?" (Romans 11:11-12 AV)

Acts 9 – the mystery apostle and the salvation by grace of an enemy

Soon after this the Lord saved his mystery apostle Paul (Acts 9). I call Paul the Lord's mystery apostle, not only because the Lord revealed the mystery to him, but also because the Lord already had his twelve apostles. Why did he need another one? I believe the precedent for this was established during the Lord's earthly ministry. His apostles and disciples were selected because they had the potential to be filled with new teachings.

"And no man putteth new wine into old bottles; else the new wine will burst the bottles, and be spilled, and the bottles shall perish. But new wine must be put into new bottles; and both are preserved." (Luke 5:37-38 AV)

To launch a new dispensation to both Gentiles and Jews, the Lord required a new wine bottle. Paul was the perfect candidate – staunch, young and highly educated in the scriptures, fluent in the Hebrew and Greek languages and a Roman citizen. But he was also the most energetic and aggressive persecutor of the Lord's Spirit-filled flock. So the Lord saved his worst enemy by his first exercise of irresistible grace. Call me a Calvinist but what else was it? One minute Paul is breathing out threatenings and slaughter and charging toward Damascus to arrest any of the Lord's disciples he could find and bring them back to Jerusalem in chains. The next minute he is meekly submitting to that same Lord.

"And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem. And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: *it is* hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord *said* unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do." (Acts 9:1-6 AV)

This glorious manifestation from heaven swamped Paul with an almighty fear of the Lord and he remained the Lord's faithful servant until his death.

"For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!" (1 Corinthians 9:16 AV)

“The fear of the LORD *is* the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy *is* understanding.” (Proverbs 9:10 AV)

“For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished *my* course, I have kept the faith:” (2 Timothy 4:6-7 AV)

Paul referred to his salvation as being the first of its kind when he used the words “me first” in his first letter to Timothy

“And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it **ignorantly in unbelief**. And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in **me first** Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting.” (1 Timothy 1:12-16 AV)

Taking note of the exact wording around Paul’s “me first” pattern is critical. Paul’s salvation was not the first example of Jesus Christ shewing forth mercy toward sinners. He could not claim to be the first sinner to have obtained mercy from Jesus Christ. There were numerous instances of the sick having their sins forgiven during the Lord’s earthly ministry. After the Lord’s departure above eight thousand souls had been saved prior to Paul, through the ministry of Peter’s Spirit-filled flock, and they were all sinners because all have sinned.

“ Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, *Thy* sins be forgiven thee; or to say, *Arise*, and take up thy bed, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he saith to the sick of the palsy,)” (Mark 2:9-10 AV)

“Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added *unto them* about three thousand souls.” (Acts 2:41 AV)

“Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand.” (Acts 4:4 AV)

“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;” (Romans 3:23 AV)

Paul’s salvation is a “me first” pattern of Jesus Christ shewing forth all longsuffering toward **ignorant** and **unbelieving** sinners. Since the Holy Spirit was first poured out on the apostles on the day of Pentecost, all who had received it were believers who had gladly received – they had received voluntarily. They had become believers and gladly repented and were baptised on the strength of the preaching of Peter’s little flock and

the wonders and signs that were regularly occurring. They were not ignorant and they were not unbelieving. They were deserving to a greater or lesser extent.

Paul was not a willing volunteer but a rebel. Paul was a self-righteous Pharisee who thought he could see. (Perhaps the Lord was making this point to Paul when he blinded him for three days).

“And some of the Pharisees which were with him heard these words, and said unto him, Are we blind also? Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth.” (John 9:40-41 AV)

“Which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee.” (Acts 26:5 AV)

Yet the Lord saved him by grace through faith, without works, because he rebelled in ignorance and unbelief. (Don't we all?) The thousands saved prior to Paul got saved by their choice and works. Paul got saved by God's choice in spite of his works. But God hath chosen

“But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty;” (I Corinthians 1:27 AV)

GRACE = UNMERITED FAVOUR. Paul's salvation is the first salvation by grace alone, without works.

“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.” (Ephesians 2:8-9 AV)

Ok. So the Lord saved Paul by grace but where was the faith coming from? Paul was an unbeliever.

“Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.” (I Timothy 1:13 AV)

The answer to this seeming riddle is contained in scriptures such as the following. (This important distinction between faith IN Jesus Christ and the faith OF Jesus Christ has been lost in many modern translations.)

“Even the righteousness of God *which is* by **faith of Jesus Christ** unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference:” (Romans 3:22 AV)

“Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the **faith of Jesus Christ**, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the **faith of Christ**, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.” (Galatians 2:16 AV)

Believers are saved by grace through the faith OF Christ. But they must first be believers. At what point did Paul become a believer? Paul became a believer when the risen and glorified Lord appeared unto him. His ignorance of the deity of Christ was addressed by a personal deific appearance. He became a believer on the road to Damascus and received the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit, three days later. (Why did Paul have to wait three days? I believe the Lord did this to drive home to this spiritually blind Pharisee his declaration of John 9:40-41 above, and to deeply approve Paul's apostleship of the new dispensation with a type of his own death, burial and resurrection.) After three days, when he received the Spirit of Christ, he was saved by the faith OF Jesus Christ. (Paul had not been ignorant and unbelieving regarding the then existing scriptures and the law of Moses. He was ignorant and unbelieving that Jesus Christ was and is the fulfilment of both.)

So the sequence of events in salvation by grace through faith (based upon my own experience and to the best of my understanding,) is as follows:

1. Ignorant and unbelieving sinner (like Paul)
2. Ignorance is dealt to (in Paul's case by glorious appearing of the Lord). "T'was grace that taught my heart to fear".
3. The sinner, no longer ignorant, is a believer, and is immediately (3 days later in Paul's case) indwelt by the Spirit of Christ and "in Christ"; justified by grace through the faith OF Christ - the faith of he who died for his enemies (ignorant and unbelieving sinners). "And grace my fears relieved".

"For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life." (Romans 5:10 AV)

Other aspects of Paul's salvation were clearly *not* a pattern for us who have been saved since. The Lord did not deal to my ignorance and unbelief with a personal visitation or even a vision. He allowed my deceitful lusts to get me into a "fine mess", making my already bad situation a thousand times worse and literally putting burning coals of fear and shame in my brain. I became desperate enough to humble myself and seek prayer from Christian friends. "T'was grace that taught my heart to fear".

I did not receive the Holy Spirit after three days of blindness through water baptism and the laying on of hands (as Paul did). A week after my Christian friends prayed for me I went along to their fellowship to thank them. The burning coals had subsided. The Holy Spirit came into my heart during an argument with their grace preacher – precisely at the moment I conceded that perhaps PAUL WAS MY APOSTLE AND THE APOSTLE OF THE RISEN, GLORIFIED LORD FOR THIS PRESENT AGE. I had been ignorant of the Lord's revelations to Paul and that Paul was the APOSTLE OF THE GENTILES. Once my ignorance was dealt to, belief became possible. Once I believed I was saved by grace through the faith OF Jesus Christ. "And grace my fears relieved".

(I should explain that I was saved the moment I started taking Paul seriously, not because Paul is our saviour, but because in taking Paul seriously I was implicitly taking the Lord's resurrection seriously. Paul never met Jesus during the Lord's earthly ministry.

He only met Jesus during his present heavenly ministry - the risen, ascended and glorified Lord.

“ But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, **and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.** For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” (Romans 10:8-10 AV)

I had been seeking a long time, and I had found. I had knocked a long time and the door was opened. I had daily been asking God to “show me his will for me” for about three years prior to my salvation. As the saying goes “be careful what you pray for”. His will was done, not mine. I rarely used and didn’t understand the words ‘salvation’ and ‘saved’ prior to it happening to me. I had no idea what was required to be saved and that I was saved purely by grace is proved by it only making sense with hindsight - once I had ‘spiritual eyes’.

If you feel you are in darkness then you must believe that he exists and SEEK, SEEK, SEEK. Check out the meaning of IMPORTUNITY in your dictionary.

“ I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, **yet because of his importunity** he will rise and give him as many as he needeth. And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if *he ask* a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: **how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?**” (Luke 11:8-13 AV)

“But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” (Hebrews 11:6 AV)

Acts 10 – Gentile inclusion and the power of the preaching of the cross

The Lord’s next move was to send Peter to the Gentile Cornelius (Acts 10), after revealing to him that uncircumcised Gentiles were now on equal terms with the Jews before God. God would soon reveal to Peter that the baptism with the Holy Ghost was not exclusive to Jews. He had broken down the middle wall of partition and made the Gentiles nigh.

“And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.” (Acts 10:15 AV)

“Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, 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 AV)

“While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost.” (Acts 10:44-45 AV)

“And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning. Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost. Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as *he did* unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God? 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 11:15-18 AV)

The above scriptures make it quite clear that this was the first occurrence of Gentiles receiving the Holy Ghost. I am speaking here of the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, sent by the Lord from heaven after his ascension, and first poured out on the Jewish believers on the day of Pentecost. To be baptised with the post-Pentecostal Holy Ghost is to be baptised into the Lord’s death, burial and resurrection – i.e. to be washed by the Lord’s death, burial and resurrection. (Don’t be confused by the various names that the Holy Spirit is referred to. Lots of names but the same Spirit – the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit, the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of truth.)

“I indeed have baptized you with water: but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost.” (Mark 1:8 AV)

“Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also *in the likeness* of *his* resurrection:” (Rom 6:3-5 AV)

“And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.” (1 Cor 6:11 AV)

This was not the Holy Spirit’s ministry in Old Testament times so if there were any Spirit-filled Gentiles prior to Calvary, they don’t count.

I am convinced that the Lord’s timing of Peter’s visit with Cornelius, being right after Paul’s salvation, is greatly significant. Paul was to become the Lord’s apostle of the Gentiles and he would need the approval of kingdom-keys carrying Peter to give his

Gentile apostleship legitimacy. In due course Peter and the other apostles of the circumcision gave their approval to Paul's Gentile apostleship.

"But contrariwise, 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:) And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision." (Gal 2:7-9 AV)

The Lord went to great lengths to arrange the encounter between Peter and Cornelius – as great as or greater than any God-arranged meeting in the Bible. First he gave Cornelius a vision:

"He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius. And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter: He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do." (Acts 10:3-6 AV)

Then he gave Peter a vision to ensure he would visit the house of an 'unclean' Gentile. Though Peter was initially unclear as to what the vision meant, the arrival of Gentiles from Cornelius at the gate helped him to understand it:

"Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made enquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate," (Acts 10:17 AV)

The risen and glorified Lord's direct interference in the course of events, as recorded in Acts chapters 9 and 10, was brief, concise and economical – he did only what was necessary to ensure the establishment and spread of the Christian Church among the Gentiles.

Most mid-Acts teachers would disagree with my introductory point for these mysteries. Their main objection would probably be that Cornelius heard and believed Peter's preaching - therefore his salvation (which astonished the Jews who were present) did not signify that anything new had started and that Cornelius and his gathering of kinfolk and near friends were merely saved into Peter's little flock - believing Israel, not the body of Christ. Methinks that some get carried away with dividing (rightly or wrongly). God at no time had two separate bodies of believers. (See the study – 'Rightly dividing Israel and the Christian Church'.)

The mystery was not revealed to Paul until much later but it seems clear from the scriptural evidence that the revelation of the mystery lagged behind the actual

introduction of the mystery. At least two of the mystery revelations were introduced by the Lord with the saving of Cornelius and his gathering; the mystery of the Gentiles being fellowheirs of the promise of Christ, and the mystery of the gospel – the power of the preaching of the cross.

Two chapters before in Acts 8, Samaritans had required the laying on of hands to receive the Holy Ghost - 'apostolic mediation' as C.I. Scofield put it.

*"Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) Then laid they *their* hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost." (Acts 8:14-17 AV)*

One chapter back in Acts 9 our apostle Paul was filled with the Holy Ghost, through the laying on of hands and water baptism, three days after his blinding encounter with the risen and glorified Lord. (The three days have God-given death and resurrection significance and mark Paul out as a very important servant of the Lord. Saul the persecutor of the Lord died on the road to Damascus. He was born of the Spirit three days later.)

*"And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, *even* Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost. And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized." (Acts 9:17-18 AV)*

No such mediation was required in the saving of Cornelius and his gathering who were saved way before Peter could get them into a tank of water or lay hands on them. *Hands-off, dry baptism of Gentiles* - things had changed; God's dispensation had changed. It is clear from the context that God was 'ringing the changes'. He had just recruited his mystery apostle Paul and his next move was to bring his kingdom keys-carrying chief apostle Peter up to date.

Peter and the other believing Jews with him were aware that they had just witnessed the first occurrence of Gentiles receiving the Holy Ghost but they were not aware that they had just witnessed the first occurrence of people being saved by the power of the preaching of the cross alone. By simply telling the story of the events concerning Jesus Christ, Peter had of course told them that the Lord had been slain and had been raised up by God on the third day, and that through his name whosoever believes in him shall receive remission of sins. By simply relating to others the events that had occurred, Peter had quite inadvertently 'preached the cross'. Cornelius and his gathering believed what they heard and were saved.

"How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the

land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree: Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, *even* to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God *to be* the Judge of quick and dead. To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins." (Acts 10:38-43 AV)

Peter's tidings covered the same main points as what was to become Paul's gospel declared in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 and also include an account of the risen Lord being shewed openly by God to Peter and other chosen witnesses, similar to Paul's account in 1 Corinthians 15:5-8. The Lord gave Paul the full revelation of the mystery over the years leading up to the writing of his epistles.

The components of the mystery

I have detected seven mysteries that Paul spoke of. Combined they form the unprophesied arrangement which is currently in place between man and God. I believe the heart of the mystery to be what I have called Mystery 3 – the mystery of the gospel of Christ and of Godliness.

Mystery 1: Israel's blindness

God's holy nation Israel is blinded in part – the 'part' being in fact nearly all of them. Blinded Israelites persist in attempting to establish their own righteousness by the works of the law. A remnant of Jewish believers, according to the election of grace, is not blinded. In Paul's time there was an elect remnant and there probably still is today.

"For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. For Christ *is* the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." (Rom 10:3-4 AV)

"Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace." (Rom 11:5 AV)

"For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in." (Rom 11:25 AV)

Mystery 2: Middle wall of partition broken down. Gentiles fellowheirs, of the same body, partakers of his promise in Christ

God has concluded his holy nation Israel in unbelief, along with us heathen, pagan Gentiles 😊, so that he might show mercy to all. Through Israel's diminishing we Gentiles have greatly benefited (though the world will benefit even more greatly by Israel's ultimate fulness). For the first time God reveals that he is making a new creature, the Church, the body of Christ, in which there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile.

"I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but *rather* through their fall salvation *is come* unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy. Now if the fall of them *be* the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness?" (Rom 11:11-12 AV)

"For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all." (Rom 11:32 AV)

"That 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: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition *between us*; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, *even* the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, *so* making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father." (Eph 2:12-18 AV)

"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; (as I wrote afore in few words, *Whereby*, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel:" (Eph 3:2-6 AV)

Mystery 3: The mystery of the gospel of Christ, and of Godliness

The mystery of the gospel is a mystery indeed. The preaching of the cross alone is now the power of God unto salvation. Through simple unfeigned belief we are gifted the earnest of the Holy Spirit, righteousness, sanctification, justification, redemption, glorification, eternal life – did I miss anything?

"Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:" (1 Cor 15:1-4 AV)

"For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God." (1 Cor 1:18 AV)

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.”
(Rom 1:16 AV)

“And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.” (Eph 6:19-20 AV)

“That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ;” (Col 2:2 AV)

“Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds:” (Col 4:3 AV)

“And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.” (1Tim 3:16 AV)

Mystery 4: Christ's oneness with his Church

Each member of the body is a member of Christ. It is not a human hierarchy or organisation but a Godly organism. Our spirits are joined to his Spirit and our flesh has become his flesh.

“ Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make *them* the members of an harlot? God forbid. What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh. But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit.” (1 Corinthians 6:15-17 AV)

“For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the Church: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the Church.” (Ephesians 5:29-32 AV)

“And he is the head of the body, the Church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all *things* he might have the preeminence.” (Col 1:18 AV)

“To whom God would make known what *is* the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:” (Col 1:27 AV)

Mystery 5: The mystery of iniquity – the spirit of antichrist

Although iniquity has been with the human race since the fall (and particularly since the murder of Abel), belief or not, that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is now the simple

means by which the human race is divided. It is the line in the sand that one either crosses to be with Christ or stays put to be with antichrist and the mockers.

The spirit of antichrist did not waste any time. It got to work on the Church right from day one. John also spoke of it in an epistle to the Hebrew believers. The unrestrained, full manifestation of that Wicked awaits those who will experience the great tribulation.

“For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming:” (2Thess 2:7-8 AV)

“And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that *spirit* of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.” (1John 4:3 AV)

Mystery 6: The catching up of the Church mystery prophecy

We even have prophecy within mystery – commonly known as the rapture.

“Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.” (1Cor 15:51-52 AV)

In Old Testament times the focus of prophecy was earthly; the restoration of David’s kingdom to Israel on a much grander scale, through which all the people of earth will be blessed.

The New Testament reveals that our earthly bodies are not our eternal bodies but merely seeds that must die so we can be transformed into our eternal, heavenly form. The whole focus of Christianity is heavenly and the man Jesus Christ, God manifested among us, declared the shift in focus and personally led the way from earth to heaven.

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.” (John 12:24-25 AV)

“*Thou* fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die: And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other *grain*: But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body.” (1Cor 15:36-38 AV)

Mystery 7: The dispensation of the fulness of times

The Father’s ultimate purpose to gather all things in heaven and earth together in Christ. There was first rebellion against God in heaven followed by rebellion against God on

earth. There will be war in heaven. The rebellious angels will be cast down to earth and the glorified saints will reign with the Lord and his angels in heaven. Then the Lord and all his saints and angels will return to earth to overcome the god of this present evil world and all of his followers. All things in heaven and earth will be gathered together in Christ and he will present all things to the Father so that he is all in all and will dwell with us evermore in the new heaven and the new earth.

"Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all." (1 Corinthians 15:24-28 AV)

"And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him." (Revelation 12:7-9 AV)

"And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power;" (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9 AV)

"And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them. And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever." (Revelation 20:7-10 AV)

"Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him:" (Eph 1:9-10 AV)

"For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell; And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven." (Col 1:19-20 AV)

“And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, *and be* their God.” (Revelation 21:1-3 AV)