

## Doctrine of the Mystery

### 1 Thessalonians 2:1—4

The last lesson showed how precious the Mystery doctrine was to Paul. He suffered greatly in defense of it but continued to boldly proclaim its truths. This is in stark contrast with many churches today that don't make doctrine supreme. Although many churches claim doctrine is supreme it often takes a back seat to church growth. If doctrine will chase people away the easy solution is to change or hide what is believed. If it may offend someone then either the doctrine is wrong and needs to change or be blunted so as not to prick sensitive ears. What a contrast to Paul's suffering as he boldly disseminated the doctrine that was given to him directly by Jesus Christ. Paul wasn't concerned about church growth, in fact his doctrine often offended people to the point that towards the end of his life he sadly saw all those who were in Asia turned away from him (his doctrine of the Mystery) (2 Timothy 1:15).

#### Which doctrine?

It's important to define exactly which doctrine we need to preach and teach in this age of Grace. Are we to take the whole Bible as written directly to us or are there things that were written to others that do not directly apply to us? Those who adhere to Covenant Theology tend to understand that the whole Bible is written to today's Church. Those things that don't quite fit are allegorized, becoming examples for us to follow or understand. For instance, passages that speak of Israel crossing the Jordan River to enter the Promised Land now become spiritualized truths about what happens to the believer upon death. Since they believe there is but one people of God throughout the ages (after the fall of Adam) what God has spoken to Abraham or the prophets is just as relevant to us today as it was to Israel. However, since it is difficult to relate Israel's physical promises (become a great people, inherit a lot of land, being priests in the Millennial Kingdom, etc.) directly to the church, many of these passages are allegorized. Even though the Millennial Kingdom is described in great detail and said to last 1,000 years (Revelation 20:1—7), their theology makes it necessary to allegorize these passages to say there will be a long-lasting spiritual kingdom with Christ on the throne of the believer's heart.

Instead of accepting all of Scripture then allegorizing it to fit today, Dispensationalists take a more literal interpretation of Scripture and then determine which parts of the Bible were written directly to us (since all Scripture has been written for our benefit Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 15:11). Using the above example, God is understood to have dealt with Israel in a manner distinct from how He deals with us today. They have the promise of a 1,000-year long Kingdom while we have the promise of heaven. All dispensationalists divide Scripture but unfortunately not all dispensationalists agree where this division should be made.

#### Rightly dividing

Almost all dispensationalists use 2 Timothy 2:15 to support their view of dividing up God's Word, interpreting different portions to apply to different people or groups. Doing so makes it much more possible to make a literal interpretation of Scripture.

**2 Timothy 2:15** Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

Many non-dispensationalists translate the phrase "rightly dividing" to mean "correctly handle." From a covenant theologian's viewpoint, this verse needs to be interpreted as accurately handing God's Word since dividing up God's Word is neither necessary nor proper. The word (G3718) literally means to cut straight, to dissect. If we are correctly handling Scripture we are dividing it correctly. Since the whole Bible is truth (notice I did not say it contains truth), we are literally dividing truth from truth. Israel was given the truth of their Gospel and we in the Church, the Body of Christ have been given ours. We cannot take truth given to Israel as our truth any more than they can take our truth for

themselves. According to this verse we are to strive to demonstrate ourselves as having been tested and found genuine, an unashamed worker, by accurately dividing Scripture.

### **Where should we divide?**

Knowing we need to divide Scripture does not tell us where we should divide Scripture. Fortunately, Paul gives us this information. The best place to look for this information would be found in the book that tells us to divide. Sure enough, 2 Timothy 2:2 clues us in as to where we are to make such a division.

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

Here Paul clearly tells Timothy to take what he taught him and pass it on to other men who will then use this doctrine to teach others. Verse 8 emphasizes the uniqueness of Paul's doctrine by calling it "my gospel." As the apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15—16; Romans 11:13; Ephesians 3:1; 1 Timothy 2:7), Paul was commissioned by God to bring the Gospel of Grace (Acts 20:24) to all those outside of Israel. This happened when Israel rejected their Messiah making made them incapable to spread the Gospel of the Kingdom to the Gentiles. Instead of using Israel to disseminate the gospel, God appointed Paul. If the Gospel of the Kingdom were still being preached then the 12 Disciples could have done that. Instead, since a whole new message was to be preached, God picked Paul (both a Jew and a Roman) to begin this new work. It is only in Paul's writings that we can find our position (in Christ, seated in the heavenly places Ephesians 1:20; 2:6); our walk (Romans 8:4; Galatians 5:16; Ephesians 4:17—23; Philippians 3:17); our destination (2 Corinthians 5:6—8; 1 Corinthians 15:51—54; 1 Thessalonians 4:13—17; 1 Corinthians 6:3). We are not able to find instructions for us today by going outside of Paul's teaching.

### **A new message**

Paul gives clues throughout his writings that he is dealing out a brand new message distinct from the Gospel of the Kingdom. First Paul clearly states that he did not receive this message from any human (Galatians 1:11—12). He also needed to stand before the leaders of the Hebrew church in Jerusalem (Peter, James and others) to present the doctrine he was teaching. Having heard his defense they agreed it was from God and they gave him the right hand of fellowship (Galatians 2:1—10). Notice how Paul was given the Mystery directly from Jesus Christ while those he told it to came to understand it was from God by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 3:1—5).

Paul also makes it clear that his message was a mystery until it was revealed through him (Romans 16:25; Ephesians 3:1—10; Colossians 1:26—29). A special note on Ephesians 3:8 is in order. Most interpretations see the word unfathomable (as many translations put it) and assume that God's word is so deep that we will never be able to understand it. The King James Version correctly used the word unsearchable. This means the doctrine Paul was preaching cannot be traced back to any previous doctrine before it was revealed to him.

Paul is careful to distinguish the Gospel of Grace he preached from the Gospel of the Kingdom preached by Jesus and His Disciples. One way he does this is by using the terms "my gospel," "the gospel I preached" or "our gospel" to make sure we understand which gospel he is preaching. If there were only one gospel there would be no reason to make that distinction.

Another term Paul uses to separate the two economies is "but now." He does this because of important changes made between Law and Grace or Prophecy and Mystery (Romans 3:21; 6:22; 7:6; 11:30; 16:25—26; Ephesians 2:13; Colossians 3:8). (see [lesson 4](#) for additional information)

For previous notes and additional mid-Acts materials please visit [www.MidActsTruths.com](http://www.MidActsTruths.com)