

# Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth: Ultra-Dispensationalism Examined in the Light of Holy Scripture

by H. A. Ironside

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## Foreword

These papers were originally published in *Serving and Waiting*, a Philadelphia magazine, organ of the Philadelphia School of the Bible. Many have testified to help received from their perusal and they are now reprinted in response to urgent requests of Christian workers in many places.

## Preface to the Third Edition

The fact that two large editions of this booklet have already been sold and that another is called for gives me a sense of real satisfaction, indicating, as I had believed, that there is great need for the setting forth of the truth it contains and that it is being used to deliver many from a specious, soul-withering system of teaching that has been spreading in many places where its true character was hitherto unrecognized.

Testimonies have come to me from all sides of help and enlightenment received, for which I am grateful to God.

On the other hand, my little book has brought me a full share of abuse and invective. Personal attacks have been of such a character as to be beneath contempt. I have refused to answer them. "The king's command was, 'Answer him not.'" But one attempt to discredit this testimony seems to call for some reply.

My attention has been called to a most dishonest effort to set my teaching for the past forty years in apparent opposition to what is herein set forth. I disavow any such change of attitude. The leaflet in question quotes from my books on "Colossians" and "Sailing with Paul," in which I sought to show that the mystery of the one Body is never found in any other New Testament writer save Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, and nowhere in the Old Testament. This I here re-affirm. Paul was distinctively the one to whom this sacred secret was revealed. In apparent contradiction to this, quotations are given from the present booklet to show that I now teach that the mystery of the blessing of Jew and Gentile on one common ground is set forth by others than Paul; as, for instance John in the 10th chapter of his Gospel, when he gives us our Lord's teaching as to the uniting of His Jewish sheep with "other sheep not of this fold"—Gentile believers—in one flock under one Shepherd. The same mystery is opened up in Peter's vision of the sheet let down from heaven.

Is there any contradiction here? None whatever. I affirm still that Paul alone speaks for the mystery of the Body, but the mystery of the blessing of Jew and Gentile on the common ground of free grace was revealed to others before it was made known to Paul. To continue the circulation of the leaflet referred to will but manifest the dishonesty of the person, or persons, concerned. It is an utter misrepresentation of my views.

I send forth this third edition praying that the Lord will use it to deliver many more from the unscriptural and positively harmful teachings of the ultra-dispensationalists who, under the guise of setting forth "high truth," are deliberately attempting to rob Christians of the greater part of their Bible. April 1938—H. A. Ironside.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **What is Ultra-Dispensationalism?**

"Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth" (2 Tim. 2:15).

PAUL'S exhortation to the younger preacher, Timothy, has come home to many with great power in recent years. As a result, there has been a

return to more ancient methods of Bible study, which had been largely neglected during the centuries of the Church's drift from apostolic testimony. Augustine's words have had a re-affirmation: "Distinguish the ages, and the Scriptures are plain." And so there has been great emphasis put in many quarters, and rightly so, upon the study of what is commonly known as "dispensational" truth. This line of teaching, if kept within Scriptural bounds, cannot but prove a great blessing to the humble student of the Word of God who desires to know His will or plan in His dealings with men from creation to the coming glory. A careful examination of the volume of Revelation shows that God's ways with men have differed in various ages. This must be taken into account if one would properly apprehend His truth.

The word "dispensation" is found several times in the pages of our English Bible and is a translation of the Greek word "*oikonomia*." This word, strictly speaking, means "house order." It might be translated "administration," "order," or "stewardship." In each successive age, God gives to men of faith a certain stewardship, or makes known to them a certain order or administration, in accordance with which they are responsible to behave. A dispensation then is a period of time in which God is dealing with men in some way in which He has not dealt with them before. Only when a new revelation from God is given, does a dispensation change. Moreover, there may be degrees of revelation in one dispensation; all, however, having to do with a fuller unfolding of the will of God for that particular age. This was very definitely true in the dispensation of law, from Moses to Christ. We have the various revelations: of Sinai, both the first and second giving of the law; then added instructions during the wilderness years; the covenant with David; and the revelations given to the prophets. The circumstances in which God's people were found changed frequently during this age of law, but the dispensation itself continued from Sinai until Jesus cried, "It is finished." It is important to have this in mind, otherwise the vast scope of an ever unfolding dispensation may be lost sight of, and one might get the idea that every additional revelation of truth in a given age changed the dispensation, whereas it only enlarges it.

One may illustrate a dispensation in a very simple way, remembering that the word really means "house order," and I might add, the Greek word has been Anglicized, and we know it as "economy." Let us suppose a young woman whom we will call Mary, is going out into service. She obtains a position in a humble home belonging to a good family of the working class. There are certain rules governing that home which she must learn to observe. All perhaps is not plain to her at once, but as time goes on, she learns more and more fully the desires of her mistress. We will say she is to rise at five every morning and

begin to prepare the breakfast and put up the lunches for those who go out to work. At six she is to ring the rising bell; at half-past six the family are supposed to be at the breakfast-table; and at seven they leave for work. Dinner of course is at a certain hour at night, and in the meantime she has her different duties to perform in keeping the house in order. She learns quite thoroughly the domestic economy of this particular home and becomes a well-qualified household servant. Now let us suppose that later on she finds that a cook and housekeeper is needed for the large mansion on the hill. She applies for the position and is accepted. Moving in, her mistress undertakes to instruct her in the economy of the new home, but Mary says, "You need not give me any instructions, Ma'am, I know exactly how a house should be run. Just leave it to me and everything will be attended to properly. I have had some years of experience in housekeeping and I would not have asked for the position if I did not know what was required." Her mistress is dubious, but, for the time being, acquiesces.

The next morning, the waking-gong sounds at six o'clock. The family, who are accustomed to banker's hours during the day and are given to very late hours at night, are astonished and chagrined at being aroused so early. The mistress calls down to the housekeeper, "What does this mean?" and learns that breakfast will be on the table in half-an-hour.

"Why, Mary," she exclaims; "we never breakfast here until half-past eight."

"But the breakfast is hot and the lunches are all ready, Ma'am."

"No one carries lunches in this home. You see, Mary, you do not understand the arrangement here. I shall have to instruct you carefully today." And poor bewildered Mary learns the importance of dispensational truth!

The illustration, I know, is crude, but I think any one will see the point. God had one order for the house of Israel. There is another order for the house of God, the Church of the living God today. There will be a different order in the millennial age, and there have been varying orders in the past.

All this comes out clearly in the pages of Holy Scripture, and is certainly involved in the expression in our English Bibles, "rightly dividing the Word of Truth." Of course, this expression is not by any means to be limited to dispensational teaching. It also implies putting each great doctrine of the Word in its right place. It has been translated, "cutting in a straight line the Word of Truth," that is, not confounding or confusing things that differ. It even suggests the

thought of honestly facing the Word of Truth.

It is right here then that we need to be careful, and not read into the Word of God ideas out of our own minds which are not really there. Through doing this, some have ignored dispensational truth altogether. Others have swung to an ultra-dispensationalism which is most pernicious in its effect upon one's own soul and upon testimony for God generally. Of these ultra-dispensational systems, one in particular has come into prominence of late years, which, for want of a better name, is generally called "Bullingerism," owing to the fact that it was first advocated some years ago by Dr. E. W. Bullinger, a clergyman of the Church of England. These views have been widely spread through the notes of "The Companion Bible," a work partly edited by Dr. Bullinger, though he died before it was completed. This Bible has many valuable features and has been a help in certain respects to God's servants who have used it conservatively, but it contains interpretations which are utterly subversive of the truth. Some of Dr. Bullinger's positions are glaringly opposed to what is generally accepted as orthodox teaching, as, for instance, the sleep of the soul between death and resurrection; and it is a most significant fact that while he did not apparently fully commit himself to any eschatological position as to the final state of the impenitent, most of his followers in Great Britain have gone off into annihilation, and there is quite a sect in America who began with his teaching who now are restorationists of the broadest type, teaching what they are pleased to call universal reconciliation, which to their minds involves the final salvation not only of all men, but of Satan and all the fallen angels. These two views, diverse as they are, are nevertheless the legitimate offspring of the ultra-dispensational system to which we refer.

The present writer has been urged by many for years to take up these questions, but has always heretofore shrunk from doing so; first, because of the time and labor involved, which seemed out of all proportion to the possible value of such an examination; and secondly, because of a natural shrinking from controversy, remembering the word, "The servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient; in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth." But the rapid spread of these pernicious views and their evident detrimental effect upon so many who hold them, has led to the conclusion that it would be unfaithfulness to God and to His people if one refused to seek to give any help he could in regard to these teachings.

Briefly, then, what are the outstanding tenets of Bullingerism and its kindred systems? For one needs to remember that a number are

teaching these ultra-dispensational things who declare that they are not familiar with the writings of Dr. Bullinger, and repudiate with indignation the name of "Bullingerism." There are perhaps six outstanding positions taken by these teachers:

*First*, inasmuch as our Lord Jesus was "a minister of the circumcision to confirm the promises made to the fathers," it is insisted that the four Gospels are entirely Jewish and have no real message for the Church, the Body of Christ. All might not put it quite as boldly as this, but certainly their disciples go to the limit in repudiating the authority of the Gospels.

*Secondly*, it is maintained that the book of Acts covers a transition period between the dispensation of the law and the dispensation of the mystery; that is, that in the book of Acts we do not have the Church, the Body of Christ, but that the word "ekklesia" (church, or assembly), as used in that book, refers to a different Church altogether to that of Paul's prison epistles. This earlier Church is simply an aspect of the kingdom and is not the same as the Body of Christ!

*Third*, it is contended that Paul did not receive his special revelation of the mystery of the Body until his imprisonment in Rome, and that his prison epistles alone reveal this truth and are, strictly speaking, the only portion of the Holy Scriptures given to members of the Body. All of the other epistles of Paul, save those written during his imprisonment and the general epistles, are relegated to the earlier dispensation of the book of Acts, and have no permanent value for us, but were for the instruction of the so-called Jewish church of that time.

*Fourth*, the entire book of Revelation has to do with the coming age and has no reference to the Church today. Even the letters to the seven churches in Asia, which are distinctly said to be "the things which are," are, according to this system, to be considered as "the things which are not," and will not be until the Church, the Body of Christ, is removed from this world. Then, it is contended, these seven churches will appear on the earth as Jewish churches in the Great Tribulation.

*Fifth*, the Body of Christ is altogether a different company, according to these teachers, from the Bride of the Lamb, the latter being supposed to be Jewish.

*Sixth*, the Christian ordinances, having been given before Paul is supposed to have received his revelation of the mystery in prison, have no real connection with the present economy, and therefore, are relegated to the past, and may again have a place in the future Great Tribulation. (Note: As to this, these ultra-dispensationalists differ. Most

of them reject water baptism entirely for this age. All of them are not prepared to go so far in connection with the Lord's Supper, but many of them repudiate it too.)

Besides these six points, there are many other unscriptural things which are advocated by various disciples who began with these views and have been rapidly throwing overboard other Scriptural teachings. Many Bullingerites boldly advocate the sleep of the soul between death and resurrection, the annihilation of the wicked, or, as we have seen, universal salvation of all men and demons, the denial of the eternal Sonship of the Lord Jesus Christ, and, gravest of all, the personality of the Holy Spirit. All of these evil doctrines find congenial soil in Bullingerism. Once men take up with this system there is no telling how far they will go, and what their final position will be in regard to the great fundamental truths of Christianity. It is because of this that one needs to be on his guard, for it is as true of systems as it is of teachers, "By their fruits ye shall know them."

Having had most intimate acquaintance with Bullingerism as taught by many for the last forty years, I have no hesitancy in saying that its fruits are evil. It has produced a tremendous crop of heresies throughout the length and breadth of this and other lands, it has divided Christians and wrecked churches and assemblies without number; it has lifted up its votaries in intellectual and spiritual pride to an appalling extent, so that they look with supreme contempt upon Christians who do not accept their peculiar views; and in most instances where it has been long tolerated, it has absolutely throttled Gospel effort at home and sown discord on missionary fields abroad. So true are these things of this system that I have no hesitancy in saying it is an absolutely Satanic perversion of the truth. Instead of rightly dividing the Word, I shall seek to show that these teachers wrongly divide the Word, and that their propaganda is anything but conducive to spirituality and enlightenment in divine things.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **The Four Gospels and Their Relation to the Church**

HOWEVER they may differ in regard to minor details of their various systems, practically all ultra-dispensationalists are a unit in declaring that the four Gospels must be entirely relegated to a past dispensation (in fact, according to most of them, they are pushed two dispensations back), and, therefore, are not to be considered as in any sense applying to this present age. It is affirmed with the utmost assurance that the Gospels are wholly Jewish. Inasmuch as we are told in the Epistle to

the Romans (15:8), that "Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers," the position is taken that the records of the Evangelists deal solely with this phase of things, and that there is nothing even in the utterances of our Lord Himself in those books that has any special place for the present dispensation.

Yet a careful consideration of the very passage in which these words are found would seem to negative this entire theory and prove that it is absolutely groundless, for when the apostle is stressing true Christian behavior, he refers the saints back to the life and ministry of our Lord Jesus when here on earth. Notice the opening verses of Romans 15. We are told that the "strong should bear the infirmities of the weak, and not seek to please themselves, but that each one should have in mind the edification of his neighbor," having Christ as our great example, "who pleased not Himself, but of whom it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached Thee fell on Me."

We are then definitely informed that not only what we have in the four Gospels, but what we have in all the Old Testament is for us, "for whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." Here there is no setting aside of an earlier revelation as though it had no message for the people of God in a later day simply because dispensations have changed. Spiritual principles never change; moral responsibility never changes, and the believer who would glorify God in the present age must manifest the grace that was seen in Christ when He walked here on earth during the age that is gone. It is perfectly true that He came in exact accord with Old Testament prophecy and came under the law, in order that He might deliver those who were under the law from that bondage. He was in reality a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, not—observe—to fulfil at His first coming the promises made unto the fathers, but to confirm them. This He did by His teaching and His example. He assures Israel even in setting them to one side, that the promises made beforehand shall yet have their fulfilment.

But, observe, it is upon this very fact that the apostle bases present grace going out to the Gentiles, for he adds in verse 9:

**"And that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy; as it is written: For this cause I will confess to Thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto Thy name. And again He saith, Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with His people. And again, Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles; and laud Him, all ye people. And again, Esaias saith, There shall be a Root of Jesse, and He that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in**



**Him shall the Gentiles trust" (vers. 9-12).**

Here, while not for a moment ignoring that revelation of the mystery of which he speaks in the closing chapter, Paul shows that the present work of God in reaching out in grace to the Gentiles, is in full harmony with Old Testament Scripture, while going far beyond anything that the Old Testament prophets ever dreamed of, and then he adds:

**"Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost" (ver. 13).**

While there is a change of dispensation, there is no rude severing of Old Testament or Gospel revelation from that of the present age. The one flows naturally out of the other, and the ways of God are shown to be perfectly harmonious. This being so in connection with the Old Testament, how much more does the same principle apply in connection with the four Gospels. While fully recognizing their dispensational place, and realizing that our Lord is presented in the three Synoptics as offering Himself as King and the kingdom of Heaven as such to Israel, only to meet with ever-increasing rejection, yet it should be plain to any spiritual mind that the principles of the kingdom which He sets forth are the same principles that should hold authority over the hearts of all who acknowledge the Lordship of Christ. In John's Gospel the case is somewhat different, for there Christ is seen as the rejected One from the very beginning. It is in chapter one that we read, "He came unto His own and His own received Him not." Then based upon that, we have the new and fuller revelation which runs throughout that Gospel of grace, flowing out to all men who have no merit whatever in themselves.

But in Matthew, which is preeminently the dispensational Gospel, the Lord is presented as the Son of David first of all. Then when it is evident that Israel will refuse His claims, He is presented in the larger aspect of Son of Abraham in whom all the nations of the earth shall be blessed. The break with the leaders of the nation comes in chapter twelve, where they definitely ascribe the works of the Holy Spirit to the devil. In doing this, they become guilty of blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, the crowning sin of that dispensation, which our Lord declares could not be forgiven either in that age or in the one to follow. In chapter thirteen, we have an altogether new ministry beginning. The Lord for the first time opens up the mysteries of the kingdom of Heaven, revealing things that had been kept secret from the foundation of the world, namely the strange and unlooked for form that the kingdom would take here on earth after Israel had rejected the King and He had returned to Heaven. This is set forth in the seven parables

of that chapter, and gives us the course of Christendom during all the present age.

As a rule, the ultra-dispensationalists would ignore all this and push these seven parables forward into the tribulation era after the Church, the Body of Christ, has been taken out of this scene. But this is to do violence to the entire Gospel and to ignore utterly the history of the past 1900 years. Just as in Revelation two and three we have an outline of the history of the professing Church presented under the similitude of the seven letters, so in Matthew 13 we have the course of Christendom in perfect harmony with the Church letters, portrayed in such a way as to make clear the distinction between the Church that man builds and that which is truly of God. In chapter sixteen of Matthew's Gospel, the Lord declares for the first time that He is going to build a Church or assembly. This assembly is to be built upon the Rock, the confession of the apostle Peter that Christ is the Son of the living God. How utterly vain it is to try to separate this declaration from the statement in the Ephesian Epistle where we read,

**"Now therefore, ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit" (2:19-22).**

Here in the preeminent prison epistle of which so much is made by the Bullingerites, you find that the Church then in existence is the Church our Lord spoke of building when He was here in the days of His flesh. The discipline of that Church is given in Matthew 18:15-20:

**"Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone; if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them."**

In Matthew sixteen you have the assembly as a whole, comprising all believers during the present dispensation. Here in chapter eighteen, you have the local assembly in the position of responsibility on earth, and its authority to deal with evil-doers in corrective discipline.

The complete setting aside of Israel for the present age is given us in chapter 23:37-39,

**"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killst the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see Me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord."**

In the light of the words, "Your house is left unto you desolate," how amazing the presumption that would lead any to declare, as practically all these extreme dispensationalists do declare, that Israel is being given a second trial throughout all the book of Acts, and that their real setting aside does not take place until Paul's meeting with the elders of the Jews after his imprisonment in Rome, as recorded in the last chapter of Acts. The fact of the matter is that the book of Acts opens with the setting aside of Israel until the day when they shall say, "Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord." That is His second glorious coming. In the interval, God is saving out of Israel as well as of the Gentiles, all who turn to Him in repentance.

In Matthew twenty-four, we are carried on to the days immediately preceding that time when the Son of Man shall appear in glory, and we find the people of Israel in great distress, but a remnant called His "elect" shall be saved in that day.

I pass purposely over chapter twenty-five as having no particular bearing on the outline, because a careful consideration of it would take more time and space than is here available. The closing chapters give us the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, and then the commission of His apostles. People who have never investigated Bullingerism and its kindred systems will hardly believe me when I say that even the great commission upon which the Church has acted for 1900 years, and which is still our authority for world-wide missions, is, according to these teachers, a commission with which we have nothing whatever to do, that has no reference to the Church at all, and that the work there predicted will not begin until taken up by the remnant of Israel in the days of the Great Tribulation. Yet such is actually the teaching. In view of this, let us carefully read the closing verses of the Gospel:

**"Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw Him, they worshipped Him: but some doubted. And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Mt. 28:16-20).**

According to the Bullingeristic interpretation of this passage, we should have to paraphrase it somewhat as follows: "Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw Him, they worshipped Him: but some doubted. And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto Me in heaven and earth, and after two entire dispensations have rolled by, I command that the remnant of Israel who shall be living two thousand or more years later, shall go out and teach the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them in that day to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you, but from which I absolve all believers between the present hour and that coming age, and lo, I will be with that remnant until the close of Daniel's seventieth week." Can anything be more absurd, more grotesque—and I might add, more wicked—than thus to twist and misuse the words of our Lord Jesus Christ?

In view of all this, may I direct my reader's careful attention to the solemn statement of the apostle Paul, which is found in I Timothy, chapter 6. After having given a great many practical exhortations to Timothy as to the instruction he was to give to the churches for their guidance during all the present age, the apostle says,

**"If any man teach otherwise and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; he is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself" (I Tim. 6:3-5).**

One would almost think that this was a direct command to Timothy to beware of Bullingerism! Notice, Timothy is to withdraw himself from, that is, to have no fellowship with, those who refuse the present authority of the words of our Lord Jesus Christ. Where do you get

those actual words? Certainly in the four Gospels. There are very few actual words of the Lord Jesus Christ scattered throughout the rest of the New Testament. Of course there is a sense in which all the New Testament is from Him, but the apostle is clearly referring here to the actual spoken words of our Saviour, which have been recorded for the benefit of the saints, and which set forth the teaching that is in accordance with godliness or practical piety. If a man refuses these words, whether on the plea that they do not apply to our dispensation, or for any other reason, the Spirit of God declares it is an evidence of intellectual or spiritual pride. Such men ordinarily think they know much more than others, and they look down from their fancied heights of superior Scriptural understanding with a certain contempt, often not untinged with scornful amusement, upon godly men and women who are simply seeking to take the words of the Lord Jesus as the guide for their lives.

But here we are told that such "know nothing," but are really in their spiritual dotage, "doting about questions and strifes of words." The dotard is generally characterized by frequent repetition of similar expressions. We know how marked this symptom is in those who have entered upon a state of physical and intellectual senility. Spiritual dotage may be discerned in the same way. A constant dwelling upon certain expressions as though these were all important, to the ignoring of the great body of truth, is an outstanding symptom. The margin, it will be observed, substitutes the word "sick" for "doting;" "word-sickness" is an apt expression. The word-sick man over-estimates altogether the importance of terms. He babbles continually about expressions which many of his brethren scarcely understand. He is given to misplaced emphasis, making far more of fine doctrinal distinctions than of practical godly living. As a result, his influence is generally baneful instead of helpful, leading to strife and disputation instead of binding the hearts of the people of God together in the unity of the Spirit.

The well-known passage in the closing chapter of Mark's Gospel, which gives us another aspect of the great commission, having to do particularly with the apostles, is a favorite battleground with the ultra-dispensationalists. Ignoring again the entire connection, they insist that the commission given in verses fifteen and eighteen could only apply during the days of the book of Acts, inasmuch as certain signs were to follow them that believe. As the commission in Matthew has been relegated by them to the Great Tribulation after the Christian age has closed, this one is supposed to have had its fulfilment before the present mystery dispensation began, and so has no real force now. They point out, what to them seems conclusive, that in this commission, as

of course that in Matthew, water baptism is evidently linked with a profession of faith in Christ. They are perfectly hydrophobic as to this. The very thought of water sets them foaming with indignation. There must on no account be any recognition of water baptism during the present age. It must be gotten rid of at all costs. So here where we read that our Lord said, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature; he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:15,16), which would seem to indicate world-wide evangelism, looking out to the proclamation of the glad glorious Gospel of God to lost men everywhere, this commission must nevertheless be gotten rid of somehow. The way they do it is this: The Lord declares that certain signs shall follow when this Gospel is proclaimed. These signs evidently followed in the days of the Acts. They declare they have never followed since. Therefore, it is evident that water baptism is only to go on so long as the signs follow. If the signs have ceased, then water baptism ceases. The signs are not here now, therefore no water baptism. How amazingly clear (!!), though, as we shall see in a moment, absolutely illogical. The signs accompanied preaching the Gospel. Why continue to preach if such signs are not now manifest?

The Matthew commission makes it plain that baptism in the name of the Trinity is to go on to the end of the age, and that age has not come to an end yet, whatever changes of dispensation may have come in. Now what of this commission in Mark? Observe first of all that our Lord is not declaring that the signs shall follow believers in the Gospel which is to be proclaimed by the Lord's messengers. The signs were to follow those of the apostles who believed, and they did. There were some of them who did not believe. See verse eleven: "And they, when they had heard that He was alive and had been seen of her, believed not." Then again, notice verse thirteen: "They went and told it unto the residue; neither believed they them." And in the verse that follows, we read: "Afterward He appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen Him after He was risen." Now our Lord commissions the eleven, sends them forth to go to the ends of the earth preaching the Gospel to every creature. There is nothing limited here. It is not a Jewish commission. It has nothing to do with the restoration of the kingdom to Israel. It is a world-wide commission to go to all the Gentiles, and to go forth preaching the Word. Responsibility rests upon those who hear. They are to believe and be baptized. Those who do are recognized among the saved. On the other hand, He does not say, "He that is not baptized shall be damned," because baptism was simply an outward confession of their faith, but He does say, "He that believeth not shall be damned."

Then in verses seventeen and eighteen, we have what Paul later called "the signs of an apostle."

**"These signs shall follow them that believe: In My name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover."**

During all the period of the book of Acts, these signs did follow the apostles. More than that, if we can place the least reliance upon early Church history, the same signs frequently followed other servants of Christ, as they went forth in obedience to this commission, and this long after the imprisonment of the apostle Paul. We should expect this from the closing verses of Mark:

**"So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, He was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God. And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the Word with signs following" (Mark 16:19,20).**

In this last verse, Mark covers the evangelization of the world (not merely a message going out to the Jews), during all the years that followed until the last of the apostles, John himself, had disappeared from the scene. I do not mean to intimate that Mark knew this, but I do mean that the Spirit of God caused him so to write this closing verse as to cover complete apostolic testimony right on to its consummation. They preached everywhere, not simply in connection with Israel. Yet in the face of this, the statement has been made over and over again by these ultradispensationalists, that the twelve never went to the Gentiles, excepting in the case of the apostle Peter and a few similar instances. The statement has also been made that all miracles ceased with Paul's imprisonment, that there were no miracles afterwards. What superb ignorance of Church history is here indicated, and what an absurd position a man puts himself in who commits himself to negatives like these! An eminent logician has well said, "Never commit yourself to a negative, for that supposes that you are in possession of all the facts." If a man says there were no miracles wrought in the Church after the imprisonment of the apostle Peter, it means, if that statement is true, that he has thorough knowledge of all that has taken place in every land on earth where the Gospel has been preached, in all the centuries since the days of Paul's imprisonment, and knows all the work that every servant of Christ has ever done. Otherwise he could not logically and rationally make such a statement.

What then is the conclusion? It is wrongly dividing the Word of Truth to seek to rob Christians of the precious instruction given by our Lord

Jesus in the four Gospels, though fully recognizing their dispensational place. It is an offense against Christian missions everywhere to try to set aside the great commission for the entire present age. It is not true that a definite limit is placed in Scripture upon the manifestation of sign gifts, and that such gifts have never appeared since the days of the apostles.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **The Transitional Period**

#### **Is the Church of The Acts the Body of Christ?**

THERE is perhaps nothing about which the ultradispensationalists are more certain, according to their own expressions, than that the book of the Acts covers a transitional period, coming in between the age of the law and the present age in which the dispensation of the mystery has been revealed. They do not always agree as to the name of this intervening period. Some call it the Kingdom Church; others the Jewish Church; and there are those who prefer the term Pentecostal Dispensation.

The general teaching is about as follows: It is affirmed that the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost and His baptizing the one hundred and twenty and those who afterwards believed, did not have anything to do with the formation of the Church, the Body of Christ. On the contrary, they insist that the Church throughout all of the book of Acts up to Paul's imprisonment was of an altogether lower order than that of the Epistle to the Ephesians. Assemblies in Judea, Samaria, and the various Gentile countries, were simply groups of believers who were waiting for the manifestation of the kingdom, and had not yet come into the full liberty of grace. The ordinances of the Lord's Supper and of baptism were linked with these companies and were to continue only until Israel had definitely and finally refused the Gospel message, after which the full revelation of the mystery is supposed to have been given to the apostle Paul when he was imprisoned at Rome. From that time on a new dispensation began. Surely this is wrongly confounding the Word of Truth. How any rational and spiritually-minded person could ever come to such a conclusion after a careful reading of the book of Acts, and with it the various epistles addressed to the churches and peoples mentioned in that book, is more than some of us can comprehend. Let us see what the facts actually are.

In the first place, it is perfectly plain that the Church, the Body of Christ, was formed by the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Very definitely



this term is used of that great event which took place at Pentecost and was repeated in measure in Cornelius' household. In each instance the same exact expression is used. Referring to Pentecost, our Lord says, "Ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence" (Acts 1:5). Referring to the event that took place in Cornelius' household, Peter says:

**"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?" (Acts 11:16,17).**

In 1 Corinthians 12:12,13, we read:

**"For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit."**

Here we are distinctly informed as to the way in which the Body has been brought into existence, and this is exactly what took place at Pentecost. Individual believers were that day baptized into one Body, and from then on the Lord added to the Church daily such as were saved. It is a significant fact that if you omit this definite passage in I Corinthians, there is no other verse in any epistle that tells us in plain words just how the Body is formed; although we might deduce this from Ephesians 4:4, where we read: "There is one Body and one Spirit." Undoubtedly this refers to the baptism of the Holy Spirit, by which the Body is formed, in contradistinction to water baptism in the next verse. But this is simply interpretation, and all might not agree as to it. But there can surely be no question as to the application of the passage in 1 Corinthians 12:13. Yet, singularly enough, the very people who insist that the Body is formed by the Spirit's baptism, declare that these Corinthians were not members of the Body, nor did that Body come into existence until at least four or five years afterwards.

A careful reading of the book of Acts shows us the gradual manner in which the truth of the new dispensation was introduced, and this is what has led some to speak of this book as covering a transitional period. Personally, I have no objection to the term "transitional period," if it be understood that the transition was in the minds of men and not in the mind of God. According to God, the new dispensation, that in which we now live, the dispensation of the grace of God, otherwise called the dispensation of the mystery, began the moment the

Spirit descended at Pentecost. That moment the one Body came into existence, though at the beginning it was composed entirely of believers taken out from the Jewish people. But in the minds even of the disciples, there was a long period before they all fully entered into the special work that God had begun to do. Many of them, in fact, probably never did apprehend the true character of this dispensation, as we shall see further on.

The position is often taken that the twelve apostles were very ignorant of what the Lord was really doing, and that their entire ministry was toward Israel. Have not such teachers forgotten that during the forty days that the Lord appeared to His disciples before ascending to Heaven, He taught them exactly what His program was, and the part they were to have in it? In Acts 1:3,4, we read:

**"He also showed Himself alive after His passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God: and being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith He, ye have heard of Me."**

And it was then that He distinctly told them of the coming baptism of the Holy Spirit. According to the divine plan, the Gospel message was first to be proclaimed in Jerusalem, then Judea, then Samaria, and then unto the uttermost parts of the earth. This is exactly what we find in the book of Acts. The earlier chapters give us the proclamation in Jerusalem and Judea. Then we have Philip going down to Samaria, followed by John and Peter. Later Peter goes to the house of Cornelius, and he and his household, believing the Gospel, are baptized by the same Spirit into the same Body. The conversion of Saul of Tarsus prepares the way for a world-wide ministry, he being specifically chosen of God for that testimony.

But before Saul's conversion, there were churches of God in many cities, and these churches of God together formed the Church of God; churches signifying local companies, but the Church of God taking in all believers. Years afterwards, Paul writes, "I persecuted the Church of God and wasted it" (Gal. 1:13). And again, "For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God" (I Cor. 15:9). The Church of God was to him one whole. It was exactly the same Church of God as that of which he speaks in 1 Timothy 3:15, when, writing to the younger preacher, he says: "That thou mightest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself 'in the house of God, which is the Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." In the meantime he had been cast into prison

and had written all the rest of the so-called prison epistles, with the exception, of course, of Titus, which was written while he was at liberty, between his imprisonments, and 2 Timothy, which was written during his second imprisonment. (Note: I make this statement on the supposition that the note at the end of I Timothy is correct, namely that the epistle was written from Laodicea, a place not visited by Paul before his first imprisonment. If written earlier the argument does not apply, except to show that Paul ever recognized the Church of God as one and undivided.) There is no hint of any difference having come in to distinguish the Church of God which he says he persecuted, from the Church of God in which Timothy was recognized as a minister of the Word. It is one and the same Church throughout.

Going back to Acts then, we notice that after his conversion, Paul is definitely set apart as the apostle to the Gentiles, and yet everywhere he goes, he first seeks out his Jewish brethren after the flesh, because it was God's purpose that the Gospel should be made known to the Jew first, and then to the Gentile. In practically every city, the same results follow. A few of the Jews receive the message; the bulk of them reject it. Then Paul turns from the Jews to the Gentiles, and thus the message goes out to the whole world. Throughout all of this period, covered by the ministries of Peter and Paul particularly, both baptism in water and the breaking of bread have their place. The signs of an apostle follow the ministry, God authenticating His Word as His servants go forth in His Name. However, it is perfectly plain that the nearer we get to the close of the Acts, the less we have in the way of signs and wonders. This is to be expected. In the meantime various books of the New Testament had been written, particularly Paul's letters to the Thessalonians, the Corinthians, and the Romans. In all likelihood, the Epistle of James had also been produced, though we cannot definitely locate the time of its writing. The Epistles of Peter and of John come afterward. They were not part of the earlier written ministry.

Everywhere that Paul goes, he preaches the kingdom as the Lord Himself has commanded, and finally he reached Rome a prisoner. There, following his usual custom, though not having the same liberty as in other places, he gets in touch first with the leaders of the Jewish people, gives them his message, and then tells them that even though they reject it, yet the purpose of God must be carried out, and the salvation of God sent to the Gentiles. This is supposed by many to be a dispensational break, but we have exactly the same thing in the thirteenth chapter of Acts. There we read from verse 44 on, how the Jews in Antioch of Pisidia withstood the Word spoken by Paul, and Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said:

**"It was necessary that the word of God should first have been**

**spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set Thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that Thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth."**

I ask any thoughtful reader: What difference is there between this account of Paul's dealing with the Jews, the proclamation of grace going out to the Gentiles, and that found in chapter 28 of this same book? In the light of these two passages, may we not say that if Paul was given liberty, as we know he was, to preach for several years after his first imprisonment, he undoubtedly still followed exactly the same method of proclaiming the Gospel to the Jew first, and then to the Gentiles? It is passing strange that these ultra-dispensationalists can overlook a passage like Acts 13, and then read so much into the similar portion in chapter 28. According to them, as we have pointed out, the dispensational break occurred at this latter time, after which Paul's ministry, they tell us, took an entirely different form. It was then that the dispensation of the mystery was revealed to him, they say, which he embodied in his prison epistles. He was no longer a preacher of the kingdom, but now a minister of the Body. The theory sounds very plausible until one examines the text of Scripture itself.

Let us look at the last two verses of Acts 28:

**"And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him."**

Now observe in chapter one, verse three, our Lord is said to have spoken to His disciples during the forty days of "the things pertaining to the kingdom of God ." In the very last verse of the book, after Paul's supposed later revelation, he is still "preaching the kingdom of God;" certainly the next phrase, "teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ," implies continuance in exactly the same type of ministry in which he had been engaged before. There is no hint here of something new.

Now let us go back a little. In chapter 20 of the book of Acts, we find the apostle Paul at Miletus on his way to Jerusalem. From there he sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church. We have a very touching account of his last interview with them. Among other things, he says to them:

**"I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.**

**Take heed unto yourselves and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the Church of God which He hath purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:27,28).**

And then he commends these elders in view of the coming apostasy, not to some new revelation yet to be given, but "to God and the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all them that are sanctified." Note particularly the breadth of the statement found in verse 27. "All the counsel of God" had already been made known through Paul to the Ephesian elders before he went up to Jerusalem for the last time. There is not a hint of a partial revelation, not a hint of a transitional period, but they already had everything they needed to keep them until the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I venture to say that the better one is acquainted with the book of Acts, the clearer all this will become. It is truly absurd to attempt to make two Churches out of the redeemed company between Pentecost and the Lord's return. The Church is one and indivisible. It is the Church that Christ built upon the rock, namely the truth that He is the Son of the living God. It is the Church of God which He purchased with the blood of His own Son. That Church of God, Saul in his ignorance, persecuted. Of that same Church of God, he afterwards became a member through the Spirit's baptism. In that Church of God, Timothy was a recognized minister, not only before, but after Paul's imprisonment.

In regard to the statement so frequently made that God was giving Israel a second chance throughout the book of Acts, it is evident that there is no foundation whatever for such a statement. Our Lord definitely declared the setting aside of Israel for this entire age when He said, "Your house is left unto you desolate. Ye shall not see Me again until ye say, Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord!" It was after that house was left desolate that the glorious proclamation at Pentecost was given through the power of the Holy Spirit, offering salvation by grace to any in Israel who repented, and to as many as the Lord our God shall call, which, of course, includes the whole Gentile world. Not once in any of the sermons recorded of Peter and of Paul do we have a hint that the nation of Israel is still on trial, and that God is waiting for that nation to repent in this age. On the contrary, the very fact that believers are called upon to "save themselves from that untoward generation" is evidence of the complete setting aside of Israel nationally, and the calling out of a select company of those who acknowledge the claims of the Lord Jesus Christ. By their baptism, they outwardly severed the link that bound them to the unbelieving nation, and thus came over onto Christian ground. To this company, Gentile believers were later added, and these two together constitute

the Body of Christ. It is perfectly true that the Body as such is not mentioned in the book of Acts, and that for a very good reason. In this book, we have the record of the beginning of the evangelization of the world, which involves, of course, not the revelation of the truth of the Body, but the proclamation of the kingdom of God, which none can enter apart from the new birth.

A careful study of the epistles, taking particular note of the times at which, and the persons to whom, they were written, will only serve to make these things clearer.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### When Was the Revelation of the Mystery of the One Body Given?

IT is contended by Bullingerites, and others of like ilk, that Paul did not receive the revelation of the mystery of the one Body until he was imprisoned in Rome, 63 A. D. Generally, too, the ground is taken that this revelation was given to him alone, and that the twelve knew nothing of it. Let us see if these assertions will stand the test of Holy Scripture.

We shall turn, first of all, directly to the writings of the apostle Paul, and examine the passages in which he refers to this subject. The first one is found in the Epistle to the Romans which was written, according to the best authorities, in the year A. D. 60, at least three years before Paul's imprisonment, and certainly some time before he reached Rome, as in that letter he tells the Romans that he is contemplating the visit to them, and asks them to pray that it might be a prosperous one. It might seem as though his prayer was not answered inasmuch as he reached Rome in chains, a prisoner for the Gospel's sake. But God's ways are not ours, and we can be sure that in the light of eternity, we shall see that this was indeed one of the most prosperous voyages that anyone ever made. Now in closing this epistle to the Romans, the apostle says in chapter 16, verses 25 to 27:

**"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, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith: to God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen."**

Here we have the plain statement that Paul's preaching throughout the

years had been in accordance with the revelation of the mystery previously kept secret, but at that time made manifest. Moreover, he intimates that it had been already published abroad in writing, for he says, "It is made manifest (not exactly by the Scriptures of the prophets, as though he referred to Old Testament prophets, but) by prophetic writings," that is, his own and others. And this proclamation of the mystery had been made known to all nations for the obedience of faith.

Does anyone ask, How can any ultra-dispensationalist dare to say in the face of such a Scripture as this, that the mystery had not been made known and had not been previously preached before Paul was imprisoned at Rome? If a simple believing Christian, he will probably be amazed at the answer. Dr. Bullinger and others who follow him suggest that in all likelihood the last three verses of the Epistle to the Romans were not written by Paul when he sent the letter from some distant Gentile city, but that they were appended to the letter after he reached Rome and received the new revelation. Is this unbelievable? Nevertheless, it is exactly what these men teach. It is higher criticism of the worst type and impugns the perfection of the Word of God. For, even supposing their contentions were true, how absurd it would be for Paul to add these words after he reached Rome, to an epistle purporting to be written before he got there! And how senseless it would be for him to speak while he was in prison, of a Gospel and a revelation which he was supposed to have preached in all the world, if he had never yet begun that proclamation. Needless to say, the contention of Dr. Bullinger is an absolute fabrication. It is the special pleading of a hard-driven controversialist, bound to maintain his unscriptural system at all costs, even to destroying the unity of the Word of God.

Error is never consistent, and even the astute Bullinger has overlooked the fact that earlier in this very epistle, Paul declares the truth of the one Body just as clearly and definitely as he does in Ephesians or any later letter. Notice particularly Romans 12:4,5:

**"For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and everyone members one of another."**

Could we have a clearer declaration than this of the truth of the mystery? What ultra-dispensationalist will dare to say that this passage is an interpolation added in after years in order to make Romans fit with Ephesians? God's Word is perfect and always exact. These unspiritual theorists invariably overtook something that completely destroys their unscriptural hypotheses.

When then did Paul get this revelation of the truth of the one Body? He tells us he had been preaching it throughout the world among all nations. The answer clearly is, he received it at the time of his conversion, when he cried in amazement, "Who art Thou, Lord?" and the glorified Saviour answered, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest." This was the revelation of the mystery. In that announcement our Lord declared that every Christian on earth is so indissolubly linked up with Him as the glorified Head in Heaven, that everything done against one of them is felt by the Head. This is, the mystery—members of His Body, of His flesh, and of His bones.

And moreover, this is in exact accord with certain statements elsewhere made in the book of Acts. For instance, in chapter 5, verse 14, we read:

**"And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women."**

This was before Paul's conversion. Observe it does not simply say that they were added to the company of believers, nor even added to the assembly alone, but they were added to the Lord. This is only by the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Quite in keeping with this, when we turn to chapter 11:22-24, we read concerning the character and ministry of Barnabas that,

**"He was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost, and of faith: and much people were added unto the Lord."**

Now no one was ever added to the Lord in any other way than by the baptism of the Holy Spirit. So that clearly we have the Body of Christ here in the Acts, although the term itself is not used.

When we turn to 1 Corinthians, the only epistle which gives us divine order for the regulation of the affairs of the churches of God here on earth, we have the plain statement of this mystery as we have already seen, in chapter 12:12-14.

**"For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one Body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many."**

It is absurd to say, as these ecclesiastical hobby-riders do, that the Body referred to here is not the same thing as the Body of Ephesians and Colossians. It is a Body made up of those who formerly were Jews



or Gentiles, bond or free, but are now all one in Christ. And this Body has been formed by the baptism of the Holy Spirit. In no other way was the Body of Christ brought into existence. Objection has been raised that when the apostle goes on to apply practically the truth of our responsibility as members of the Body in our relation to each other, he uses the illustration of the eye and ear as members of the head, which, they tell us, he could not use if he thought of Christ as the Head of the Body, and was thinking of believers as one Body with Him. But he tells us distinctly in the previous chapter that the Head of every man is Christ. This could only be said of those who were linked with Him in this hallowed fellowship and members of this divine organism. The great difference, of course, between the Body as presented in Corinthians and as in Ephesians is this: the Body in Ephesians embraces all saints living or dead as to the flesh, from Pentecost to the Rapture, whereas the Body in Corinthians embraces all saints upon the earth at any given time. Seen thus in the place of responsibility, it is quite in keeping that the apostle should use the illustration that he does. It is in vain for these ultra-dispensationalists to fight against responsibility.

Recently I overheard a leader among them make this statement: "Whenever you get commandments of any kind, you are on Jewish ground, and you have given up grace." Yet in every epistle of the New Testament, we have commandments and exhortations insisting upon the believer's responsibility to recognize the government of God in this way. Grace and government are not opposing principles, but are intimately linked together. He who refuses the truth of responsibility does not thereby magnify grace, but rather is in danger of turning the grace of God into lasciviousness and becomes practically an antinomian, throwing off all restraint, professing to be saved by grace, but refusing to recognize the claims of Christ.

Coming back then to consider the passage in 1 Corinthians, we have the truth of the Body clearly set forth, and are shown how it was brought into existence in a letter written at least four years before Paul's imprisonment; and he writes that letter to a group of believers who had been brought to a knowledge of Christ through his preaching some years before. To them he says in verses 26,27:

**"And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it, or one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now ye are the Body of Christ, and members in particular."**

Verse 26 only emphasizes what we have referred to above, that here we have the Body in the place of responsibility on earth. Members in Heaven do not suffer. All members on earth do. But it is objected again

that in the Greek there is no definite article before the word "body," and therefore the passage should simply read, "Now ye are a Body of Christ," and so we are told this refers only to a local church. This does not touch the question. Every local church in apostolic days was the Body of Christ representatively in that place. It would be so today if it were not for the fact that so many unsaved people have been received into the membership of the local churches. According to the Word of God, there was only the one Body, and in any city where the Gospel had been preached and believed, that Body could be found as a local company.

When we pass on to 2 Corinthians, we find the same precious truth ministered by the apostle long before he was imprisoned at Rome. He tells us, in chapter 5:16,17:

**"Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we Him no more. Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature [or literally, this is a new creation]: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."**

Could words more plainly set forth the truth of the mystery than these? Old relationships ended and every believer brought into a new place altogether before God, and a new condition, so that Christ is now his Head, and he a member of the new creation. And this was part of the preaching that the apostle had been declaring wherever he went during all the years of his ministry.

We turn next to Galatians, a letter written, according to the best authority we have, a year earlier than Corinthians, and the ultra-dispensationalists are very sure that when Paul speaks of being baptized into Christ in this letter, there can be no reference to water baptism, but that he refers solely to the baptism of the Holy Spirit. I am not in agreement with them on this; but allowing for the moment that they are correct, then notice where it puts their theory. Note carefully chapter 3: 26-29:

**"For ye are all the children [sons] of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."**

Here again we are distinctly told that all the children of faith, Abraham's seed spiritually, are sons of God, and that all such as have

been baptized into Christ have put on Christ, and that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, nor any of the other distinctions according to nature, but all are one in Him. Is there anything in the revelation of the mystery as given in Ephesians or Colossians that goes beyond this? It is a clear definite statement of the absolute unity in Christ of those who before their conversion occupied different positions here on earth, some being Jews, some Gentiles, some free men, some slaves, some men, some women, but every distinction now obliterated in the new creation.

If any are foolish enough to object, as some have, that Abraham's seed is altogether different from the Body of Christ, then we turn to Ephesians itself, the epistle which they claim, above all others supports their unscriptural theory, and find their entire position is there completely disallowed. In the first chapter of this glorious epistle, the apostle reminds the Ephesians of things that they have learned through his ministry in days gone by. There is no hint that he is opening up to them something new, but he simply puts down in writing for permanent use, precious things already dear to them. He reminds them that they have been blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ; that they have been chosen in Him before the foundation of the world in order that they might be holy and without blame before Him; that in love, He has predestinated them unto the place of sons by Christ Jesus, having taken them into favor in the Beloved. Theirs is redemption through His blood, sins all forgiven according to the riches of His grace, and to them He has abounded in all wisdom and prudence, having made known the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure, which He hath purposed in Himself (see vers. 3-9). He points them on to the full consummation of this mystery when in the administration of the completed seasons, that is, the last dispensation, He will head up in one all things in Christ, both heavenly and earthly, and He reminds them that we have already obtained an inheritance in Him, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things according to the counsel of His own will. We need to notice the pronouns used in verses 12 and 13. He first speaks of converts from Israel, when he says, "That we should be to the praise of His glory, who first trusted in Christ." Then he refers to the Gentiles, such as these Ephesians had been, when in the next verse he says:

**"In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of His glory."**

Now observe carefully, he is far from intimating that he is at this time unveiling something of which they had never heard before. He carries them back in memory to the hour of their conversion, and declares that these things were true of them then. And, because of this, he prays that they may have deeper understanding, not of new truth about to be revealed, but of blessed and wonderful things already made known. In the second chapter, he deals specifically with the new creation, reminding them in verse 12 that they in time past were Gentiles who were called uncircumcision, and were in themselves without Christ and aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and literally atheists in the world. But now they have been made nigh by the blood of Christ. The result is that they became members of that same Body into which their converted Jewish brethren had already been assimilated. Notice carefully verses 14-18:

**"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."**

The distinction between Jew and Gentile was abolished in the cross, not after Paul's imprisonment in Rome. From that time on all who believed were brought into the Body of Christ through the one Spirit of verse 18. What were the means used to effect this? The preaching recorded in the book of Acts, for it is only that to which he can possibly refer, when he says (vers. 16,17):

**"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."**

It was necessary that the message should first go to them that were nigh, as it did in the early chapters of Acts, and then to those that were afar off; but the result of that preaching was that all who believed were reconciled to God in one Body.

In the last four verses of the chapter he shows the unity of the Church from the beginning. The Church is the household of God. It is also a great building, and he declares:

**"Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets [New Testament prophets, of course], Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth [note the tense; it is not yet completed, it is still in process of construction, but it is growing] unto an holy temple in the Lord; in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit."**

How blind must he be who can see in such a passage as this, disassociation of the Ephesian saints from the work which God began at Pentecost! They are builded into the same temple and rest upon the same foundation.

This is made even clearer in the next chapter, where Paul gives us probably the fullest information concerning the one Body that we have anywhere in the New Testament, and, therefore, we must devote considerable time and space to it. First, he tells us that he was a prisoner of Jesus Christ because of the Gentiles, and he explains that in the next few verses. It was his devotion to the revelation of the mystery which is part of the dispensation of the grace of God, that resulted in his imprisonment. He did not get this dispensation after he was in prison. Then he insists that this revelation was not made in previous ages unto the sons of men, that is, it was not made known in Old Testament times. But he tells us it is "now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit." Now if I believed in over-emphasis as some do, I should like to print these words in very bold type, but to do so would be an insult to the intelligence of my readers. I simply desire to ask their most careful attention to these words. The Bullingerites tell us that the mystery was only made known to the apostle Paul, not to other apostles. The apostle himself tells us here that "it is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets." Note not only the plural, but that others besides apostles had this revelation. How utterly absurd would words like these be if he were referring to something that had just been secretly made known to him! But is it true that other apostles and prophets had already known if the mystery? It is. This he declares in these words. What is that mystery? Verse six is the answer.

**"That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same Body, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel."**

Thus they too become Abraham's seed, because they are children of faith.

The mystery then is not simply centered in the term "Body," but whatever expression may be used, the mystery is that during the present age all distinction between believing Jews and believing Gentiles is done away in Christ. Was this mystery made known by other servants besides the apostle Paul? It was. The apostle John makes it known in his account of our Lord's ministry as given in the tenth chapter of his Gospel. There we read that the Lord Jesus, as the Good Shepherd, entered into the sheepfold of Judaism to lead His own out into glorious liberty. And cryptically He adds,

**"Other sheep I have which are not of this fold: Them also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice; and there shall be one fold and one Shepherd."**

This is perhaps the earliest intimation of the mystery that we have. It was not committed to writing, of course, until some years after the epistle to the Ephesians was written. But it shows us that John, as an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, had received the revelation of the mystery even before the apostle Paul did.

Then what of the apostle Peter? We dare to say this same mystery was made known to him on the housetop of Simon's residence in Joppa, when he had the vision of the descending sheet from Heaven and saw in it all manner of beasts and creeping things, and heard the word from Heaven,

**"What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common"** [or unclean].

This was to him an intimation that in Christ the distinction between Jew and Gentile was henceforth to be done away, and he makes it perfectly clear that this was his conviction when he stood up to preach in the household of Cornelius (Acts 10:34 to end). Moreover, his epistles emphasize the same fact, though not in the full way that those of the apostle Paul do. John and Peter are apostles. Are there any prophets who give evidence of having in measure at least understood this truth? The greatest of all the New Testament prophets is Luke himself, and in his book of the Acts, the mystery is plainly made known, though not taught doctrinally. We see God working in grace to unite Jew and Gentile into one Body.

Turning back to Ephesians three, we find in verse seven that the apostle tells us that he was made a minister according to the gift of the grace of God for the very purpose of making known this mystery. He says in verses eight and nine,

**"Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace**

**given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ."**

This had been his great responsibility throughout the years. Because of this, he had suffered bitter persecution, on account of which he was even then in prison, but he is the more concerned that after his death there should be left on record such a full statement of this truth that no one could lose sight of it.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **Further Examination of the Epistles**

PASSING over for the present the Apostle Paul's presentation of the sevenfold unity of Christianity in Ephesians 4, and his identification of the Body and the Bride in chapter 5, which we shall discuss later, we turn now to others of the prison epistles to see if we can find the slightest intimation of a new revelation given after Paul reached Rome. Unquestionably, Philippians was written during the Roman imprisonment. But we search its four precious chapters in vain for the least suggestion that he has received anything new to unfold. In chapter 1, where he presents Christ as the believer's life, he shows how thoroughly the evangelistic spirit had taken possession of him, so that even in his prison-cell he was rejoicing that Christ was being preached whether in pretence or in truth, and his own desire is that this same Christ may ever be magnified in his body, whether in life or in death. He urges the saints to stand fast in one spirit contending for the very faith which he had already made known to them.

There is not a hint that he has now something new to reveal; that is, that the old dispensation to which they had hitherto belonged had come to a close, and that a new one had begun. In chapter 2 he dwells on Christ as our Example, and shows how he himself and Timothy and Epaphroditus during the years had sought to follow in Christ's steps, and this is still before his soul. In the third chapter he recounts his past experiences and self-confidence in the old days before he was saved, and then shows how the change was brought about by a sight of the risen Christ. From that moment on, he counted all things as loss for the One who had won his heart, and he was pressing on toward the mark for the prize of the calling of God on high in Christ Jesus. He calls upon them whom he designates as "perfect" to be thus minded. "Perfect" here means "mature," or we might even say well-rounded, or well-balanced. Nothing is needed to give them this perfection in

addition to what they already had. Surely, if anywhere, this was the place to show them that hitherto they were but babes, and had only received an initial revelation, but that now he had something for them of an altogether new character which would perfect them in Christ. But there is no word of any such added truth. Nor yet in the last chapter where he exhorts to unity and peace among themselves. May we not say that Paul is singularly amiss in not sharing with his old converts at Philippi the new revelation he had received, if such a thing were really true?

But it was not true:—all the reasoning of the ultra-dispensationalists to the contrary notwithstanding;—for when we turn over to Colossians we find him once more reiterating the same truths he had proclaimed for a generation. He shows that two ministries had been committed to him from the first. He had been made a minister of the Gospel. That Gospel has been preached in all the creation which is under heaven. He had also been made a minister of "the mystery which hath been hidden from ages and generations, but now," he says, "is made manifest to His saints: to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in [or, among] you, the hope of glory: whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus: whereunto I also labor, striving according to His working, which worketh in me mightily" (Col. 1:26-29).

Let it be carefully observed that he is here covering his entire ministry. He had no such opportunity to preach to multitudes while he was in his Roman, or as some think, his Caesarean prison at the time he wrote this epistle. But he tells us what had characterized his ministry throughout the years. Other saints there were whom he had not met personally, as well as those at Colosse. He thinks of the Laodicean believers, and he longs that they all may be brought into the knowledge of this mystery. But it is not something new. It is that which has ever characterized his teaching.

The Epistle of Titus is not of course a prison epistle at all, but it was written later than any of those that are so designated, excepting Second Timothy. In this letter Paul instructs the younger preacher, Titus, as to the divine order for local churches, the work of a true pastor, and the testimony committed to the servants of God. Surely here, if anywhere, we should expect him to put before Titus the fact that the "transitional period" has now come to an end and Titus must ring the changes as the ultra-dispensationalists do to-day, on "body truth," "closed doors," "Jewish Gospels," "Kingdom Age," etc., etc., ad nauseam. But, no; none of these terms so frequently used and played upon until one is wearied, are suggested to Titus. He is simply to go on preaching and



teaching the very same things that have been taught during his earlier association with the Apostle Paul.

The brief letter to Philemon we may pass over, as we would hardly expect to find anything doctrinal in it; and yet even here if Paul's heart were throbbing with the joy of some absolutely new opening up of truth, we would almost wonder how he could help saying a word about it, at least to his friend Philemon.

Hebrews was undoubtedly written very shortly before the apostle's martyrdom, granting that it is from the pen of Paul. That this is so, I have tried to make clear in my book on the Epistle to the Hebrews, and I shall not attempt to go into it now. But in any case, it was undoubtedly written very shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem, and here if anywhere, one might expect these Hebrew believers to be told that the "kingdom age" is now over, "the transition period" has now been finished, and it is for them to accept the new revelation of "body truth." But we search in vain for anything of the kind. It is simply a normal presentation of the precious things of Christ, showing how completely Old Testament types have had their fulfilment in Him and His finished work, and that all who believe now come under the blessings of the new covenant.

Probably later than Hebrews is the second letter to Timothy. It was penned during Paul's second imprisonment, very shortly before his death. As this occurred in A. D. 66 or 67, we may see how far along we have come and still no mention of any new revelation. So far as the truth that is dealt with is concerned, Second Timothy might have been written any time before the first imprisonment. It is in perfect harmony with all the apostle's previous ministry.

But now there are other Epistles to be considered. We have already seen that Paul makes no claim to being the sole depository of the revelation of the mystery. He says it was made known to Christ's holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit, and so we turn to consider the writings of other apostles and prophets asking, "Have we in them any intimation of a new revelation after Paul went to Rome?"

We may dismiss the Epistle of James as not touching on this question. It is addressed definitely to the twelve tribes scattered abroad, and is God's last word, as it were, to those of Israel who were still more or less linked in spirit to the synagogue. Bullingerites generally tell us that James was the first epistle to be written but this is absurd on the face of it. It is quite evident that James is a corrective epistle. It must have been written after the doctrine of justification by faith, as proclaimed by Paul, had been widely preached, for James writes to check those

who were abusing that doctrine and using it as an occasion for the flesh. No one can read chapter 2 thoughtfully without seeing that it is based upon, and has in view throughout, Paul's teaching in Romans 4. James does not contradict Paul in the slightest degree, but he does show that there is another justification than that of which Paul speaks. The great apostle to the Gentiles deals particularly with justification by faith before God. James, the apostle to the twelve tribes, emphasizes justification by works before men.

First Peter was probably written before Paul's second imprisonment. Second Peter was certainly written afterwards, and all of Paul's letters were already in circulation when this epistle was penned. Note Peter's own words: "And account that the long-suffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other Scriptures, unto their own destruction" (2 Pet. 3:15,16). It is impossible to understand these verses excepting in the light of the fact that all the Epistles of Paul were already in circulation. Does Peter then tell us that a new dispensation had come in, and that the middle wall between Jew and Gentile having now for the first time been broken down and the one Body formed, the believers to whom he writes, who were of Jewish extraction, are to recognize this new revelation? Not at all. Peter has never heard of any such thing. He puts Paul's writings on the same plane as the other Scriptures, but warns against the danger of misunderstanding, and so wresting them.

Long years after all the other apostles had gone home to heaven, we find the aged John still preserved in life and caring for the churches of God. According to apparently reliable Church History, he made his home in Ephesus, and moved about in old age among the other churches mentioned in the first three chapters of the Book of the Revelation, those churches which the Bullingerites declare never existed in the past but are still to arise as Jewish Assemblies in the Great Tribulation! Could anything be much more grotesque?

John's Epistles were written, according to the very best authority we have, some time in the last decade of the first century of the Christian era. Weigh this well. Paul had been in heaven for nearly thirty years. John was an inspired apostle, and surely would know, if any one did, of the new revelation and its importance. But we search his letters in vain for the least reference to anything of the kind. In fact, we find the very opposite. False teaching had come in, and he writes to garrison the hearts of the saints against it. In order to do this, he refers them back to

that which was from the beginning, namely, to the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and His apostles, as a careful reading of his first Epistle makes abundantly clear. There is not the slightest basis for the thought that a fuller unfolding of truth had been vouchsafed to Paul and others about thirty years after Christ's ascension. It is the message that they had heard from the beginning which he again commends to them.

Let us imagine the late Dr. Bullinger, or some of his lesser satellites, living, not in the twentieth century, but in the closing days of the first century of the Christian era. Filled with their ideas of a new revelation given to Paul in prison, can you by any stretch of the imagination think of them writing epistles or treatises in which no reference whatever is made to the supposedly new doctrines? The fact of the matter is that these men today can scarcely open their mouths without speaking of these things. No matter what text they begin to expound, they almost invariably wind up with something about their system of rightly dividing the Word of Truth, and the importance of making the fine distinctions which they imagine they see in the Word. Yet inspired men like Peter and John, and without particularly going into it, we may add Jude, can expound and apply the Truth of God in the fullest possible way without any reference to anything of the kind. What is the only legitimate conclusion? It is that this whole ultra-dispensational system is an idle dream unsupported by the testimony of the inspired writings.

Error is never consistent. It always over-emphasizes some point generally unimportant and fails to recognize other things of great importance. Heresy is simply a school of opinion in which something is particularly pressed out of proportion to its logical place. Who would dare to say that this system we have been attempting to refute is not therefore heretical? Mark, I do not mean to class it with what Peter calls "damnable heresies," but it is certainly schismatic, and its votaries constitute a special school of opinion within the professed Church of God, a school that attaches great importance to something which after all is not evident to the vast majority of devoted and godly believers. That the effect of this can only be division and harmful, is not only self-evident, but has been abundantly manifest in many places. The Holy Spirit says, "A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject; knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself" (Titus 3:10,11). This is as certainly the Word of God as anything else revealed in the Scripture of Truth.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Is the Church the Bride of the Lamb?

ONE of the first positions generally taken by the ultra-dispensationalists is that it is unthinkable that the Church should be the Body of Christ, and yet at the same time be identified with the Bride of the Lamb. They insist that there is a mixing of figures here which is utterly untenable. How, they ask with scorn, could the Church be both the Bride and a part of the Body of the Bridegroom? Some even go farther and suggest that Christians who all down through the centuries have had no difficulty as to the two figures (recognizing the fact that they are figures, and therefore that there need be no confusion in thought when it comes to harmonizing both), are actually guilty of charging Deity with spiritual polygamy! I would not put such an abominable thought in writing, but it is their own expression which I have heard again and again. They point out, what all Bible students readily admit, that in the Old Testament, Israel is called the bride and the wife of Jehovah. "Then," they exclaim, "how can the Lord have two wives without being guilty of the very thing that He Himself condemns in His creatures here on earth?"

In view of such absurd deductions, it will be necessary to examine with some care just how these figures are used. In the first place, we find God using a number of different figurative expressions in speaking of Israel. He declares Himself to be their Father, that is, the Father of the nation, and Israel is called His son. "Out of Egypt have I called My son" (Hosea 11:1), and, "Let My son go, that he may serve me" (Exod. 4:23). In other places similar expressions are used, and yet the prophets again and again speak of Israel as the wife of Jehovah, and the later prophets depict her as a divorced wife because of her unfaithfulness, some day to be received back again, when she has been purged from her sins. But it is important to see that a divorced wife can never again be a bride, even though she may be forgiven and restored to her wifely estate. What incongruity do we have here if we are to interpret Scripture on the principle of the Bullingerites. Here is a son who is also a wife. What utter absurdity!

Then again we have Israel depicted as a vine. "God brought a vine out of Egypt" (Ps. 80:8), and, "Israel is an empty vine; he bringeth forth fruit for himself" (Hosea 10:1). In many other places, the same figure is used. Elsewhere we have this favored nation spoken of as the priests of the Lord, occupying a special position throughout all the millennium, as though they were intermediaries between the Gentiles and Jehovah Himself. Other similitudes are used, but these are enough to show that there is no attempt made in Scripture to harmonize every figure. Each

one is used as suits God's purpose for the moment. So the nation which at one time is viewed as a son is seen on another occasion as a vine, and elsewhere as a wife, and again as a nation of priests.

This being so in connection with Israel, why need we be surprised if a similar diversity of terms is used in connection with the Church? When our Lord first introduces the subject of the new order, He speaks of the Church as a building: "Upon this rock I will build My Church" (Matt. 16:18). The apostle Paul views the Church in the same way in 1 Corinthians 3:9,10, "I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. Ye are God's building." Again in Ephesians 2:19-22: "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God: and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." In regard to this passage, please take note that if the Bullingerites are correct, we have here a building suspended in the air with a great gap between the foundation and the superstructure; for this building is said to rest upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, but according to the views of those we are discussing, we must separate in a very definite way the New Testament apostles and prophets of the book of Acts from the Ephesian church, which is supposed to be a different company altogether. The absurdity of this becomes the more apparent as we see how we would have to do damage to the picture of the building as used here by the apostle Paul. The fact is the Church of Acts and that of the prison epistles is one and indivisible. In I Timothy 3:15, he speaks of "the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." The apostle Peter looks at the Church in exactly the same way, as a company of living stones built upon the Living Stone, our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 2:5).

We have already seen that the figure of the Body is used in a number of Paul's writings, not only in the prison Epistles, but in Romans and 1 Corinthians, to set forth the intimate relationship subsisting between Christ in glory and His people on earth, whereas the house expresses stability, and tells us that the Church is a dwelling place for God in this world, as the temple was of old. The Body speaks of union with Christ, by the indwelling Spirit. But Paul sees no incongruity whatever in changing the figure from that of the Body to the Bride. In the fifth chapter of Ephesians he glides readily from one to the other, and no violence whatever is done to either view. He shows us that a man's wife is to be regarded as his own body. And in the latter part of that chapter, where he goes back to the marriage relationship as originally

established by God, he says:

**"Therefore as the Church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. 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. Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself: and the wife see that she reverence her husband" (vers. 24-33).**

Surely nothing could be plainer than that we are to understand the relationship of Adam and Eve at the very beginning was intended by God to set forth the great mystery of Christ and the Church. Writing to the Corinthians at an earlier date, he said, "I have espoused you as a chaste virgin unto Christ," and Christian behavior is shown to spring from the responsibility connected with that espousal. The Church is viewed as an affianced bride, not yet married, but called upon to be faithful to her absent Lord until the day when she will be openly acknowledged by Him as His Bride. It is this glorious occasion that John brings before us in the nineteenth chapter of the book of Revelation. It is of no earthly bride he is speaking, but of the heavenly. After the destruction of the false harlot, Babylon the Great, the marriage supper of the Lamb is celebrated in the Father's house, and all saints are called upon to rejoice because the marriage of the Lamb has come and His wife hath made herself ready. At the judgment-seat of Christ, she receives from His hand the linen garments in which she is to be arrayed at the marriage feast. Notice that on this occasion we have not only the Bride and the Bridegroom, but we read, "Blessed are they that are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb." These invited guests are distinguished from the Bride herself. They of course are another group of redeemed sinners, namely, Old Testament saints, and possibly some Tribulation saints who have been martyred for Christ's sake. These are the friends of the Bridegroom who rejoice in His happiness when He takes His Bride to Himself.

All down through the Christian centuries believers have revelled in the sweetness of the thought of the bridal relationship, setting forth, as no

other figure does, the intensity of Christ's love for His own. How truly we may sing:

*"The bride eyes not her garment,  
But her dear Bridegroom's face;  
I will not gaze on glory,  
But on my King of grace;  
Not at the crown He giveth,  
But on His piercèd hand;  
The Lamb is all the glory  
Of Immanuel's land."*

How much we would lose if we lost this! And yet one is pained sometimes to realize how insensible Christians who ought to know better, can be as to its preciousness. I remember on one occasion hearing an advocate of the system we are reviewing exclaim, "I am not part of the Bride; I am part of the Bridegroom Himself. I belong to Christ's Body, and His Body is far more precious to Him than His Bride." I replied, "You mean then that you think far more of your own body than you do of your wife!" He was rather taken back, as he might well be.

But after all, if Israel is a divorced wife to be restored some day, and the Church is also a bride, is there not ground for what some have called "spiritual polygamy?" Certainly not. Similar figures may be used in each dispensation to illustrate spiritual realities; and then it is important to see that Israel is distinctively called the wife of Jehovah, whereas the Church is the Bride of the Lamb. Israel's nuptial relationship is with God Himself apart altogether from any question of incarnation. The Church is the Bride of the Incarnate One who became the Lamb of God for our redemption. Who would want to lose the blessedness of this?

In the last chapter of the book of the Revelation, we have added confirmation as to the correctness of the position taken in this paper. In verse 16, our Lord Jesus declares Himself as the Coming One, saying, "I am the Root and Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star." In the very next verse we are told, "And the Spirit and the Bride say, Come." Here we have the Church's response to our Lord's declaration that He is the Morning Star. The morning star shines out before the rising of the sun. It is as the Morning Star Christ comes for His Church. Unto Israel, He will arise as the Sun of Righteousness with healing in His wings. And so here the moment the announcement is made which indicates His near return, the Spirit who dwells in the Church, and the Bride actuated by the Spirit, cry with eager longing, "Come," for the word is addressed to Him. How truly absurd it would

be to try to bring Israel in here as though the earthly people were those responding to the Saviour's voice during this present age!

But so determined are these ultra-dispensationalists to take from the Church everything that is found in the book of Revelation, that they even insist that the letters addressed to the churches in chapters 2 and 3 are all for Israel too. Ignoring the fact that the apostle John had labored for years in the Roman proconsular Province of Asia, that he was thoroughly familiar with all these seven churches, they nevertheless even go so far as to deny that some of these churches had any existence in the first century of the Christian era, when John wrote the Apocalypse, although Sir William Ramsay's researches have proven the contrary. On the other hand they declare that all of these churches are to rise up in the future after the Body has been removed to Heaven, and that then the seven letters will have their application, but have no present bearing upon the consciences of the saints. I cannot conceive of anything more Satanic than this. Here are churches actually raised up of God through the preaching of the Gospel. Ephesus we know well. Laodicea is mentioned in the letter to the Colossians. The other churches we may be sure existed at the time and in exactly the state that John depicts, and the risen Christ addresses these churches in the most solemn way, and seven times over calls upon all exercised souls to give heed to what he says to each one, crying, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." In these letters, we have depicted every possible condition in which the churches of God can be found from Apostolic days to the end of the Christian era. More than that: we have in a mystic way the moral and spiritual principles of the entire course of Church History portrayed. All this should have immense weight with us as believers, and should speak loudly to our consciences; but along comes the Bullingerite and, with a wave of his interpretative wand, dismisses them entirely for the present age, airily declaring that they have no message for us whatever, that they are all Jewish, and will only have their place in the Great Tribulation after the Church is gone! And thus the people of God who accept this unscriptural system are robbed of not only the precious things in which these letters abound, but their consciences become indifferent to the solemn admonitions found therein. Surely this is a masterpiece of Satanic strategy, whereby under the plea of rightly dividing the Word of Truth, the Scriptures are so wrongly divided that they cease to have any message for God's people today, and the Word of the Lord is made of no effect by this unscriptural tradition. And yet the Lord in instructing John, says, "Write the things which are." It is the present continuous tense. It might be rendered, "The things which are now going on." "Not at all," exclaims the Bullingerite. "These are the things which are not going on, neither will they have any place so



long as the Church of God is on earth." Others may accept this as deep teaching and advanced truth. Personally, I reject it as a Satanic perversion calculated to destroy the power of the Word of God over the souls of His people.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **Do Baptism and the Lord's Supper Have Any Place in the Present Dispensation of the Grace of God?**

IT is most distressing to one who has revelled in the grace of God for years, but has recognized on the other hand that grace produces loving obedience in the heart of the believer, to read the puerile and childish diatribes of the ultra-dispensationalists, as they inveigh against the Christian ordinances as though observance of these in some way contravened the liberty of Grace. Insisting that Paul had a new ministry revealed to him after Acts 28, and that this ministry is given only in the so-called prison epistles, they make a great deal of the fact that in these epistles we do not have any distinct instruction as to the baptizing of believers, or the observance of the Lord's Supper.

We have already seen, I trust clearly, that Paul himself disavows any new revelation having been given him after his imprisonment, but insists that the mystery was that very message which he had already made known to all nations for the obedience of faith. It was but part of that whole counsel of God which he had declared to the Ephesians long before his arrest. These brethren, by a process of sophistical reasoning, try to prove that baptism belonged only to an earlier dispensation and was in some sense meritorious, as though it had in itself saving virtue, but that since the dispensation of grace has been fully revealed, there is no place for baptism, because of changed conditions for salvation. To state this argument is but to expose its fallacy.

Let one point be absolutely clear: No one was ever saved in any dispensation on any other ground than the finished work of Christ. In all the ages before the cross, God justified men by faith; in all the years since, men have been justified in exactly the same way. Adam believed God and was clothed with coats of skin, a picture of one becoming the righteousness of God in Christ. Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness. Nevertheless, afterwards he was circumcised; but that circumcision, the apostle tells us, was simply a seal of the righteousness he had by faith. And throughout all the Old Testament dispensation, however legalistic Jews may have observed the ordinance of circumcision and thought of it as having in itself some saving virtue, it still remained in God's sight, as in the beginning, only

a seal, where there was genuine faith, of that righteousness which He imputed. The difficulty with many who reason as these Bullingerites do, is that they cannot seem to understand the difference between the loving loyal obedience of a devoted heart, and a legal obedience which is offered to God as though it were in itself meritorious. No one was ever saved through the sacrifices offered under law, for it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sin. Nevertheless, wherever there was real faith in Israel, the sacrifices were offered because of the instruction given in the Word of God, and in these sacrifices the work of Christ was pictured continually.

When John the Baptist came in the way of righteousness, he called on men to confess their sinfulness and their just desert of death by baptism, and so we read that the publicans and sinners "justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John." There was no merit in the baptism. It was the divinely appointed way of acknowledging their sinfulness and need of a Saviour. Therefore it is called a baptism "unto repentance for the remission of sins." They were like men in debt, giving their notes to the divine creditor. A note does not pay a debt but it is an acknowledgment of indebtedness. Christ's baptism was simply his endorsement of all of these notes. When He said to John, who would have hindered Him from being baptized, "Suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness," it was as though He said, "In this way I pledge Myself to meet every righteous demand of the throne of God on behalf of these confessed sinners." And this is surely what He had in mind when, three years later, He exclaimed, "I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" (Luke 12:50). On the cross He met the claims of righteousness and thus fulfilled the meaning of His baptism.

Christian baptism has its beginning in resurrection. It was the risen Christ about to be glorified who commissioned His apostles to go out, not simply to Jews, observe, nor yet to proclaim a second offer of the kingdom, as some say, but to carry the Gospel to men of all nations, baptizing those who professed to believe, in (or, unto) the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. This we see them literally doing throughout the early days of the Church, as recorded in the Book of Acts. Wherever the Gospel is preached, baptism is linked with it, not as part of the Gospel, for Paul distinctly says, "Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the Gospel," but as an outward expression of faith in the Gospel. It is evident in the Book of Acts that there is a somewhat different presentation of this, according as to whether the message is addressed to Jews in outward covenant relation with God or to Gentiles who are strangers to the covenants of promise. Paul calls these two aspects of the one Gospel, the Gospel of the circumcision

and the Gospel of the uncircumcision. The Jew being already a member of a nation which, up to the cross, had been recognized as in covenant relationship with God, was called upon to be baptized to save himself from that untoward generation. That is, to step out, as it were, from the nation, no longer claiming national privilege, nor yet being exposed to national judgment. With the Gentile, it was otherwise. He was simply called upon to believe the Gospel, and believing it, to confess his faith in baptism. And this abides to the end of the age as our Lord Himself clearly declared in the closing verses of Matthew 28. There has never been any change in the order.

It has been said that the baptism of the Holy Spirit superseded water baptism, but Scripture teaches the very contrary. Cornelius and his household were baptized with the Holy Spirit when they believed the Word spoken by Peter. But the apostle, turning to his Jewish brethren, immediately asks: "Who can forbid water that these should not be baptized which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?" And they were at once baptized by authority of the Lord Jesus, which is what the expression "in the name of" involves. This was not a meritorious act. It was a blessed and precious privilege granted to this Gentile household upon the evidence of their faith in Christ.

It has been objected that the apostle Paul himself makes light of baptism and was really glad that he had not baptized many at Corinth. It is surely a most shifty kind of exegesis that would lead any one to make such a statement. In the record in Acts, where we read of Paul's ministry in Corinth, we are told that many of the Corinthians hearing, believed and were baptized. Paul did not himself do the baptizing, save in a few instances, but he certainly saw that it was done, and the Holy Spirit evidently quotes the record with approval. Why then did Paul thank God in First Corinthians 1, that he had baptized so few? The answer is perfectly plain. Because the Corinthians were making much of human leaders and he saw the tendency to glory in man. He knew that if there were many there who had been baptized by him, they would be likely, under the prevailing conditions, to pride themselves upon the fact that he, the apostle to the Gentiles, had been the one who baptized them. But far from making light of baptism, when he chides them for their sectarian spirit, he shows them that the only name worthy of exaltation is the name of the One by whose authority they had been baptized.

As to the various disputed scriptures in Romans 6:3,4; Colossians 2:12; Ephesians 4:5; and Galatians 3:27, where baptism is mentioned without any definite indication as to whether it is water or Spirit, one thing at least is perfectly clear. Water baptism is necessarily implied, because Spirit baptism is but a figurative expression, and water baptism was the

act upon which the figure was based. This comes out in the first mention of Spirit baptism. "I indeed," says John, "baptize you with water" [this then was the actual literal baptism], "but He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire." It is not literal baptism in the Holy Spirit. It is not literal fire, but figurative. If this be but kept in mind, there would be no confusion. Baptism in water pictures both burial and resurrection. On this Paul bases his instruction in Romans 6 and Colossians 2:12. Thus water baptism marks people out as belonging to Christ by profession, and therefore is the basic thought in Galatians 3:27, even though it is by the Spirit's baptism that people are actually united to Christ.

There has been much disputation regarding the passage in Ephesians 4, but without laying special stress on the importance of water baptism, it is very evident that the passage would have no meaning if water baptism, as well as that of the Spirit, were not in view. Let me try to make this plain. In the opening verses, the apostle calls upon the Ephesian believers, and of course all Christians, to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith they have been called, and he lays stress on the importance of endeavoring to keep the Spirit's unity in the bond of peace. Then he explains this unity as being sevenfold. In verse 4 he emphasizes three special things, one Body, one Spirit, and one hope. Now there can be no question that the Spirit is brought in here as forming the Body, and the Spirit forms the Body by what is called elsewhere the baptism of the Spirit. Then in verse 5 we have another trio, one Lord, one faith, one baptism. Here it seems to me clearly enough we have, not a duplication of what we have already had in verse 4, but something that is more outward. One Lord in whom we believe; one faith that we confess; and one baptism by which we express our allegiance to that Lord and that faith. In verse 6 we have God Himself as the Father of all, the Founder of this blessed unity.

Now without going into any disputation as to whether the term "one baptism," is to be confined to the baptism of the Spirit, or the baptism of water, it is certainly evident that it at least implies water. No man confesses his faith in Christ by the baptism of the Holy Spirit alone, for millions have been baptized by the Holy Spirit, and yet the world knows nothing of it. On the other hand, of course, many have faith in Christ who have never been baptized in water, but that does not alter the fact that, according to the Lord's own instructions, water baptism should follow confession of Christ. The Lord has never rescinded this order, and for men to attempt to do so is but to substitute human authority for divine.

The statement has been made that inasmuch as all carnal ordinances were abolished in the cross, this includes baptism and the Lord's

Supper. However, to merely state this is to refute it, inasmuch as Christian baptism was not given until just before the Lord's ascension, and the Lord's Supper was given from heaven to the apostle Paul by special revelation, long after Christ's ascension (1 Cor. 11:23,24). To read into such a passage as Hebrews 6:1,2 any reference to Christian baptism, is ignorance so colossal that it does not even deserve an answer. The apostle there is definitely referring to Judaism in contrast with Christianity. The "doctrine of baptisms" is the teaching of washings under law.

To the lover of the Lord Jesus Christ there can be nothing legal about baptism. It is simply the glad expression of a grateful heart recognizing its identity with Christ in death, burial, and resurrection. Many of us look back to the moment when we were thus baptized as one of the most precious experiences we have ever known.

All ultra-dispensationalists do not reject the Lord's Supper, but those who are rigidly tied up to the prison epistles and have practically no other Bible, set this blessed ordinance aside in the same curt way that they dismiss water baptism. We are told that in a spiritual dispensation there is no place for outward observances. And yet, singularly enough, these brethren meet together for worship and prayer, and that very frequently upon the first day of the week, though they are almost a unit in denying that this is the Lord's Day. They insist, though the Holy Ghost has Himself changed the term; that the Lord's Day is identical with the Day of the Lord; and so the observance of the first day of the week is with them simply gross legality. Think of parting with all the holy privileges of the Lord's Day on the plea that it is a mark of higher spirituality to make this a common day like any other. I know that some quote as authority for this, Paul's words in Romans 14:5: "One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind." But an examination of the entire passage in which this verse is found, will make it clear that the apostle is here referring to Jewish distinctions between clean and unclean meats, and holy and common days, and he would have Gentile believers respect even the legal feeling of their Jewish brethren in these matters. The enlightened Christian of course in a very real sense esteems every day alike, that is, every day is devoted to the glory of God, but this does not mean that he fails to differentiate between days on which he participates in the ordinary activities of the world, and the first day of the week, which is largely set aside for spiritual exercises. We have known men to glory in their liberty, as they called it, who could take part in Christian service on Lord's Day morning and spend the afternoon golfing, or in some other more worldly way, and this on pretence of a higher spirituality than

that of those who are supposed to be legal, because they use the hours of the entire day either for their own spiritual upbuilding or for the blessing of others.

It is strange that many, who insist that there are no ordinances or commandments connected with the dispensation of pure grace, should take up collections in their services and urge people to give as unto the Lord to support their ministry. Logically, they should tell people that giving is legal and belongs to the old dispensation, but has no place in the present age, when we simply receive but give nothing in return! The passage already referred to in 1 Corinthians 11 makes it clear that though the apostle Paul did not receive his instruction concerning the observance of the Lord's Supper from the twelve, it was given to him by special revelation from heaven, thus indicating what an important place it has in this age. Surely one is guilty of gross perversion of Scripture who dares to teach that since Paul's imprisonment, the Lord's Supper should no longer be observed, when the Holy Ghost has said, "As often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till He come."

The most sacred hours that many of us have ever known have been those spent with fellow-believers seated at the table of the Lord, recognizing in the broken bread and poured-out wine, the memorials of our Saviour's death, and thus in a new way entering into and appropriating the reality of which the symbols speak. We may be thought legal, because we refuse to surrender such precious privileges at the behest of some of our self-styled expositors of pure grace, but we remember that "the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world," and until He come, by His grace, to remember Him in the way of His own appointment.

## **Chapter 8**

### **Concluding Remarks**

IN closing this review of the system of teaching which we have had before us, I do not think it necessary to go into the questions at any length of Soul-sleeping and Annihilation (conditional immortality), or the opposite view of the final restoration of Universalism. As already mentioned, the followers of the late Dr. E. W. Bullinger have largely taken up with the first type of teaching in Great Britain; whereas in America many of them have supported Universalist views. But these heretical teachings have been so ably answered on many different

occasions by other writers, that it would seem like a work of supererogation to go into them now. I only mention them, in fact, as a warning to those who are dabbling with this system, for that which looks so innocent in the beginning often ends up in complete departure from "the faith once delivered to the saints."

One who was a leading advocate of Bullingerism on the west coast for many years, has put out literature recently which denies the Eternal Sonship of the Lord Jesus Christ, the true personality of the Holy Spirit, and many other important truths. In order to support his restoration system, he has put out a private translation of the New Testament which, by his disciples, is generally accepted as absolute authority. Making no pretence to scholarship myself, but simply seeking to be a reverent student of the English Bible with whatever help I have been enabled to glean throughout more than forty years of studying the Word, I hesitated to pronounce upon many of the peculiar translations in this new New Testament, but several years ago it was my privilege to spend some time in company with the late Dr. A. T. Robertson, undoubtedly the foremost Greek scholar in America, and possibly without a peer elsewhere. I asked him if he had ever examined the Version in question. With a look of disgust, he said, "I certainly did. The editor had the impertinence to send me a copy, and asked me to commend his ignorance to others."

I said, "Doctor, would you give me in a few words your real estimate of this work, and give me the privilege of quoting you as occasion may arise?"

He replied, "I can give it to you in two words, Piffle and Puffle, and you may tell any one that that is my estimate of this vaunted translation."

In giving publicity to this conversation, my desire is to warn those who are carried away by great pretence to learning, who may not themselves be familiar with the original languages in which the Bible was written, and are therefore easily impressed by a parade of assumed scholarship.

Generally speaking, I have sought to avoid personalities in this discussion. Many otherwise excellent men have taken up these new views. I have no quarrel with men. I do not desire to reflect upon or belittle any of them. It is the Truth of God that is in question, and my appeal is therefore to the Word itself.

Singularly enough, since these papers began running serially, I have received abusive letters from a number of different teachers accusing me of attacking them. One such writes that he is neither a Bullingerite

nor an ultra-dispensationalist, and resents being so designated. Each one must draw his own conclusions as to whether he holds the views I have endeavored to refute. "I speak as unto wise men. judge ye what I say."

In bringing these papers to a close, I would urge interested readers to remember the exhortation of the apostle, "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good." —H. A. Ironside

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