

Paul's "Mystery"

Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the secrets of God (1 Corinthians 4.1).

Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the secret which has been kept secret for long ages past, but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith; to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen (Romans 16.25).

Introduction

God laid the groundwork for the creation of the Jewish race with His call of Abram. After Jacob and his sons moved to Egypt they multiplied and Israel became a populous people. After they escaped Egypt, they became a nation under Moses with a government based upon the Mosaic Law. All God's dealings with mankind were mediated through Israel from Abraham to Paul. Based upon the Abrahamic Covenant, God's blessings to Gentiles were to come through Israel. And all blessings to Israel were to come through the Messiah. How could God bless Gentiles when the channel of blessing, Israel, had rejected their source of blessing? The Old Testament had no answer to this question. God had revealed no plan to bless Gentiles apart from Israel.

When God saved and commissioned Paul He began a new program. With this program, He could bless Gentiles despite Israel's rejection of their Messiah. In short, God instituted a salvific revolution. With Paul's commission, God created the Church, the body of Christ, and brought in a new age, the Church age. The Church would not operate under Law as Israel had but under grace (Romans 6.14). Paul stands at the

headwaters of this new program. As such, Paul is the founder of Christianity. He is THE man for the Church as Abraham and Moses were THE men (racial and national heads) of Israel. Only when one understands this truth can one begin to understand Christian theology.

Saul to Paul

Saul of Tarsus, who became Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles (Romans 11.13), had one of the most remarkable lives in history. God transformed him from being Jesus of Nazareth's greatest enemy to become his most vigorous servant and evangelist. But of much greater significance than Paul's personal transformation was God's change in His program. God revealed truths to Paul that He had kept secret. Jesus, during his three-year ministry on earth, never revealed these teachings and the Twelve knew nothing of them, even after Christ's resurrection. Christendom's greatest theological error has been its failure to recognize or understand Paul's unique apostleship. Because of this, vast theological confusion and error exist within the Church. On the one hand, perhaps we should not be too hard. Peter, at the end of his life, struggled with Paul's teachings. Shortly before his execution, he wrote:

*¹⁴ Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless,
¹⁵ and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, ¹⁶ as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction. (2 Peter 3.14-16).*

But on the other hand, we should not be too easy. We have had

2,000 years to understand the theological change God worked through Paul. Sadly, the vast majority of theologians, scholars, and teachers throughout Christendom remain ignorant of or refuse to acknowledge this great fact.

Luke introduced Saul of Tarsus as one present at Stephen's trial. Saul held the clothes of those who stoned Stephen (Acts 7.58). Stephen, one of the first deacons (Acts 6.1-5) of the Jewish church, had been arrested by the Sanhedrin. He had become a thorn in their side for none of their scholars could cope with his miracles or his wisdom (Acts 6.8-10). One wonders if Saul (since he was from Cilicia) was one who had argued with Stephen (Acts 6.9-10) and if this had something to do with Jesus' statement to Saul, "it is hard for you to kick against the goads" (Acts 26.14). We have Luke's court record of Stephen's trial in Acts 7. Stephen defended himself with a brilliant summation of Israel's history. In so doing, he turned the tables on his judges and put them on trial. He accused them of resisting the Holy Spirit, killing God's prophets, and failing to keep the Law (Acts 7.51-55). When he stated he saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God (Acts 7.55-56; Psalm 68.1), the enraged Sanhedrin seized and stoned him. This action violated the Mosaic Law (Acts 7.54-60).¹

After Stephen's execution, Saul's zeal for Judaism drove him to arrest, torture, and kill those who believed in Jesus as the Messiah (known as τῆς ὁδοῦ, the Way, Acts 9.2). Paul recounted his opposition to Jesus in Acts 22.1-21 and 26.1-29. Because of Saul's intense persecution, Jewish believers feared him greatly (Acts 9.13-14). Not content to arrest those who had believed in Jesus within the borders of Israel, Paul obtained documents from the high priest which allowed him to extend his persecution of Jews into Syria. But on his journey to Damascus, a remarkable event occurred. Nearing the city, a brilliant light from heaven shone around Saul and he fell to the earth. Luke recorded,

⁴ and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" ⁵ And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" And He said, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, ⁶ but get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do." (Acts 9.4-6).

Nothing in Paul's experience could have prepared him for this shock. Jesus of Nazareth, the one against whom he had directed all his energies, revealed He was the Lord God of Israel, the YHVH (יהוה) of the prophets.

Paul and the Twelve

The Twelve were commissioned and taught by the Lord during his earthly ministry. They looked forward to the promised kingdom and their role in it (Matthew 19.23-28). After Judas revealed himself a traitor, the first thing the apostles' recognized they must do was to fill his position. They believed that the kingdom was about to be established (Acts 1.6-7, 16-26) for that was what they had been taught for the past three years (Matthew 3.2, 4.17; Mark 1.15; Luke 17.21). The kingdom could not come without a full complement of twelve apostles. As the Scriptures indicate, Matthias filled the vacancy left by Judas (Acts 1.23-26). Some have maintained Peter and the other apostles were precipitous and should have waited for Paul to fill this position. Such a view ignores the text. The Scriptures reveal their actions were under the control of the Holy Spirit and that to qualify as one of the Twelve one had to have been with the apostles since the ministry of John the Baptist and be a witness of Jesus' resurrection (Acts 1.21-22). Would Saul of Tarsus/Paul have qualified? Hardly.

While the Twelve were commissioned and taught by the Lord for three years during His *earthly* ministry, the ascended, *heavenly* Lord commissioned and taught Paul for three years (most of which was probably spent in the Arabian desert,

Galatians 1.17-18). The Twelve were commissioned within the borders of Israel. Paul was commissioned beyond the borders of Israel. After the ascended Lord commissioned Paul He revealed doctrines to Paul He had never revealed to the Twelve.

Differences Between the Jesus and the Twelve and Paul	
The Twelve	Paul
Proclaimed repentance and water baptism for salvation (Acts 2.38)	Proclaimed "believe" alone for salvation (Romans 4.5-6; 1 Corinthians 15.1-4)
Proclaimed the gospel of the kingdom (Matthew 4.17; Acts 3.19)	Proclaimed the gospel of the grace of God (Acts 20.24)
Saved and commissioned within Israel's borders (Matthew 16.13, 16-17)	Saved and commissioned outside Israel's borders (Acts 9.3)
Were taught in Christ's earthly ministry	Was taught in Christ's heavenly ministry (Galatians 1.1, 11-12)
Ministered to Jews only (Matthew 10.5; Galatians 2.7-9)	Ministered primarily to Gentiles (Romans 11.13; Galatians 2.7-9)

The most logical thing for Saul to have done following his conversion would have been to return to Jerusalem and consult with the Twelve. Imagine what a meeting that would have been! Saul, the great persecutor of the Way (Acts 22.4), had become a believer—and in such a dramatic manner—by the direct confrontation of the Lord in glory. It didn't happen (Galatians 1.16-17). God had other plans for Paul. He insulated him from the Twelve and like what He had done with Moses, sent him to Arabia—into the desert—most likely to Sinai. Why?

The Rise of Paul

Peter is the primary personage for the first dozen chapters of Acts. Luke recorded Paul's salvation in chapter 9. Peter

reappears in chapter 15 at the Jerusalem Council and assisted Paul in his argument (Acts 15.7-11) over the issue of whether Gentiles had to be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses to be saved (Acts 15.1, 5). Worth note is Peter was not running the Council—James was. This James was not James the Apostle, one of the Twelve (Acts 12.2), for he had been executed by Herod Antipas (Acts 12.1-2). This James (a.k.a. James the Just) was Jesus' half-brother. By the time of the Jerusalem Council (51 A.D.), Peter's authority and the authority of the Twelve had declined to the degree that a second-order apostle was running things. James was an apostle in a secondary sense for he did not meet the qualifications for apostleship as did the Twelve (cf. John 7.5 cf. Galatians 1.19; 1 Corinthians 15.7, Acts 1.21-22). After Luke's account of the Jerusalem Council, the Twelve drop out of view and the remainder of Acts is all about Paul. Why?

God had revealed Gentiles would be blessed by the Jews (cf. Isaiah 42.1, 6; 49.6; 60.3; Zechariah 8.23; Luke 2.32). These promises were based on the assumption the Jews would accept their Messiah. How could Gentiles be blessed if Israel refused their Messiah? They couldn't since all blessing was based upon the Messiah. God had revealed no other plan. But God in His sovereignty always has a plan, even though he may keep it secret (Deuteronomy 29.29). God knew Israel would reject Him and made provision for it.

The Lord commissioned Paul as the apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 9.15-16; Romans 11.13; Ephesians 3.1; 1 Timothy 2.7). No Biblical record exists Peter and the Eleven ever had a ministry to Gentiles. The Twelve made an agreement with Paul to confine their ministry to Jews while Paul would go to Gentiles (Galatians 2.7-9). Even though Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles, he first witnessed to Jews that Jesus was the Messiah. In Acts, the record reveals Paul first approached Jews and then turned to Gentiles when the Jews rejected Jesus as the Messiah (Acts 13.46; 18.5-6; 28.24-28 cf. Romans

1.16-17; Acts 9.15).

Paul's argument with the Twelve at the Council demonstrated a change of evangelistic program had occurred. Jesus had commanded His disciples to go to all nations, i.e., Gentiles (Matthew 28.19). This never happened. When it became clear Israel would not repent (the crisis point was the stoning of Stephen in Acts 7), God commissioned Paul to minister to Gentiles. During the thirty years Paul faithfully served the Lord, the Lord revealed to him secrets (μυστήριον) He had not revealed in His own earthly ministry nor at any time to the Twelve.

The Mystery (μυστήριον)

The word translated "mystery" is the Greek word μυστήριον. This unfortunate translation has confused most of Christendom. The word μυστήριον does not mean "mystery" as we think as in "strange," "enigma," "weird," etc. It means a "secret"—something kept hidden, something previously unrevealed. Paul used the term to describe the body of doctrine the risen, ascended, glorified Lord revealed to him. God alone can keep a secret and He had kept these revelations hidden until He chose to disclose them. Paul called these doctrines "secrets" for that was what they were. What were these secrets that Peter and the other apostles knew nothing about?

1. The Secret of the Gospel of the Grace of God

²⁵ Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery [secret] which has been kept secret for long ages past, ²⁶ but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith (Romans 16.25-26).

Paul preached the “gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20.24). Time and again Paul proclaimed that the gospel he preached was *his* gospel (Romans 2.16; 16.25; 2 Timothy 2.8; Galatians 1.11-12, 2.2). Did the Twelve not preach this gospel? The Scriptures reveal they did *not*—until they learned it from Paul (cf. Acts 15.1, 5, 6-11). Paul declared his gospel was, “kept secret for long ages past, but *now* is manifested.” Paul wrote that by revelation he went to Jerusalem to communicate the gospel he preached (Galatians 2.2). It was a “secret” until the ascended Lord revealed it to Paul and it was a secret until Paul revealed it to the Twelve. What gospel did John the Baptist, Jesus, and the Twelve proclaim? They preached the “gospel of the kingdom” (Matthew 4.23; 9.35; Mark 1.14-15). Its message was that God’s earthly kingdom, which the prophets had proclaimed throughout the Old Testament, was at hand. For it to come upon the earth required repentance and baptism. Even after the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, Peter continued to preach the gospel of the kingdom (Acts 2.38; 3.19-21). This was a completely different gospel than the gospel of the grace of God (Acts 20.24) that Paul preached.

What was the content of the kingdom gospel during the ministry of Jesus and afterward? Salvation was based upon believing Jesus was Israel’s Messiah, the Son of God (Matthew 16.16; John 11.27; [Acts 8.37]). No mention was made of believing in Jesus’ death and resurrection even *after* His resurrection. Peter did not tell the Jews he addressed on the day of Pentecost to believe Jesus died for them and rose from the dead. He told them to repent and be baptized (Acts 2.38). Immediately after Paul was saved he too preached this message: Jesus was the Son of God (Acts 9.20). Paul did not begin to preach his gospel (Christ died for us and rose from the dead) until after he returned from Arabia. Why not? Because God had not yet revealed it. Not until after Paul returned from his three years in Arabia did he preach this gospel. During that time the ascended Lord revealed to Paul the meaning of His

death and resurrection (Galatians 1.16-19, 2.1-2).²

Paul's gospel of the grace of God was the message of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. Paul wrote the Corinthians,

¹ Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, ² by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. ³ For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, (1 Corinthians 15.1-4)

Do you see the difference in Paul's gospel? Where is repentance? Where is baptism? They are not there. Salvation according to the gospel of the kingdom was to repent and be baptized, believing Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God (Matthew 16.16-17; John 11.25-27; Acts 2.38). Salvation according to the gospel of the grace of God (Acts 20.24), Paul's gospel, is to believe Christ died for us, was buried, and arose from the dead (1 Corinthians 15.1-4). According to Paul's gospel, only one thing is necessary: trust in the death, burial, and resurrection for your sins. Do you believe it? If so, you are saved from sin and death. This is God's promise.

Peter told the Jews they had murdered their Messiah and needed to repent and be baptized (Acts 2.36-38, 41). Did Peter or the Twelve preach Christ crucified for salvation? No. The cross for Peter was something to be repented of, not a message of hope and salvation (Acts 2.22-24; 2.36-39; 3.13-20).

Not until the Jerusalem Council (51 A.D.) did this change.

After much argument, Peter, who had remained quiet during the debate (what a character change!) made a remarkable statement. We read:

⁷ After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, "Brethren, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe. ⁸ And God, who knows the heart, testified to them giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us; ⁹ and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith. ¹⁰ Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? ¹¹ But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are." ¹² All the people kept silent, and they were listening to Barnabas and Paul as they were relating what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles (Acts 15.7-12).

At the critical moment, God the Holy Spirit moved Peter to recall the time he had visited the house of Cornelius, the Roman centurion, a Gentile, many years before (Acts 10.1-48). Peter, who had been listening to the arguments, rose to Paul's defense in the quarrel over whether Gentiles had to be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses to be saved. Had it not been for Peter, Paul's evangelism would have become much more difficult. What was most remarkable was Peter's statement: "But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are." What a switch! Jews saved like Gentiles, not Gentiles like Jews? Amazing! What was the result? The Jews who had argued against Paul became silent and listened to Paul and Barnabas.

Lest anyone doubt that Paul's gospel was a new gospel, he

explicitly declared it so in Ephesians 6.19. Paul wrote the Ephesians:

¹⁸ With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, ¹⁹ and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery [secret] of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak (Ephesians 6.18-20).

In verse 19, Paul stated his gospel was a “secret.” This verse parallels Romans 16.25. The gospel of the kingdom, that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God, was no secret. It had been proclaimed by John the Baptist, Jesus, and Peter along with the Twelve. What was secret? It was that Christ had died for our sins and had been raised from the dead for our justification and that by trusting in this alone one can have salvation. Until God revealed this truth to Paul, this great fact was unknown. No one knew the significance of Christ’s death on the cross—that it paid for our sins—and no one knew that one could obtain salvation by faith alone until Paul proclaimed it. Paul’s “secret” gospel contained no works such as baptism, which had been required for salvation by the gospel of the kingdom (Acts 2.36-38; cf. Mark 1.4, 16.16). Paul’s gospel was faith + 0—a totally new revelation.

2. The Secret of the Blinding of Israel

Paul wrote in Romans 11.25-27,

²⁵ For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery [secret]—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; ²⁶ and so all

Israel will be saved; just as it is written, "THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB." "THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS."

God laid the groundwork for His creation of a new race of people, the Jews, with His call of Abraham. Through the line of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, God began to reveal Himself. From that point, until the time when the ascended Lord commissioned Paul, God dealt with mankind through the nation of Israel. To the Jews belonged the Word of God, adoption, glory, and covenants, etc. (Romans 3.2, 9.4; Ephesians 2.12; Acts 3.25). God had revealed His prophetic plan through the Jewish prophets. This plan is summarized in Psalm 2:

Psalm 2	Comment
<p>¹ Why are the nations in an uproar and the peoples devising a vain thing? ² The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers take counsel together against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying, ³ "Let us tear their fetters apart and cast away their cords from us!"</p>	<p>The 1st Advent–Rejection of the Messiah by Gentiles (nations) and Jews (the peoples). Also prophetic of the attitude of mankind before the 2nd Advent.</p>
<p>⁴ He who sits in the heavens laughs, the Lord scoffs at them. ⁵ Then He will speak to them in His anger and terrify them in His fury, saying, ⁹ 'You shall break them with a rod of iron, You shall shatter them like earthenware.'</p>	<p>The judgment of God, i.e., the tribulation or the time of Jacob's Trouble (Matthew 24.1-51; Jeremiah 30.7).</p>

<p>⁶ “But as for Me, I have installed My King upon Zion, My holy mountain.”</p> <p>⁸ ‘Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as Your possession.</p>	<p>Establishment of the Messianic Kingdom of God (the OT has hundreds of verses describing this kingdom).</p>
<p>⁷ “I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to Me, ‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.</p>	<p>The resurrection of Christ (cf. Acts 13.33) is when He was “begotten.”</p>
<p>¹⁰ Now therefore, O kings, show discernment; Take warning, O judges of the earth. ¹¹ Worship the LORD with reverence and rejoice with trembling. ¹² Do homage to the Son, that He not become angry, and you perish in the way, for His wrath may soon be kindled. How blessed are all who take refuge in Him!</p>	<p>God warns of judgment to the world (Jew and Gentile) and blessings for those who trust in the Lord.</p>

Notice the psalm made no mention of the temporary blinding of Israel and God’s creation of the Church, the body of Christ. These truths are found nowhere in the Old Testament. Why? Paul declared these things were a secret. A partial hardening—not total and not forever—would last *until* the fullness of the Gentiles (Romans 11.25) occurred, i.e., until the body of Christ was complete. After that, *all* Israel, i.e., the entire nation, every single Jew alive on earth who will recognize Jesus as the Messiah, will be saved (Matthew 23.37-39; Isaiah 66.8; Zechariah 12.10, 13.6; Acts 2.36, 38). Peter understood the need for the whole nation to repent. In his sermon on Pentecost, he demanded every single Jew repent (Acts 2.36, 38). This had been taught by the prophets (Isaiah 66.7-9, 25.9; Zechariah 12.10, 13.6) and was known. Paul quoted Isaiah 59.20. What was unknown was when and how. Paul revealed that

following Israel's rejection of their Messiah the nation's salvation would not occur "until the fullness of the Gentiles is come in."

At the end of the Tribulation, at the end of the great Day of the Lord, all Jews will believe Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. They will go into the promised kingdom (Acts 1.6; Romans 11.16 cf. Isaiah 66.8, Matthew 6.10). Unlike the generation of Jesus' day who failed to repent and experience the kingdom, the Tribulation generation will respond and believe Jesus is Messiah (Matthew 23.39, cf. John 10.16, the "other sheep."). God is sovereign and has promised through his prophets that Israel will enjoy the kingdom (Romans 9.29 cf. Deuteronomy 28.1-14). God will keep His word.

3. The Secret of the Rapture or Resurrection of the Body of Christ

The "rapture" is the resurrection of the Church, the body of Christ. In this divine event, members of the body of Christ will receive resurrection bodies. When the body of Christ is complete, God will take His body unto Himself. Paul called this the "fullness of the Gentiles" (Romans 11.25) since the body of Christ is composed primarily of Gentiles. The word Paul used for the Rapture was [ἄρπάζω](#) which means "to seize" or "to snatch away." Our English word "rapture" comes from the Latin "rapiemur" which is the word Jerome used in the Latin Vulgate to translate ἄρπάζω. Paul revealed the secret of the Rapture in 1 Corinthians 15.51-53:

⁵¹ Behold, I tell you a mystery [secret]; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, ⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. ⁵³ For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality.

Paul elaborated on this event when he wrote the Thessalonians about the order of the resurrection of the body of Christ:

¹³ But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. ¹⁴ For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. ¹⁵ For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. ¹⁸ Therefore comfort one another with these words. (1 Thessalonians 4.13-18).

In the passage above, Paul reiterated his gospel—Christ died for our sins and rose again. Having this belief gives the believer confidence to know he will be with the Lord. Paul gave the resurrection sequence for the body of Christ: those who have died will be raised first. Those who are alive will be raised second, i.e., given a resurrection body. In other words, the latter group, those who are alive, will not experience physical death. Both groups will meet the Lord in the air. This whole transformation will take place “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.” The words for “moment” and “twinkling” are [ἄτομος](#) and [ῥιπή](#). The thought here is that this will occur instantaneously.

This return of the Lord is an entirely different event from His return to save Israel and the nations at the end of the Tribulation. In the first return, the Lord will meet the body of Christ in the clouds (a heavenly return for a heavenly

people, Ephesians 1.3). In the second return, the Lord will return to earth, (an earthly return for an earthly people, Zechariah 14.4). The Rapture is the “blessed hope” (Titus 2.13) of the body of Christ and was Paul’s personal hope (Philippians 3.11, ἐξανάστασιν τὴν ἐκνεκρῶν).

Paul had to correct false teaching constantly. Someone, posing as Paul, wrote the Thessalonians that the Day of the Lord had occurred. They denied the Rapture—what Paul had taught them when he was with them—that believers would be delivered from the Day of the Lord. Paul addressed this error with the following words in 2 Thessalonians 2.1-5:

¹ Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him,

² that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.

³ Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, ⁴ who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God. ⁵ Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things?

No one wrote about the Rapture except Paul because no one knew about it. It was a secret the glorified Lord revealed to Paul alone. Jesus never mentioned it in his earthly ministry and the Twelve never mentioned it in their writings. All non-Pauline writings of Christ’s return speak of His return to earth at the end of the Tribulation.

In Jewish theology, before the first advent of Christ, the Jews knew of only one advent. They understood a few passages spoke of a suffering Messiah and most spoke of a ruling

Messiah. They could never put these ideas together nor understand there would be one Messiah but two advents (1 Peter 1.10-11). In the same way, the second advent will have two parts. The first part will be Christ's return in the air for his body, the Church (the Rapture). The second part of Christ's return will be his return to earth for a repentant Israel (Matthew 23.39; Zechariah 12.10) and the Gentiles who remain alive (Matthew 24.22). The two advents are noted in the chart below:

A D V E N T S	First Advent (Rejection and Suffering)–Revealed in Old Testament	
	Second Advent (Mercy and Judgment)	
	Phase 1: Unrevealed until Paul God's mercy to the Church (the Body of Christ) to save it (by the Rapture) from the wrath to come	Phase 2: Revealed in Old Testament God's judgment upon a Christ rejecting world and the return of Christ as King to save a repentant Israel

Throughout the Old Testament, the prophets warned of a time called the "day of the Lord." The "day of the Lord" was a time in which God would pour His wrath upon the nations. It was a time in which God would release His wrath against the world for its evil—for a world that will reject the true God and worship the Antichrist. References to the day include the following: Isaiah 2.12-21; 13.9-13; 26.20-21; 34.1-2, 8; Ezekiel 30.1-8; Joel 1.13-16; 2.1-3, 11; 2.23-32; 3.12-18; Amos 5.18-20; Obadiah 1.15-17; Zephaniah 1.7-18; 2.1-3; Zechariah 12.2-10; 14.1-20; Malachi 4.1-3. It will be a day of "wrath," "darkness," "gloom," and "wailing." Jesus described the day in Matthew 24.1-51 and John in the book of Revelation. Included in this day is Israel's deliverance, which Paul foretold in Romans 11.26 when "all Israel," i.e., the entire nation will be saved.

Paul taught a different day, a day unrevealed by the prophets, by Jesus, or by the Twelve. This day Paul called the “day of Christ” or the “day of the Lord Jesus.” It stands in contrast to the “day of the Lord.” Paul wrote of the “day of Christ” in 1 Corinthians 1.8; 5.5; 2 Corinthians 1.14; Philippians 1.6, 10; 2.16. The “day of Christ” is a day of deliverance, not a day of judgment. The “day of Christ” is the return of Christ for his body, the Church, or the Rapture. Associated with this day of deliverance is the judgment of the believer’s works. Paul wrote the Corinthians about this in 1 Corinthians 3.13-15. See the author’s study on the [Day of Christ](#).

4. The Secret of the One Body

Paul alone taught the Body of Christ. How did Paul learn about it? The ascended Lord revealed the truth that the Church (1 Corinthians 12.12-27; Ephesians 1.22-23; Colossians 1.18, 24) was His body and that its nature was that Jew and Gentile were equal in Christ (Galatians 3.26-29). The Lord did not reveal this truth to Peter or the Twelve. Search the Scriptures—one will find no word about the body of Christ from anyone but Paul. Paul wrote the Ephesians:

¹ For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—² if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace which was given to me for you;³ that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery [secret], as I wrote before in brief.⁴ By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery [secret] of Christ,⁵ which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit;⁶ to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel,⁷ of which I was made a minister,

according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me according to the working of His power. ⁸ To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, ⁹ and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery [secret] which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; (Ephesians 3.1-9).

Notice the points Paul made:

1. Paul was the prisoner of Christ for the sake of Gentiles.
2. By revelation, he received the secret (μυστήριον).

As the passage above states, this secret was *not* known to other generations. But the secret became revealed to his holy apostles and prophets. Who were these? Certainly not the Twelve. They never mention the body of Christ. Peter and the Twelve *learned* about the body of Christ from Paul *after* the Lord revealed this secret to him. What was this secret?

The secret was that Gentiles who believed Paul's gospel were fellow-heirs and members of the body of Christ with Jews who believed Paul's gospel. Before Paul, beginning with Abraham, by means of the Abrahamic Covenant, Israel held priority in God's program. The prophets revealed Gentiles would be blessed through Israel. But nothing indicated *equality*. That Gentiles were now *equal* with Jews was a revolutionary shift in God's plan. Consider. Jesus, in his earthly ministry, commanded His disciples *not* to go to Gentiles. Matthew recorded:

⁵ *These twelve Jesus sent out after instructing them: "Do not go in the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans; ⁶ but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matthew 10.5-6).*

Could words be more plain? Don't go to Gentiles! Jesus made two exceptions to His rule in His earthly ministry: a Canaanite woman (Matthew 15.22-28) and a Roman centurion (Matthew 8.5-10 cf. Luke 7.1-10). He responded to them because of their exceptional faith. See the author's study [Two Remarkable Healings](#).

All this was *new*. We know about it from Paul *alone*. It is helpful to recognize what is *not* in the Scriptures as well as what is in them. Pay particular attention to the verses below that Paul wrote (quoted above in Ephesians 3.1-9):

1. "of which *I* (not Peter, not the Twelve) was made a minister."
2. "according to the gift of God's grace which was given to *me* (not Peter, not the Twelve) according to the working of His power."
3. "To me, (not Peter, not the Twelve) the very least of all saints, this grace was given,"
4. "to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery [secret] which for ages has been hidden (Peter and the Twelve knew nothing of it) in God who created all things." It was Paul's ministry that revealed this secret which God had kept hidden.

Paul wrote similar words to the Colossians,

²⁴ *Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions.* ²⁵ *Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God,* ²⁶ *that is, the mystery [secret] which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints,* ²⁷ *to whom God willed to make known*

what is the riches of the glory of this mystery [secret] among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory (Colossians 1.24-27).

We see the same points again:

1. The Church is the body of Christ.
2. Paul (not Peter, not the Twelve) was made a minister of this new body, the Church.
3. God bestowed this stewardship upon Paul (not Peter, not the Twelve).
4. The revelation of the Church as the body of Christ was previously hidden (the Twelve knew nothing of it).
5. This secret includes Christ being in the believer which is the hope of glory.

Paul wrote the Corinthians regarding his ministry,

¹⁰ According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. ¹¹ For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 3.10-11).

God gave Paul the gospel of the grace of God (Acts 20.24). This was wholly different from the gospel of the kingdom which had begun with John the Baptist. Like a wise master builder or chief architect, Paul built the Church on the foundation: Christ. The above passage teaches that Paul, not Peter, not the Twelve, was the architect of the Church. The Lord gave Peter charge over the *Jewish church* in His earthly ministry. This was the church that existed on the day of Pentecost. Gentiles did not participate in this church. Paul reminded his Gentile believers in Ephesus that prior to the revelation of the secret of the body of Christ they were excluded from Israel and all the benefits Israel enjoyed:

¹¹ Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called "Uncircumcision" by the so-called "Circumcision," which is performed in the flesh by human hands— ¹² remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, ¹⁵ by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, ¹⁶ and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. ¹⁷ AND HE CAME AND PREACHED PEACE TO YOU WHO WERE FAR AWAY, AND PEACE TO THOSE WHO WERE NEAR; ¹⁸ for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, ²⁰ having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, ²¹ in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, ²² in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit (Ephesians 2.11-22).

Paul illustrated the body of Christ with the human body. Thus,

For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ (1 Corinthians 12.12).

Becoming a member of the body of Christ, the Church, is through the baptism of the Holy Spirit. This is not a sensory experience. It occurs when one believes the gospel (1 Corinthians 15.1-4).

¹² For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. ¹³ For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit (1 Corinthians 12.12-13).

Paul wrote that each part of the body is vital:

¹⁴ For the body is not one member, but many. ¹⁵ If the foot says, "Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body.

¹⁶ And if the ear says, "Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸ But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. ¹⁹ If they were all one member, where would the body be? ²⁰ But now there are many members, but one body. ²¹ And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; or again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." ²² On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; ²³ and those members of the body which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our less presentable members become much more presentable, ²⁴ whereas our more presentable members have no need of it. But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor

to that member which lacked, ²⁵ so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶ And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it (1 Corinthians 12.14-26).

Paul's conclusion was, "Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it" (1 Corinthians 12.27). As the human body is a whole and each part is important, so too the body of Christ. Every believer is important and has a vital function in the body of Christ.

Another illustration Paul used about the body of Christ was marriage. Paul wrote:

²² *Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord.* ²³ *For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body.* ²⁴ *But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything.* ²⁵ *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her,* ²⁶ *so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,* ²⁷ *that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.* ²⁸ *So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself;* ²⁹ *for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church,* ³⁰ *because we are members of His body.* ³¹ *FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND SHALL BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH.* ³² *This mystery [secret] is great; but I am*

speaking with reference to Christ and the church. ³³ *Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband (Ephesians 5.22-33).*

The Christian husband is head of the wife in the same manner as Christ is Head of the Church, the body of Christ. Husbands are to 1) love their wives as Christ loved the Church (v. 25) and 2) love their wives as their own bodies (v. 28, 33). Paul declared the relationship of Christ to the Church and husbands to wives was a secret (μυστήριον). No one knew it or taught this before Paul.

We learn from Paul alone that Christ is the Head of the Body, the Church (Ephesians 1.22; 4.15; 5.23; Colossians 1.18; 2.19). In the age of grace, Christ is nowhere called the “king” of the Church. That is His title for Israel. A king has subjects. We have Christ as our Head, not our King. We are integral to Him. We are joint-heirs with Him (Romans 8.17). A joint-heir enjoys a different kind of relationship than a subject to a king. A joint-heir is one who shares everything belonging to the heir. This is grace! We know this from Paul alone for it, again, was a secret Paul received from the risen Lord.

5. The Secret of Heavenly Citizenship

From Paul alone do we learn that the believer in the body of Christ has a heavenly position and heavenly citizenship. Peter and the Twelve looked forward to an *earthly* position, not a heavenly one. The Jew knew nothing of heavenly blessing. He looked forward to the kingdom on earth. This is why Jesus instructed his disciples to pray, “Your kingdom come. Your will be done, *on earth* as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6.10). Consider Peter’s question to the Lord and his answer in Matthew 19.27-28:

²⁷ Then Peter said to Him, "Behold, we have left everything and followed You; what then will there be for us?" ²⁸ And Jesus said to them, "Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Where will Jesus sit on His glorious throne? In Jerusalem. This made perfect sense to Peter. Had Jesus answered any other way, Peter would have found the reply incomprehensible and at odds with the teachings of the prophets. Only by Jesus' ruling in Jerusalem can God fulfill the Davidic Covenant, His promise to David. The psalmist wrote in Psalm 2.8 of the conversation between God the Father and God the Son:

'Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as Your possession.

Zechariah declared:

⁹ And the LORD will be king over all the earth; in that day the LORD will be the only one, and His name the only one. ¹⁰ All the land will be changed into a plain from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem; but Jerusalem will rise and remain on its site from Benjamin's Gate as far as the place of the First Gate to the Corner Gate, and from the Tower of Hananel to the king's wine presses. ¹¹ People will live in it, and there will no longer be a curse, for Jerusalem will dwell in security (Zechariah 14.9-11 cf. Zechariah 8.2-3; Daniel 7.14, 27).

When the disciples asked the Lord how they should pray, he answered them:

⁹ "Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. ¹⁰ 'Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. ¹¹ 'Give us this day our daily bread. ¹² 'And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ¹³ 'And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen' (Matthew 6.9-13).

Is anything heavenly here? Jesus told his disciples to pray for God's kingdom to come on *earth* and for His will to be done on *earth*. Jesus knew His Old Testament. He knew He would reign as David's greater Son (Luke 1.32).

But God has given the Church, the body of Christ, different promises from those He gave Israel. God's promises to the Church are *heavenly* ³ not earthly. Thus, Paul wrote the Ephesians:

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ," (Ephesians 1.3)

and in Ephesians 2.4-6:

⁴ *But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), ⁶ and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,*

Unlike God's promises to Israel of an earthly kingdom and citizenship, members of the body of Christ, the Church, have promises of heavenly citizenship. Paul wrote the Philippians:

²⁰ For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; ²¹ who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself (Philippians 3.20-21).

Speaking of our resurrection body, Paul wrote the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 5.1-3:

¹ For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. ² For indeed in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven, ³ inasmuch as we, having put it on, will not be found naked.

6. The Secret of His Will

The secret of his will is God's plan to gather together in one all things in Christ. Only Paul revealed this truth. Paul wrote the Ephesians in Ephesians 1.9-10:

⁹ He made known to us the mystery [secret] of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him ¹⁰ with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth.

A parallel passage of this truth is from Paul's letter to the Colossians:

¹⁹ For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, ²⁰ and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross;

through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven (Colossians 1.19-20).

7. The Secret of the Grace of God

Paul revealed that grace, not Law, is the realm in which the believer in Christ operates. Paul began every letter with a grace salutation to remind believers of his gospel of this new relationship. No word more clearly identifies Paul's ministry than the word "grace." It is the Greek [χάρις](#) and means "favor." God gives us what we do not merit or deserve. When someone receives God's grace by believing the gospel (1 Corinthians 15.1-4), God begins His transformative work to enable us to love God and seek after His righteousness. God's goal is that every believer becomes transformed, conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 8.29; Philippians 1.6). Paul was the epitome of God's grace. Before his conversion, Paul exercised all his power to destroy those who were believing in Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah. Yet God did not destroy him. He saved him. From that moment Paul became the world's foremost follower of His Savior (1 Timothy 1.15).

The word [χάρις](#) appears 156 times in 147 verses in the New Testament. Paul's usage accounts for 103 verses (70%). They are the following:

Romans 1.5, 7, 3.24, 4.4, 16, 5.2, 15, 17, 20, 21, 6.1, 14, 15, 17, 7.25, 11.5, 6, 12.3, 12.6, 15.15, 16.20, 24; 1 Corinthians 1.3, 4, 3.10, 10.30, 15.10, 15.57, 16.3, 16.23; 2 Corinthians 1.2, 12, 15, 2.14, 4.15, 6.1, 8.1, 4, 6, 7, 9, 16, 19, 9.8, 14, 15, 12.9, 13.14; Galatians 1.3, 6, 15; 2.9, 21; 5.4, 6.18; Ephesians 1.2, 6, 7, 2.5, 7, 8, 3.2, 7, 8, 4.7, 29, 6.24; Philippians 1.2, 7, 4.23; Colossians 1.2, 6, 3.16, 4.6, 18; 1 Thessalonians 1.1, 5.28; 2 Thessalonians 1.2, 12, 2.16, 3.18; 1 Timothy 1.2, 12, 1.14, 6.21; 2 Timothy 1.2, 3, 9, 2.1, 4.22; Titus 1.4, 2.11, 3.7, 15; Philemon 1.3, 25; Hebrews 2.9, 4.16, 10.29, 12.15, 28, 13.9, 25.

Paul (not Peter, not the Twelve) revealed that Christians are not under the Law of Moses but are under grace (Romans 6.14; 7.2-6; 8.2-4). He alone revealed man is justified by faith alone apart from works (Romans 3.28). He revealed Christ is the end or goal (τέλος) of the Mosaic Law (Romans 10.4). No other writer of Scripture revealed these things. They are all part of the "secret" the ascended Lord revealed to the great apostle.

8. The Secret of Identification with Christ

All who believe the gospel (1 Corinthians 15.1-4) have been identified with Christ.

³ Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?

⁴ Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

⁵ For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, ⁶ knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; ⁷ for he who has died is freed from sin. ⁸ Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, ⁹ knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him (Romans 6.3-9).

When a person believes Paul's gospel he is baptized into the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12.13). Paul spoke of this baptism as being "buried" with Christ. This was a metaphor for God seeing us as having died with Christ and identified in his death.⁴ We have been united to Christ in his death and also have been united with him in his resurrection. As Christ will

never die again, we will never die. In terms of living the Christian life, this has immediate practical benefit. Paul wrote the Romans,

¹⁰ For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. ¹¹ Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. ¹² Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, ¹³ and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. ¹⁴ For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace (Romans 6.10-14 cf. 8.1-39).

Since Christ died to sin and we are united to Him, Paul wrote we are to consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God. In this way, we can defeat our Adamic nature's inclination to sin.

Writing the Galatians, Paul expressed identification with Christ:

"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me. (Galatians 2.20)

Paul wrote the Colossians about this identification and spoke of the "secret of God" (Colossians 2.2):

¹⁰ and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority; ¹¹ and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the

removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; ¹² having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. ¹³ When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, ¹⁴ having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. (Colossians 2.10-14).

9. The Secret of Lawlessness

Paul revealed the “secret of lawlessness” to the Thessalonians:

³ Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, ⁴ who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God. ⁵ Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things? ⁶ And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he will be revealed. ⁷ For the mystery [secret] of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way. ⁸ Then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; ⁹ that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, ¹⁰ and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved.

¹¹ For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, ¹² in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness. (2 Thessalonians 2.3-12).

Paul wrote the secret of iniquity (KJV) or lawlessness (ἀνομία) was already at work. Paul used the term ἀνομία in a generic sense for all that is opposed to God and godliness. The personification of this “secret” will be the “lawless one”, (ἄνομος) the one who will become empowered by Satan, the Antichrist. John wrote about this individual in Revelation as did Daniel, yet how he will be able to come to power and operate is unknown. What Paul revealed was that what restrains (κατέχω) or holds back this individual is the Holy Spirit. Paul wrote this monstrous personage cannot appear “until the one who is now restraining is taken out of the way.” This is the Holy Spirit, specifically, the Holy Spirit who indwells believers in the Body of Christ. Paul’s primary purpose in writing his second letter to the Thessalonians was to correct a claim from a purported letter from him that the Thessalonians were experiencing the Day of the Lord. The claim was that the persecution they were enduring was the Tribulation. Paul wrote to assure them this was not the case. He declared reminded them that believers will not experience the Tribulation (1 Thessalonians 1.10, 5.9) and before it can occur, the body of Christ must be removed. When God removed His Church, His restraining power will be removed. Satan will be free to bring his man to power.

10. The Secret of the Faith

In Paul’s first letter to Timothy he wrote:

⁸ Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain, ⁹ but holding to the mystery [secret] of the faith with a clear

conscience (1 Timothy 3.8-9).

What was this “secret of the faith?” This phrase is a genitive of apposition, thus, “the secret which is the faith.” It was the body of doctrines the risen Lord had revealed to Paul, which he communicated to the Church, the body of Christ. Faith was never a secret. The teachings of Paul were. As we have noted in examining the doctrines above, none of these doctrines were known to the prophets, revealed by the Lord in His earthly ministry, or communicated by the Twelve. These were Pauline doctrines—secrets.

Conclusion

The risen, ascended, glorified Lord revealed a vast amount of new information to Paul. Paul referred to these revelations as “secrets.” God had revealed none of these things to the prophets. Jesus had not revealed these truths in His earthly ministry or to the Twelve. From Paul alone do we learn the truths of Christianity: about Christ’s work of our salvation, our sanctification, our rescue from a Christ-rejecting world, and our destiny. Holding to Pauline truths has always been a hard-fought battle. Satan knows when these truths are taught and believed the Church is strong, He therefore constantly fights to keep them hidden and to keep believers occupied with tradition and false-teaching. At the end of his life, Paul wrote Timothy, “*You are aware of the fact that all who are in Asia turned away from me, among whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes*” (2 Timothy 1.15). This was a tragic statement. Paul had expended tremendous effort and had experienced great suffering in Asia. Paul’s declaration provides insight into how theology took the direction it did and what is wrong with the theology of Christendom. Many Church Fathers were fairly orthodox but they also held unscriptural views, especially in their abandonment of Paul. Tragically, little has changed. Most churches spend the greatest portion of their time in the Gospels and Old Testament, rather than in Paul’s epistles.

This was contrary to what Paul taught (2 Corinthians 5.16). And when Paul *is* taught, his doctrines are mixed with Scriptures that pertain to Israel and vice-versa. The result is confusion and contradiction. Nothing is wrong with the Gospels. Nothing is wrong with the Old Testament. But we find *nothing* of the Church there. *Only* through studying Paul and his writings do we learn about God's work, purpose, and destiny for the body of Christ, the Church.

¹ The Sanhedrin was set off by Stephen's vision of seeing Jesus *standing* at the right hand of God (Acts 7.55-58). Numerous passages speak of Jesus *seated* at the right hand of God (Matthew 22.44; Mark 16.19, 12.36; Luke 20.42, 22.69; Acts 2.34; Hebrews 1.13, 10.12, 12.2; Psalms 110.1) but in this passage alone Jesus is revealed as standing. Why would Stephen's statement convulse the Council? They knew their Bibles. The Psalmist had revealed God's standing was a sign He was ready to leave heaven and exercise judgment (Psalms 68.1, 3.7, 10.12, 74.22, 82.8).

² In Galatians 2.2, the NASB has translated ἀνατίθημι as "submitted." This is a poor translation for it connotes Paul submitted his gospel to the council for their review and approval. A better translation of ἀνατίθημι is "set forth", "presented," "declared", or "communicated." Paul received his gospel directly from the glorified Lord (Galatians 1.12, 1.7-9). The last thing he would have done was "submit" it for men's approval.

³ While the Church's promises are heavenly, some earthly application seems to be associated with them. Paul wrote the Romans (Romans 8.17) that members of the body of Christ are joint-heirs (συγκληρονόμος) with Christ. A joint heir shares in an inheritance. The Lord will inherit the nations (Psalms 2) and rule over them. It would seem, therefore, that members of the body of Christ may have some responsibilities in this realm.

⁴ Romans 6 has no water. The baptism Paul taught in which the

believer is identified with Christ in his death (burial) is *dry*. Those who associate this baptism with water do so without Scriptural support. See the author's study on [Baptism](#).

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