

THE UNIQUENESS OF OUR CALLING

A compilation of sermons
by
the late William B. Hallman

.....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.”

Ephesians 3:9

This pamphlet is a compilation of sermons by the late William B. Hallman. These messages were presented to the Open Bible Fellowship in Milwaukee, Wisconsin shortly before Mr. Hallman's death in 1985.

Our prayer is like that of the apostle Paul when he wrote: “Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ.”

Ephesians 3:4

Two passages of Scripture form the foundation for this message. First a verse from Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus, in a free translation of my own:

.. "and to enlighten all as to what is the dispensation of the secret which has been hidden from the ages in God who created all things by Jesus Christ."
Ephesians 3:9

The second verse is from the same apostle's letter to the Colossian church:

.. "for His body's sake, which is the church; of which I became a servant according to the **dispensation** of God which is given to me for you to complete (fulfill) the Word of God: even the **secret** which has been hid from the ages and from the generations but now is made manifest to His saints. To whom God did will to make known what the riches of the glory of this **secret** are among the Gentiles (nations) which is Christ among you, the hope of glory."
Colossians 1:24b-27

There are three Greek words in these verses which form the basis for any study in the Bible. The first we shall discuss is the word we usually speak of in English as "dispensation" or "administration". (We also use the word "stewardship"). These are all good translations of the original word. The second word that we need to carefully understand is the word "mystery". There is more than one mystery mentioned and revealed in the Bible. Which one is it that belongs to us? The third word is "church" or "assembly" as I prefer to call it. There are many assemblies in the Bible, and we need to know to which assembly we really belong. Let us examine each of these three key words in turn.

1. DISPENSATION

There are three forms of this particular word as we translate it into English, and these words occur a total of twenty times in our New Testament. In the Authorized Version, they are translated by such words as: steward, stewardship, dispensation, and once each, Godly edifying, chamberlain, and governors. So we have a conglomeration of English words with reference to the translation of dispensation or stewardship – oikonomos and oikonomeo. The Septuagint version, which is the Greek translation of the Old Testament has the word oikonomia in such passages as Isaiah 22. It uses oikonomos in 1 Kings 4,16, and 18; 2 Kings 18, 19; 1 Chronicles 29; Esther 1 and 8; and Isaiah 36 and 37. Oikonomeo is used once in Psalm 111.

The first word mentioned oikonomia is made up of two Greek words: oikos, which is the Greek word for house, and nemo, which means to dispense. Put the two together and you have a word which means literally – "house dispensing" or something which is distributed or dispensed from a house.

The word oikonomia (which means to parcel out, distribute, manage) occurs three times in Luke's gospel (16:2-4); once in 1 Corinthians 9:17; three times in Ephesians 1:10; 3:2, 9); once in Colossians 1:25; once in 1 Timothy 1:4. Nine times in the New Testament the basic Greek word for dispensation is used.

The second word, oikonomos, is a combination of oikos (house) and nomos (law). This word occurs ten times in the New Testament. It is used first by Luke in his gospel (12:42); Luke

also uses the word in chapter 16:1,3,8. It occurs in Romans 16:23; in 1 Corinthians 4:1 and 2 and once³ each in Galatians 4:2; Titus 1:7 and 1 Peter 4:10.

Oikonomos is derived from the root oikonomia, by way of something we call prescriptive usage. This means that when a certain vernacular word is used often enough and for long enough, it becomes accepted as a word. If oikonomia means basically “house rule”, oikonomos means “house ruler” – someone particularly chosen to dispense. Keep this thought in mind, because it is relevant to the Scriptures when the matter of dispensing something is referred to.

God told Noah to do a certain thing. Has He told me to do the same thing? God told Abraham to do certain things. Has He told me to do the same things? Some people read the Bible and then sing the chorus, “Every promise in the Book is mine”. This is absolutely unscriptural. Has God told them to sacrifice their only begotten son? There is a sense, of course, in which the Bible is given to us for knowledge and understanding, but not in the sense of dispensation. A dispensation limits truth. It is a house rule and it comes about by a house ruler.

Oikonomeo occurs only once in the Bible, in Luke 16:2. It is in the form of an infinitive verb and means literally “to be a steward”.

These are the three basic words. Later on we will discuss the dispensation in which we live and will develop it further. It is basic, however, to see that the word dispensation does not mean a time period. There may be more than one dispensation in a certain age. For example, we have the word chronos, which has reference to “time”. We have the word kairos, which should be translated “season”. We have the word aion, which should be translated “age”. These are all different words so that a dispensation does not necessarily have the time element within it. It is something that is dispensed within time.

We have some Biblical examples of dispensationalists. For example, there was Eliezer, the steward in Abraham’s house (Genesis 15:2). We are told in Genesis 24:2 that he was a ruler in the house. He was a dispenser and he was a ruler: a true oikonomos over a true oikonomia. We could also mention Joseph, who was an overseer. He was chosen by Pharaoh to distribute grain in the time of famine. We are also told that he was given the second highest rank of Rulership over the country of Egypt.

It is important to understand the meaning of the word dispensation and to see what we are to dispense in this dispensation. There are many people who are afraid of the word. Some are anti-dispensationalist and some would dub us extreme dispensationalists. Anyone who has ever read the Scriptures must recognize that there is such a word and that it has a Biblical meaning. Therefore no one who teaches the Word can truly be anti-dispensational.

2. MYSTERY

The second word, mystery or secret is a translation of the Greek word musterion. In its modern usage we think of something that is a mystery, as something which cannot be understood. In the Biblical sense, however, it is something that cannot be understood until or unless it is revealed. Will see how that also relates to our dispensation.

The word mystery is used 27 times in the New Testament: three times in the gospels, 20 times in Paul’s epistles and four times in Revelation. It appears that Paul is a great revelator of the word mystery. In the Septuagint, it occurs nine times in the book of Daniel, particularly in chapter 2. It is equivalent to the Chaldean word raz. (Daniel was writing in the Chaldean

language, not in Hebrew.) Here the word mystery – is something that was not revealed until Daniel revealed it to Nebuchadnezzar. He was given a revelation, just as Paul was given a revelation, which had not been known before.

There are many mysteries in the Bible. For example the mysteries of the Kingdom (Matthew 13); the mystery of the duration of Israel’s blindness (Romans 11); the mystery of iniquity (2 Thess. 2:7); the mystery of Godliness; the mystery of the seven stars; the mystery of God; the mystery of Babylon the Great; the mystery of the woman (all these in Revelation); and finally, the mystery of the church – the Body of Christ. This mystery of the church is revealed in such passages as Ephesians 3:3 and 9 and 5:32, also in Colossians 1:26-27.

Peter tells us (1 Peter 1:10-11) that the prophets searched diligently regarding the sufferings of Christ and His glory. We come in during this interim – between the sufferings and the glory of Christ. So the mystery or secret of the Church, the Body of Christ, must be distinguished from all the other mysteries. We certainly don’t believe that these other mysteries belong to us today:

- the mysteries of the Kingdom of Matthew 13;
- the mystery of iniquity;
- the mystery of the seven stars in Revelation;
- the mystery of Babylon, also in Revelation.

We have to distinguish the word mystery in Ephesians and Colossians from the other revelations, and see what Paul is revealing as a secret in the day in which we live.

3. CHURCH

The Greek word for church or assembly is Ekklesia, which comes from two words: ek (out of) and kaleo (to call forth or summon). The word can be used of a religious or a secular assembly. The word in the Septuagint occurs 78 times. It is translated in the Septuagint by such expressions as: “gather me the people together”. The words assembly, congregation, and company are also used in the Greek version of the Old Testament. The word in our New Testament is also used for both secular and religious groups. For example, we have “the church in the wilderness” (Acts 7:38) with reference to Israel. There is the “church of God” mentioned in Acts and nearly all of Paul’s early epistles (which are usually called the epistles of Acts period). The word ekklesia occurs many times in 1 Corinthians, twice in 1 Timothy and once each in 2 Corinthians, Galatians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians. Is this Church of God the church to which we belong today?

Paul said that this is the church he persecuted, so it must have been a church that was in existence before he started out on his persecutions that take us back to Pentecost. Some believe that the Church of God began earlier than that, referring to Israel even during the time that Christ was on earth. Then there is an expression in Acts 19, “the assembly was confused”. This was not a church that was confused, but a secular assembly of the authorities in Ephesus. We see many local churches in the New Testament:

- the church which is at Jerusalem,
- the church of the Thessalonians,
- churches in certain provinces,
- churches which met in private homes.

There were churches of Galatia, Asia, Macedonia, Judea, Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea. And there is the church, the Body of Christ.

We can see that with such a mass of Scripture in reference to the word ekklesia, we have to ask, “which one refers to the church in which we have a part today? It is important that we see the distinctiveness of the three words dispensation, mystery and church as basic to an understanding of any position in the Bible and particularly to ours.

PAUL’S TWO MINISTRIES

Another foundation point is the fact of Paul’s two-fold ministry. We are not going to see the uniqueness of our position until we see Paul’s two ministries. This is where I believe most dispensationalists fail. If we begin the church at Acts 2, or with Paul’s conversion in Acts 9 or at Acts 13 (Paul’s first missionary journey) it is very difficult to see the uniqueness of our position today. Two books which are absolutely essential to this study are C.H. Welch’s Reconciliation and From Pentecost to Prison, both dealing with the book of Acts.

Here are some Bible references to show what the Scriptures say about Paul’s two-fold ministry. First of all, in Acts 20:27 Paul says: I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God”. Does this include his prison ministry? Let us go on a little further to Acts 26:16 where he is rehearsing his conversion and relating what the Lord spoke to him: “But rise and stand upon thy feet, for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose to make thee a minister and a witness, both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those in the which I will appear unto thee”

When we hear the word ‘both’ we know there are two separate things spoken of. Paul had seen some things that he was to reveal and he was going to receive a further revelation to which he would witness. That is the only sense one can make out of these verses. Reading further in Acts 26 we find that Paul declares: “...having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the Prophets and Moses did say should come; that Christ should suffer and that He should be the first that should rise from the dead and should show light unto the people and to the Gentiles”. In other words, up to that time, Paul was witnessing to things written in the Old Testament scriptures.

One final verse in Acts 28:20 completes this picture of Paul’s first ministry: “For this cause therefore have I called for you, to see you and to speak with you because that for the Hope of Israel I am bound with this chain.” In light of those passages let us refer to a couple of others from the prison epistles:

“For this cause, I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles...that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs and of the same body and partakers of His promise in Christ by the Gospel whereof I was made a minister.” Ephesians 3:1,6&7

“Whereof I am made a minister according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you to fulfill the Word of God, even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations but now is made manifest to His saints.” Colossians 1:25-26

You will seek in vain for a statement like that in the Law or the Prophets. Neither Moses nor the Prophets knew anything about these new truths.

If Paul were still preaching the Prophets and Moses, how could he say that it was hid from the ages and from generation of the past? If we are careful in our reading, we must come to the conclusion that Paul has an early ministry during the book of Acts in which he ministers the truth as it was found in the Old Testament. But when he comes to his prison ministry, he is revealing something that is different. Some say that all he did was to add something to the former. This is not quite true, according to the revelation. It isn't an evolution from Judaism that we are in today. It isn't something that has been added to the revelation that that God gave to Israel.

BEFORE AND AFTER ACTS 28

In a pamphlet entitled, "Before and After Acts 28" J. Eustice Mills lists over a dozen differences between Paul's early and later ministries. Here are some to think about:

1. During the Acts period, Israel is urged to 'turn again' in order that God might 'send the Christ even Jesus' (Acts 3:12-21). "Ye men of Israel, turn again that He may send the Christ who hath been appointed for you, even Jesus." That is what Peter said on the day of Pentecost. After the book of Acts, Israel's hope of the Lord's return was deferred, for Paul declared in the words of Isaiah that their heart was hardened. They became dull of hearing and they became blind. "For the heart of this people has waxed gross, their ears are dull of hearing, their eyes have been closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and should be converted" (Acts 28:27). The judgment passed upon Israel said only one thing – that their opportunity had ceased, although I believe only temporarily. God has a future purpose for Israel, but for the time being, since Paul pronounced the judgment, the fulfillment of Isaiah 6 has been for Israel what Hosea calls Lo-Ammi – "not My people".

2. During the Acts period, the word of salvation was 'sent' to Israel with a warning concerning what might come upon them if they failed to give heed. "Children of the stock of Abraham, whoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent. Beware therefore, lest that come upon you which is spoken of in the prophets" (Acts 13:26 and 40). That doesn't sound like truth for the church today, does it? After Acts, the salvation of God was sent to the Gentiles in consequence of Israel's failure. In Acts 28:28 Paul declares: "Be it known, therefore unto you that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles and they will hear it". This is entirely a different sending.

3. During Acts, believing Gentiles such as Cornelius were permitted to partake of "the Word which God had sent unto the children of Israel" (Acts 10:36). After Acts, the Gentiles received the word which God by revelation sent unto them; the dispensation of the secret. We read: "You Gentiles, since you have heard of the dispensation of the Grace of God which is given to me to youward, that by revelation He made known to me the secret" (Ephesians 3:2-3).

4. During the period of the Acts, Paul was bound for the hope of Israel. "Because that for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain" (Acts 28:20). After Acts, he became a prisoner of the Gentiles. "I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles...how that by revelation He made known unto me the secret" (Ephesians 3:1,3).

There are at least twelve, and maybe, as Eustace Mills says, some sixteen to eighteen distinct differences between Paul's early ministry before his imprisonment and his later ministry. This ministry before his imprisonment, and his later ministry. This seems an overwhelming proof that Paul had a dual ministry. I think there are three specific areas in which this truth can be seen.

First of all, we have a unique dispensation. Secondly, we have a unique dynamic (a unique power that is given to us because of a certain position that we have). Thirdly, we have a unique destiny.

OUR UNIQUE DISPENSATION

“If ye have heard of the dispensation (administration, stewardship) of the grace of God, which was given to me towards you.” Ephesians 3:2

“And to enlighten all as to what is the dispensation of the secret which has been hidden from the ages in God who created all things by Jesus Christ.” Ephesians 3:9

“Of which I became a servant according to the dispensation of God which is given me towards you to complete (fulfill) the Word of God.” Colossians 1:25

To be dispensational in one’s interpretation of Scripture is not always acceptable in the realm of theological or church circles. But if we are undispensational, or anti-dispensational, what do we do with Paul’s statement in Colossians 1:25? He claims to be a minister “according to the dispensation of God”. One would have to throw Paul out and then one has very little left as far as truth is concerned for the age in which we live. To be dispensational is to be Scriptural because the word appears in the Scriptures.

Twenty times we read these three words: oikonomia, oikonomos and oikomeo. Since the Holy Spirit has used the word so many times, that indicates that we should pay attention to what is being said.

WHAT KIND OF DISPENSATION ARE WE IN TODAY?

1. Relative to its time:

“And you that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled.” Colossians 1:21

“But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.” Ephesians 2:13

“Even the secret which hath been hid from ages and from generations but now is made manifest to His saints.” Colossians 1:26

I have underscored the little adverb ‘now’ in all three of these verses. This word is usually a translation of the Greek word nun. But in these three verses, the Holy Spirit has added a letter, making the word nuni. What does that mean? This letter is known as the “iota demonstrative”; nuni signifies that at this very moment, not before, not in the future, but right now, the truth is being revealed. That puts it in a category of something that is absolutely new. The Holy Spirit has emphasized it in this one small adverb. Paul is saying, therefore, that right now this truth is being revealed:

Not in the Book of Revelation,

Not in the Gospels,

Not at any time before, and not after.

The ministry that Paul is talking about here is a revelation given him as a prisoner.

2. Relative to its trust:

“Oh Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoid profane and vain babblings and oppositions of science falsely so called.” 1 Timothy 6:20

“The good deposit committed to thee, keep by the Holy Spirit which dwells in us.” 2 Timothy 1:14

In both of these verses, the word ‘trust’ is the Greek word *parakatatheke*. This is a combination of three Greek words: *para*, *kata*, and *tithomei* and could be literally translated “to place down beside”. The only occurrences of the word in the New Testament are these statements to Timothy. Paul tells Timothy, “you have a specific deposit, you’ve been given a trust and I am revealing it to you”.

And the things that thou has heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men who shall be able to teach others also. 2 Timothy 2:2

For some reason, Paul did not commit it to someone else, but specifically to Timothy, and Timothy was the one who was to give it to others. A specific trust, a specific deposit and we believe it was the good deposit of the secret.

Relative to its truth:

Seven times in Ephesians we see the word ‘truth’ (*aletheuo*) in the Greek. For the sake of easy reference we will list them: “the word of truth” 1:13; “speaking the truth in love” 4:15; “the truth is in Jesus” 4:21; “The new man created in true Holiness (holiness of truth)” 4:24; “speak every man truth” 4:25; “for the fruit of the spirit is truth” 5:9; and “loins girt about with truth” 6:14. It is very interesting to notice the occurrence of such a word seven times in a single epistle. (Those familiar with Dr. E.W. Bullinger’s book, *Numbers in Scripture*, will recall that seven is the number indicating spiritual perfection).

a. Truth as to place:

In reading the book of Ephesians, we notice that five times the expression “in the heavenlies” is used. We find it in Ephesians 1:3, 1:20; 2:6; 3:10 and 6:12. We believe there are three spheres of blessing. Some are going to inherit the earth. Jesus, in His great sermon on the mount, said: “Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth” Matthew 5:5. Others are going to inherit the New Jerusalem. In Hebrews 11:10 and 16, we see that “Abraham looked for a city whose builder and maker was God”. That city of Jerusalem is a satellite that is coming down from heaven to rest upon the earth in the New Heavens and the New Earth. It is possible that the New Jerusalem will hang in the heavens like a satellite during the Millennial Kingdom. Then when God comes to renovate the earth, the city will come down here upon earth. The point is that there is a special group, different from those who are going to inherit the earth.

One might ask, how do you know that there are some who are going to inherit the earth, some the New Jerusalem, and some who will inherit the heavenlies? Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:40, with reference to resurrection: “there are bodies terrestrial and there are bodies celestial”. Without doubt there are those who are going to inherit the earth. It could very well be that they will be animated again in the resurrection by a soulical principle, the principle of blood. They are going to be earth bound. Then, there will be those who are celestial and could very well be animated by the Spirit. It seems very clear from the Bible that there are these

different spheres of blessing. The meek shall inherit the earth. There is a New Jerusalem. There are the Heavens. We will develop this idea shortly.

b. Truth as to position:

Not only with reference to place is the truth unique, but with reference to position. For example, we have a body which can never die, namely “the body of Christ”. When I lay aside this body in death, it is only the physical tabernacle that I have had during the years of my earthly sojourn. Every one of us who is a member of the body of Christ has another body, a body which can never die. How wonderful to think of Him who is the Head of the new body and to know that you and I are members of this wonderful body.

Secondly, we are a building which is the Holy of Holies, “in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto a holy temple in the Lord. (Ephesians 2:21) The word for temple here is naos. The Jewish tabernacle was made up of three different parts. First of all there was the outer court around the tabernacle proper; this contained an altar of sacrifice and a laver for washing. Then, within the confines of the tabernacle, there were two parts divided by a curtain; the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place. Into the Holy of Holies, only the High Priest could enter, and only once a year. Paul says that we are a building. We are the naos. Our dwelling place will be the very Holy of Holies in which the High Priest could only enter once a year. How wonderful to have a building that can never be destroyed.

Thirdly, according to Ephesians we are in a battle against heavenly powers, a battle in which there can be no defeat. The apostle says: “We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Ephesians 6:12). And he goes on to say that we are to take on the whole armour of God: the girdle of truth, breastplate of righteousness, gospel of peace, shield of faith, helmet of salvation, and sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God. How do we put them on?

Turning to Romans 13:14, we find that the apostle says: “to put on the Lord Jesus Christ”. We believe that Jesus Christ is the girdle of Truth. He says: “I am the way, the truth and the life” (John 14:6). He is the breastplate of Righteousness. “Christ Jesus, Who of God is made ...righteousness (1 Corinthians 1:30). He is the gospel of Peace. “He is our Peace” (Ephesians 2:14). He is the shield of Faith. It was His faith first of all that operated upon our faith. He certainly is the helmet of Salvation. He is the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God (John 1:1). So in other words, when I put on the Lord Jesus Christ, I am clothing myself in the whole armour of God because He is the epitome of that armour.

There is in the Old Testament an illustration of this when Joshua was told to go in and take the land of Canaan. When they crossed Jordan they were first to take the stronghold of Jericho. They were to march around the city once a day for six days, and seven times on the seventh day, bringing with them the ark. Then the priests were to blow the trumpets and they were to shout, and the walls came down. But don't miss the context of Joshua 5:13-14, where it says: “the captain of the host of the Lord is going to fight for you”. He was the true “Joshua”. The name Joshua is the Hebrew name of our Lord Jesus (meaning “God my Savior”). Jesus Christ was there fighting that battle which those Israelites never could have fought. How can one walk around a walled city, shout, blow trumpets, and have that city fall to the ground? It is impossible humanly speaking. But when the Captain of our faith is fighting, then we have the

One who can win every battle, who can overcome the enemy, because He is the Victor, the Conqueror.

OUR UNIQUE DYNAMIC

In Ephesians 2:7 Paul mentions “the riches of His grace”. We have a powerful spiritual force in what we call Grace. God had dealt with grace in other dispensations. In fact, there has been grace in every dispensation in a certain sense. But, there has never been before and we don’t believe there will be in the future what we call a Dispensation of Grace, where Grace is absolutely supreme, and I think that becomes the Great Unique Dynamic. This grace is related to Jesus Christ. It is the Christ Life, and “we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us” Romans 8:37.

I have just taken from my bookshelf an old book, now long out of print that I’ve had for many years. It is called *The Buddha of Christendom*, by Sir Robert Anderson. In this volume he points out definitely the distinction between religion on the one hand and Christianity on the other. His thesis is this: All religions say that man has something innate, a divine spark or whatever it might be and through this he is able to perform a duty to appease God and come before Him. Sir Robert goes on to show that Christianity is just exactly the opposite. We take the position as Paul so fully argues in Romans, that there is nothing in us, all are guilty. Paul tells us in Ephesians that we had no hope, no God, no Christ (Ephesians 2:12). We began with nothing therefore the only way that God could save us was by means of grace. Anderson brings this out beautifully in his book. (Incidentally it was Dr. Bullinger who edited Anderson’s original manuscript and added some details.)

This unique dynamic is so unique because of the supreme production that comes out of it.

“That He might create in Himself of two, one new man so making peace.” Ephesians 2:15

“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works which God before prepared that we should walk in them.” Ephesians 2:10

The words “create” and “created” are from the Greek word *kitzo* which means to create, fabricate or found an original formation. It also includes the idea of proprietorship of the manufacturer. Potentially we were saved before the overthrow of the cosmos. Suppose someone comes and says: “How old are you as a believer?” You could truthfully answer that you are older than the present creation. They might laugh at you a bit, but all you have to do is turn to the Scriptures:

“According as He chose us in Him before the overthrow of the world for us to be holy and blameless before Him in love, having predestinated us for adoption through Jesus Christ to Himself according to the good pleasure of His will.” Ephesians 1:4-5

That is unique for us today. We were in God’s mind, chosen, predestinated, before this world was brought into its present existence. If one is a believer, one is an old believer – older than Adam. That is a unique thing in our position today and in our calling. That is the potential.

There is another side to this and that is the experiential. The experiential, or empirical, means that the moment that I recognized Jesus Christ as my Savior, the moment that I recognized

my need of Him, then experientially I came into this wonderful truth. The Lamb of God, the precious lamb without blemish and without spot was foreordained before the overthrow of the world, but was manifest in these last times (see 1 Peter 19:20). So, back there we already had a sacrifice. That's a wonderful thought, isn't it? Even back there the sacrifice was made. God wasn't working something that was entirely new with reference of the death of Christ. When He called us, elected us and predestinated us, there was the sacrifice in God's mind and in God's heart. We have the lamb as the sacrifice before the overthrow.

"In Whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace." Ephesians 1:7

Oh what riches we have in the grace of God! Our salvation becomes experiential through two things: the Spirit and the Word.

"It is the Spirit that quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing. The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life." John 6:63

It is by means of God's Spirit that this dead being (spiritually speaking) is quickened (given life). We were dead in trespasses and sins. We had nothing within us, and had to be quickened by the Spirit. Then the Word of God came and brought Light and Life into our existence. We read in the Scriptures about the Word, that it is the Word of God, the Word of Faith, the Word of Truth, the Word of Life and the Word of Christ. The Spirit and the Word are very important to affect the quickening and the redemption we have in the Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Unique Dynamic brings us this supreme position and production of a new creation. And we get the wonderful position of the sovereign Headship of Jesus Christ. The revelation of Christ's Headship over the assembly, His Body, and ultimately in heaven and earth, is found only in Ephesians and Colossians, making it unique.

"...Hath put all things under His feet and gave Him to be Head over all the assembly which is His body." Ephesians 1:22-23

"...Speaking the truth in love may grow up unto Him in all things which is the Head, even Christ." Ephesians 4:15

"Christ is the Head of the assembly, He is the savior of the body." Ephesians 5:23

"He is the Head of the body, the assembly." Colossians 1:18

"...Not holding the Head from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment, ministered and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God." Colossians 2:19

"Ye are complete in Him who is the Head of all principality and power." Colossians 2:10

"That in the dispensation of the fulness of times He might gather together (or 'head up') in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth, even in Him." Ephesians 1:10

We know it is the head that contains the wisdom and knowledge, and it is the head that conveys the power. Paul prays in his prayer in Colossians 1:9-11:

"...that you might be filled with the knowledge of His will..."

That you may be filled with all wisdom and spiritual understanding...

That you may be strengthened with all might according to His glorious power.”

A Christless assembly is a headless assembly. The holy union is as close as the union between the heart and the arteries. Christ is the very life blood of our anatomy, spiritually speaking. And as there is only one head for every torso, so there is only one assembly with one Head. That is the uniqueness of our position today. It is by the grace of God that we have this wonderful position.

Having rejected the Pauline revelation of Christ and His assembly, there sprang up during the ages countless numbers of Kingdom assemblies where the headship of Christ is not pre-eminent and where our relationship to that head is not pre-eminent. This is part of our very unique calling. If everyone would see that, it would eliminate all the denominations that we have today.

There is only one body for this Head, the assembly of which we are members. Five things are spoken of the Head in Colossians 1:18-19:

“He is the Head of the body, the assembly: Who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things He might have the pre-eminence. For it pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell.”

He is the Head – kephale;

He is the beginning – arche;

He is the firstborn – prototokos;

He has pre-eminence – proteuo;

And He is the fulness – pleroma.

Nothing more completely characterizes the greatness and the glory of Headship than the word pleroma, which means fulness, completeness, and perfection. The word occurs five times in Ephesians and Colossians:

“...the fulness of Him that filleth all in all.” Ephesians 1:23

“...with all the fulness of God.” Ephesians 3:19

“...the stature of the fulness of Christ.” Ephesians 4:13

“...in Him all fulness dwells.” Colossians 1:19

“...all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.” Colossians 2:9

When I summarize this idea of fulness, I find that there is a complete sevenfold fulness in this pleroma of Christ Jesus:

First – the fulness of place. In the Person of Christ is where all fulness resides. It inhabits, it dwells (says Paul in Colossians) in Jesus Christ.

Secondly - in Him is the fulness of pleasure. “It pleased the Father” concerning His headship. God takes special delight in the Headship of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Thirdly – in Him is the fulness of purpose. “For of Him and through Him and unto Him are all things that He might have the glory unto the ages.” Romans 11:36 Here we have God’s purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Fourthly – the fullness of promise. “For all the promises of God in Him are yea, and in Him amen, unto the glory of God by us.” 2 Corinthians 1:20

Fifthly – the fullness of power. “Jesus came and spoke saying, ‘all power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth.’ Matthew 28:18

Sixthly – in Him is the fullness of provision. “The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” John 1:14

Seventh – in Him is the fullness of prospect. “That in the dispensation of the fullness of times, He might head up all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth, even in Him.” Ephesians 1:10

A songwriter has put it into verse: “To know to do the Head’s command, for this the body lives and grows. All speed the feet, all skill of hands, this for Him spent and from Him flows.” In this unique dynamic of grace, we not only have the production of a new man in Christ Jesus, we have the Headship of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

A UNIQUE TENSE

We have already discussed our unique dispensation and our unique dynamic. Thirdly, we have the most secure protection. Notice again Colossians 3:3: “For you died”. The word is apothnesko and it is in the aorist tense in the Greek. I call aorist a timeless tense. That really is a contradiction because in talking about tense, one is speaking of time: past, present and future. But here is a verb form in the Greek which is past, present and future. We have no such tense in our English language. It is a unique tense – the aorist. You died yesterday; you are dead today; you will be dead tomorrow. It is for all time. And your life has been hid, krupto – it is in the perfect tense, which means that it has been absolutely complete.

Your life has been hid with Christ in God. How can we illustrate this? A crude object lesson might help. Take a large cup and write God on it. Take a smaller cup, write Jesus Christ on it and place it inside the God cup. Then take a smaller cup and write “me” on it and place it inside the Jesus Christ cup. Little me is hid in Christ in God. Only God is visible. What a wonderful relationship! It almost goes beyond human comprehension. But that is what Paul is talking about in Colossians 3:3. This is indeed eternal security – my life is hid with Christ in God.

“How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized unto Jesus Christ were baptized unto His death? ...knowing this that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed...for he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him.” Romans 6:2-8

We are buried with Him, raised with Him, seated with Him, hidden in Him. What a protection! Adam and Eve hid before God, among the trees of the garden, with insufficient covering. God came and spoke to them; then He slaughtered an animal and made garments for the naked pair – a covering by means of death. The High Priest in Israel was clothed in white linen garments when he ministered at the altar or went into the Holy of Holies. If he did not clothe himself in these holy linen garments, he would die (see Leviticus 6 and 16).

“Fine linen, clean and white, is the righteousness of the saints.” Revelation 19:8

“...and the armies which were in heaven followed upon white horses clothed in fine linen, white and clean.” Revelation 19:14

In the parable of the wedding and the wedding garment, a man comes in without wedding garments, and the master says: “Bind his hand and foot and take him away. Cast him into outer darkness, where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Matthew 22:13

No one will ever stand before God or be hid in Him without the righteousness of Jesus Christ. That’s important to understand (see 1 Corinthians 1:30, 2 Corinthians 5:21, Ephesians 4:24). To be hid with Christ in God is to be clothed with Christ. That means that I partake of all the attributes of Christ, all of the works of Christ. I am in Him and Christ is in God. What a protection, what a security and what a blessedness to know that in Him I am perfectly right. Not a demon, Satan, or any fallen angel can point a finger at me if I am in Christ, for I have righteousness that God recognizes and that God will honor. What a glorious security and satisfaction this hiding brings to us in this dispensation. What a dynamic, and it is all because of the grace of God. There is not a merit in any part of my being, or anything I have ever done. It’s all because of Christ. If my life is not in Him, then I am hopeless. But by the grace of God I have been put into Him and He is in God. Clothed in the righteousness of Christ I will stand for all eternity: invincible, unchangeable.

OUR UNIQUE DESTINY

Next to our faith in Christ, the most important thing for us to consider is where are we going to spend eternity and how are we going to spend it? The unique destiny that we have is connected with Ephesians 3:16, “the riches of His glory”. As I understand the Scriptures, there are three spheres of destiny. First of all, in Matthew 5:5: “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” There are those who will have their inheritance upon the earth. Reading further on in the gospel of Matthew:

“When the Son of Man shall have come in His glory...before Him shall be gathered all nations. He shall set the sheep on His right hand and the goats on His left. Then shall the King say to them on His right hand, ‘come ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the overthrow of the world.’” Matthew 25:31-34

Notice that in these passages nothing is said of heaven. Secondly we have some other statements. For example in the book of Hebrews: “For he (Abraham) looked for a city which hath foundations whose builder and maker is God” (11:10). And in the next chapter: “But ye are come to Mount Sion and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem” (12:22). And in Revelation 21:2: “I John saw the Holy City, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband”. Here is a city that is coming down from God out of heaven and will be inherited by Abraham. We believe that this is the city of the bridal company. Those who overcome by faith, like Abraham, will inherit the New Jerusalem.

Then I turn to such passages as Philippians 3:14 where Paul says: “I press toward the goal for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus”. The Greek expression there is *anoklesis*. This word is not an adjective, it is an adverb. The same construction is found in John 8:23: “and He said to them, ye are from beneath, I am from above (*ano*)”. This is the same expression and of course Christ came down from heaven.

So it is our conviction that there are some of the redeemed who are going to inherit the earth. Some are going to walk the streets of the New Jerusalem and some who are seated with Christ far above all principalities and powers who will reign with Him in the heavenlies. Some are going to form the kingdom of priests upon the earth. Some will constitute the Bride of the Lamb. Some will be the body of Christ, with Christ as the Head. Some are going to constitute the ‘sand’ seed of Abraham, others the ‘star’ seed. Some have their calling from before the overthrow of the world and reign with Christ in the heavenlies. The apostle Paul tells us that “the dispensation of God which is given to me for you” constitutes the glorious fact of “Christ among you, the hope of glory” Colossians 1:25-27.

The Greek word for glory is doxa. It was the Hebrew historian Philo who said of glory: “the unfolded fulness of the divine doxamos, or manifested power, and coincides with His self-revelation”. The word doxa has been called by some a ‘rainbow colored’ word. It embraces the idea of something that is weighty or heavy. It also has the idea of an opinion or judgment resulting in praise and honor, associated with splendor, brightness, magnificence, excellence, pre-eminence, dignity and grace. It is a most glorious condition, a most exalted state. One can fully define that word only as one thinks of the fulness of God. We think perhaps of such verses as:

“Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.” Luke 12:27

“The Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.” Matthew 24:30

In Exodus 33:18-19 Moses said to the Lord: “I beseech you, show me Thy glory”. The Lord answered and said: “I will make all My goodness pass before thee...and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious”. Notice the implication of the Lord’s response to Moses. In other words, He says: “If you are going to see My glory you have to see it in My goodness and in My grace”. We take the word ‘goodness’ as referring to God’s creation and we take the word ‘grace’ as referring to God’s redemption. When we look at the marvels of creation, the heavens above and the earth beneath, we see the most marvelous variety, the most glorious and beautiful things that only a creator like God could make. And of course, when it comes to the grace of God, likewise what a marvelous redemption we have.

So God tells Moses: “If you are going to see My glory, then you have to understand My goodness and My grace”. This is truly the best definition of glory that we have in the Bible. And what better illustration of God’s goodness and grace do we possess than Christ Himself. What He is, where He is, and what He does, constitutes the glory of God. Hymn writer Charles Gabriel wrote: “When by the gift of His infinite grace, I am accorded in heaven a place. Just to be there and to look on His face, will through the ages be glory for me”. The glory of God is to be seen in the face of Jesus Christ. Christ is the epitome of God’s goodness in creation, and the epitome of God’s grace in His redemptive power and blessing.

When we think of our Unique Destiny, we think of it, first of all in terms of our super-heavenly residence in the Heavenlies. I know there are some who feel that this does not necessarily deal with a place, that it rather deals with a quality or character of our spirituality. And therefore, they believe that it can take place on earth as well as in the heavenlies. There are two ways in which we can test truth. First of all, go to the original language and see what it says. When I go to the original, I find that I have an expression in the dative plural which is the dative of place. So the Greek language settles it once and for all. But what can one do if one doesn’t

know the Greek language? Another way to test the truth of an interpretation is to put the substitute word in the place of the word found in the Scriptures. For example: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the ‘qualities or characteristics’ of Christ” Ephesians 1:3; “... which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and set Him at His own right hand in the ‘qualities’” Ephesians 1:20; “...hath raised us up together and made us sit together in the ‘qualities’ in Christ Jesus” Ephesians 2:6. Go to Ephesians 3:10 and 6:12 and do the same. Immediately we can see that it doesn’t fit. There is no question but that the Greek term has reference to place – a distinct place-which is our destiny for the future. It is the place where Christ is seated (Ephesians 2:6) and it is:

“...far above all principality and power and might and dominion and every name that is named.” Ephesians 1:20-21

In 1 Kings 8:27 Solomon declares to the Lord: “The heavens and the heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee”. In other words, God is seated on top of the heavens. Ephesians 4:10 reads: “He ascended far above all heavens”. Therefore, if we are seated with Christ, we are seated on top of the very heavens.

The assembly, the body of Christ, is going to receive “the inheritance of the saints in light” Colossians 1:12. That can be translated “the inheritance of the holiest of all in the light”. This is that unapproachable light spoken of in 1 Timothy 6:16, that glorious light in which God is clothed as with a garment and in which He lives. What a residence for us as members of His body! Some astronomers, after peering into the heavens with their mighty telescopes, have come to the conclusion that the universe is infinite, and it might well be. I wouldn’t be surprised if God is continually creating; that we are going to see the manifestation of His creative power in the time to come, and that there will be absolutely no end to the infinitude of God’s creation. If we think of our Lord as Creator, there is no reason why there cannot emanate from Him in all eternity some new creation. And I think God is going to surprise us with something new and different in our super-heavenly residence.

Secondly, with reference to our destiny, there is connected with it a super-heavenly resurrection. In Philippians 3:11 we read: “If by any means I may attain (or arrive) unto the out-resurrection of the dead”. Paul is looking forward to something here that he did not have before. What did he have? He had the assurance of a resurrection according to 1 Thessalonians 4 and 1 Corinthians 15 and certainly he looked forward to that. But this is something different from the resurrection that he had under the New Covenant during the book of Acts. He was looking to the special resurrection that is going to take place prior to what is called in the Bible “the first resurrection”. Paul looked forward to a prior resurrection, and so should we as members of His body. We are potentially raised up together with Christ so that our resurrection is as sure as if it had already taken place. As sure as the crucifixion led to our Lord’s resurrection, so our resurrection is secure.

“If (since) ye be risen with Christ seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory.” Colossians 3:1-4

A hymn that we have in our hymnal puts it this way:

“With Him in glory, O wonderful word,
Eye hath not seen and ear hath not heard,
Mind hath not fathomed the future in store,
Reserved for the children of God evermore.”

Suffering over, and failure, and sin,
Like Him without and like Him within.
Bodies made perfect, spirits set free,
We will share in His glory whose glory we see.”

Another writer has written this beautiful sentiment:

“He will welcome all His body; He will diadem His own,
He will share with them His glory and will seat them on His throne.
Then forever in His presence we shall see Him face to face,
While we chant His matchless wisdom and extol His wondrous grace.”

It is indeed a sad commentary that even today there are some who never get past Egypt. There are some who never get out of the wilderness. There are some who never get past the Jordan River. There are some who do not get past the New Jerusalem. There are some who never seem to think of their destiny in the heavenlies. I hope that we can lift our thoughts into that which sometimes seems beyond our comprehension. But when God has said it in His Word, faith can take care of the rest. Accept it and believe it because God has said it.
