

Instructions Designed to Guide the Church

Almost all Christians recognize some portions of the Bible were written as directions for the Nation of Israel and other parts were designed to be guidelines for the Church. For instance, under the Law circumcision was required for a man to be acceptable to God, but now circumcision is not necessary to have a relationship with God (Gen. 17:14; Gal. 6:15). However, today there is much uncertainty among believers about whether a scriptural standard exists that would give a basis to differentiate between truth God revealed for Church practice and instructions He intended for the Jewish people.

So, can a biblical indicator be found which provides a framework for Christians to determine what truths God expects members of the Church to practice and what Scriptures are not necessary for us to apply? This article contains my Bible-based answer to this important question.¹ In short, I have concluded: *The revelation given to Paul by our risen Lord encompasses God's standard of truth for the time in which we live.* To reach this end, a study of many Scripture passages is required. Following is an analysis of numerous verses by which I will present supporting evidence for the premise: We should direct our attention to the writings of Paul in order to determine the principles intended to guide the Church.

The first passages of consideration will be shown to indicate the message received by Paul is God's *Standard of truth* for the Church. Then, focus will be directed to the *Secret Nature* of this message followed by some of its *Descriptive Qualities*. Next, the *Source* of this revelation will be explored after which its *Content* will be examined. Finally, *Application* of this gospel will be discussed with an emphasis on how it should impact our lives.

I invite you to come along on this expositional journey. My desire for you is to be encouraged and edified while you contemplate passages from the Word of God with me. Without further introduction, let us direct our attention to biblical contexts connected with this subject.

The Message Given to Paul is Our Present Day Standard of Truth

An important initial passage to consider is Second Timothy 1:13; "Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are

¹ These convictions are a result of combining instruction from several Bible teachers and authors over the course of many years tempered by personal discoveries acquired from spending time studying the Word.

in Christ Jesus.” The Holy Spirit carefully chose the word “*pattern*” (υποτυπωσιν) to describe how Timothy was to make use of the teachings he received from Paul. The English word “type” (τυπος) is from the second part of this Greek word and speaks of the *exact form* of what it represents. The “pattern” represented here is identified as the gospel message Timothy “heard from” Paul (2 Tim. 1:8-11).

Implementing this message is not an option, but a *command*, since the word translated “Hold fast” is in the *imperative mode*. As Timothy obeyed this directive, the gospel message he received from Paul would become *the Standard* for his own ministry as well as for training other teachers. This intention is confirmed a few verses later when Paul writes, “which things you heard from me through many witnesses, commit these things to faithful men, who will be qualified to teach others also” (2 Tim. 2:2).

The noun translated “administration” is the most prevalent word Paul uses to define truth he received as a Standard for the Church. One example is in Colossians 1:25, where Paul says he “was made a minister according to the administration (οικονομιαν) of God which was given to me”. The noun “*administration*” is built from combining the Greek words “οικος”, meaning *house*, with “νομος”, which means *law*. It expresses the *Law for God’s household* – all aspects of how the Church is to be *managed* – is found in the recorded truth “which was given to” Paul (v. 24). This word can be defined as *the rules which determine how a household is run*.

Transliterating the noun, “οικονομια”, we get the English word “economy”. Just as the term “economy” is used to describe all facets of operation related to the management of a country’s resources, in the Paul’s writings, this word refers to *the entire body of truth by which the Church is managed*.

The second part of the Greek word “οικονομια”, meaning “law” (νομος), is the same one used in the Scriptures referring to the “Law of Moses” (Luke 2:22; 24:44). By itself, the word “law” means *a standard* or *a rule*. The actual meaning of the phrase “Law of Moses” is the *rule associated with Moses*. The purpose God gave the Law to Moses on Mount Sinai was so it would become the *Standard of truth which administered* the House of Israel. In the same way, the message given to Paul is the foundation upon which the *Church, God’s present house, is managed* (1 Cor. 3:9; Eph. 2:19-22).

In some Bible Versions, “οικονομια” is translated “dispensation”. This Greek word is commonly taught to mean God is *dispensing* truth to men. That idea is not really contained within this word. However, in contexts surrounding “οικονομια” we are

taught it *was given, made known and revealed by God*. These descriptive phrases cover the concept this “administration” was *dispensed* by God (Rom. 16:25-26; Eph. 3:2-3; Col. 1:25-27). Also, this word has become the primary reason an entire theological position is known as *Dispensationalism*. The English term “dispensation” is appropriately used to define God’s programs which can be observed in the Bible because it is put forth to represent *standards of truth which He uses to administer these programs* throughout history.

Beyond its use in Colossians 1:25, “οικονομία” occurs in five other passages regarding the message entrusted to Paul. Each of these will be covered throughout this article (1 Cor. 9:17; Eph. 1:9; 3:2, 9; 1 Tim.1:4). It should be noted: The Holy Spirit exclusively directed Paul to use “οικονομία” in reference to divine programs. The remaining three occurrences in the New Testament are found in a single passage where Jesus told a story about an unethical *steward* (manager) who was entrusted with the *administration* of a rich man’s property (Luke 16:2-4).

Why does the word “οικονομία” spotlight the administration revealed to Paul? This is because *God gave to him a new revelation which was intended to replace the Law of Moses* (Rom. 6:14; 7:6). The Law had been God’s *standard* for the Nation of Israel during a time of more than fourteen hundred years, beginning shortly after their Exodus from Egypt and continuing through the early Acts period. *The great importance of this replacement is why so much is written about this transfer in the writings of Paul*. This transition is also the focus of Acts, in which Paul’s salvation and ministry dominate the last three quarters of the Book (Acts 13:38-48; 18:6; 28:23-28). The volume of references regarding this subject spread throughout many New Testament Books enables us to grasp what God desires to accomplish by this new program.

Nature of this Revelation – Once it was Secret, Now it is Revealed

This section will examine passages which help illustrate the nature of this “administration” given to Paul. In Ephesians 3:2, Paul speaks of “the administration of the grace of God which was given” to him. Then, he explains that “according to revelation, the mystery was made known to me” (v. 3). The noun translated “mystery” (μυστηριον) means *a secret*. It does not mean something mysterious which cannot be understood. It refers to something which is a secret because it was *not known*. However, now that it has been *revealed, it is no longer a secret*. This verse means, the “administration” God uses to manage the Church is based on this *now revealed truth* which was previously a “mystery”.

If this administration of God is now understood since it has been revealed, why does Paul continue using the word “mystery” to describe it? A probable reason is the Holy Spirit guided Paul to use this term as a *constant reminder that the truth which administers the Church had been a secret prior to the time it was revealed*. This point will be shown in the following paragraphs to be *fundamental toward comprehending what truths from the Word of God are in effect today*.

The first passage supporting this thought is Ephesians 3:9, where Paul states God’s purpose for him was “to help illuminate all men regarding what the administration of the mystery consists of, which had been hidden from the ages in God, who created all things.” Note, this “mystery . . . had been hidden” from the “ages” (αιωνων) or *periods of time* in the past. In addition, this verse says where it was concealed; it was “*hidden . . . in God*” (Col. 1:26). The idea is when we read about God creating the universe and revealing truth in Old Testament times, this “mystery” was not part of that record. He reserved this administration “of” or *associated with* (genitive case) the mystery to be disclosed at a future time.

When was this message revealed to man? A few verses prior, Paul spoke of “the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men as now it was revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the spirit” (Eph. 3:4-5; see also Rom. 16:25-26; Col. 1:26). This passage clarifies *the “mystery” truth, which was not revealed “in other generations”, was “now” revealed “to his holy apostles and prophets” during the generation of which Paul was part*. The fact that other apostles and prophets in addition to Paul received “mystery” revelation will be discussed later in this article.

Another passage verifying this “mystery” was not included in past revelations is Ephesians 3:8. Paul writes, “This grace was given to me, the lesser than the least of all the saints, to preach to the gentiles the untraceable richness of Christ.” The word translated “*untraceable*” (ανεξιχνιαστον) is made up of three Greek words. Two prefixes, the alpha “α”, meaning *not*, and the preposition “εξ”, which means *out*, are affixed to the noun “ιχνος” which means *a track*. This is like a *trace* an animal would leave behind which gives the hunter clues, showing he is in the vicinity of his prey. Together, these three words indicate the “richness of Christ” is *not able to be tracked out*. In other words, *no trace can be found of things concerning the distinctive wealth we have in Christ prior to when God made it known*.

Here, the word “untraceable” is an *adjective* explaining how no traces of the “richness of Christ” occur in past revelations. So, this “richness” *associated with* (genitive case) “Christ” is referring to same thing as “the mystery” revelation which

was also hidden in the past. The “mystery” revelation, containing facts related to the “richness of Christ”, is foundational to the truth which makes up “the administration of the grace of God” given to Paul. These three phrases together characterize the subject matter of this entire paragraph (Eph. 3:1-13).

The word “untraceable” is found one more time in the New Testament. In Romans 11:33, Paul expresses wonderment after writing about the “mystery” regarding the present state of the Nation of Israel being in a “partial hardening . . . until which time the full amount of gentiles might come in” (v. 25). Based on prior Scripture, no one could have predicted God would *set aside Israel as His people* nor give Gentiles the opportunity to be saved as those having equal value before Him. But, the previously unrevealed “mystery” truth teaches these things (Rom. 11:1-32). In response to these unexpected surprises, Paul writes, “Oh the depth of the richness and wisdom and knowledge of God; how *unsearchable* are his judgments and how *untraceable* (ανεξιχνιαστοι) his ways” (v. 33). Not only does this passage indicate these newly known “ways” of God *cannot be traced out*, but it adds they *cannot be searched out*. Thus, *Christians will search in vain to find these distinctive “mystery” truths related to God’s present relationship with Israel in the Old Testament Scriptures and in the Gospel Accounts.*

First Corinthians 2:7-8 also supports this analysis. Here, Paul says, “we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, which had been hidden, which God predestined prior to the ages intended for our glory” (v. 7). The word translated “*predestined*” (προωρισεν) is made up of two words meaning *to determine beforehand*. We get our English word “horizon” from the second word. Just as the horizon marks a line of separation between land and sky, in the same way, the use of this word *designates a time-line for when God predetermined the content of truth intended for our glory*. It was “prior to the ages”. That is, *He “predestined” this truth before created time began* – the biblical timeframe of Genesis 1:1.

Then, verse 8 says regarding this mystery wisdom, “which no one of the rulers of this age had known, for if they had known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.” The “rulers of this age” could include Pontius Pilate and the Roman rulers as well as the heavenly, evil principalities and powers, about whom Paul also speaks (Eph. 3:10; Col. 2:15). This verse teaches *God’s predestined mystery truth was not made known prior to Christ’s crucifixion*. For, it says these leaders would not have crucified Jesus if even “one” of them had understood the extent to which these “mystery” teachings would accomplish “glory” for Jewish and Gentile converts as a result of Christ’s death on the cross (Rom. 11:11-16). Since these evil rulers, some of whom were fallen angels, could not find this truth in any available revelation, how can we human beings, who are lower forms of creation

than the angels, expect to find God's *mystery wisdom* in the Old Testament writings or four Gospel Accounts? (Heb. 2:6-9; Rev. 12:7-9)

Romans 16:25 is another passage which speaks of the "revelation of the mystery which had been kept silent in eternal times". The participle translated "*which had been kept silent*" (συστημενου) means exactly that (see also: Acts 15:12; 1 Cor. 14:28). This word appears in the *perfect tense* form which indicates "*the mystery was kept silent and this silence continued in full effect*". The meaning of this word in conjunction with its tense signifies there was nothing said about this "mystery. . . in eternal times" (all recorded time) prior to it "now having been made manifest and made known through prophetic writings" (Rom. 16:26). It is necessary to view these "prophetic writings" as New Testament Epistles, not Old Testament writings, since the "mystery" is again stated as being revealed in this "now" time (Eph. 3:5; Col. 1:26). Later, more analysis will be done in regard to the nature of these "prophetic writings". Summarizing this passage, *God kept silent regarding this new "mystery" revelation in biblical writings prior to this "now" time – the time of Paul's generation.*

Second Timothy 1:9 further supports the concept that the revelation entrusted to Paul was divinely planned before the creation recorded in Genesis. Paul speaks of God's "purpose and grace which has been given to us in Christ Jesus prior to eternal times". Also, in the Book of Titus Paul speaks of "the hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised prior to eternal times, and in due time He made His word (message) manifest in preaching, with which I was entrusted." Note again, Paul was personally "entrusted" with God's message of eternal life extended to all men which He had "*promised before time began*", but it was kept secret by Him until the "now" generation, when it was finally revealed.

God's Relationship with Israel began "from the foundation of the world"

In Contrast to the revelation of the mystery having been determined by God "prior to" the foundation of the world, the truth regarding God's dealings with the Nation of Israel is spoken about as being known "from" the foundation of the world. When referring to the coming of the Son of Man, Jesus says to the Jewish faithful, "Come the blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom having been prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 25:34). Then, in Luke 11:50, Jesus declares "Woe" upon the Jewish lawyers because they rejected the prophets God sent to them just like their fathers had rejected the prophets sent during Old Testament times. God did this "in order that the blood of all the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the world, might be required from this generation." *God's relationship with the Nation of Israel is associated with truth*

revealed “from the foundation of the world”. Specifically, this relationship began with His promises to Abraham, the father of the Jewish Nation (Gen. 12:1-3).

Summarizing, God’s newly revealed “mystery” truth for the Body of Christ was “kept silent” and is “untraceable” in Old Testament revelation, while it was “hidden in God”. Connected with these concepts, it was *predetermined by God before the foundation of the world*, but was held in reserve until the time it was revealed after Christ’s crucifixion. In addition, *no other New Testament writers use the word “mystery” or claim they received new truths from the risen Lord*. These claims are limited to numerous, divinely-driven assertions of Paul alone.

Jesus does use the word “mysteries” on one occasion regarding new things He revealed about the coming Kingdom of Heaven/God, as we find recorded in three separate Gospel Accounts (Matt. 13:11; Mark 4:11; Luke 8:10). When interpreted in light of the historical setting in which they occur, Jesus’ use of the word “mysteries” refers to new truths pertaining to the Messianic Kingdom which is yet to be established on earth and not to the Church, the Body of Christ.

A New Creation is Introduced and Defined by this New Revelation

Paul also writes about Christians being a “*new creation*” in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). When God describes believers as a “new creation”, He is intending to emphasize we did not become what we are based on the original creation of Genesis. Otherwise, why would we need to be designated by the concept of being a “new creation”? In our new state “old things have passed away, new things have come into being” (2 Cor. 5:17). We are no longer unacceptable sinners in the presence of our Father, but we are sanctified saints, righteous in His sight (v. 21). Never before in history had believers occupied the privileged position of being considered righteous in the eyes of God (Rom. 6:11). We are the first ones who are spiritually alive since Christ has paid for our sins and His Spirit dwells in us. This relationship with God through Jesus Christ qualifies us to be His children who are fully acceptable to Him at this present time (Eph. 1:5-6).

Galatians 6:15 also speaks about this “new creation” as it states; “neither circumcision nor un-circumcision is anything, but a new creation.” Both the immediate context and this entire Book speak to the fact that today Christians are not under the requirement of circumcision, which God demanded for the Jews during Old Testament times (Gen. 17:14; Lev. 12:3; Acts 15:1, 5). Now, we are outside the jurisdiction of the Law and inside our Lord, Jesus Christ. By His death on the cross, we were crucified to the world and things associated with it, including the Law, emerging as a “new creation” (Gal. 6:13-14; also Rom. 6:3-6).

Then, speaking in reference to Jewish believers in the Galatian churches, Paul says, as many as “walk by this standard (κανονι), peace upon them and mercy, even upon the Israel of God” (v. 16). We derive our English word “*canon*” from this Greek word. Historically, it has been used to describe the sixty-six Books of the Bible, calling them the *canon of Scripture*. Just as men have described the Bible as the *norm, rule* and *standard* of God’s recorded truth, the things Paul writes about, including “this standard” designating us as a “new creation” in Christ, should be viewed as the *normal standard* or *canon of reality* for these Jewish Christians and all other believers today (Gal. 1:11-12).

Similarly, in Ephesians 2:14-16, we are taught about how God “nullified” the Law through Christ’s death on the cross “in order that He might create” both Jews and Gentiles into “one new man” finally “making peace” between them. As long as the Law applied, the Jews were God’s people and the Gentiles were excluded from His program (vv. 11-13). For the first time, based on *newly revealed truth which speaks of a newly created people*, Jews and Gentiles can be equal before God. The following context which we have already considered directly connects the idea of this “new creation” with the “administration of the grace of God” based on the now-revealed “mystery” truth (Eph. 2:17-3:13).

Lastly, Paul writes about our *new man*, commonly referred to as our new nature in Christ, “having been created in righteousness and holiness associated with the truth” (Eph. 4:24). The foundational mystery “truth” which explains what our “new man” consists of is expounded upon earlier in this same letter. Also, in Colossians 3:10, believers are directed “to put on the new man which is being renewed resulting in a complete knowledge according to the image of the One who created him” (see also Eph. 4:22-24).

As this “new creation”, we are the first people in the history who can actually “put on” the characteristics of God, which transform us into the “image” of Jesus Christ. This is possible because we have the indwelling Holy Spirit by whose power we can accomplish this out-of-this-world feat. For in the Son of God, we have been transferred from the “authority of darkness” into a newly created realm which gives us spiritual potential beyond any human conception (Col. 1:13; see also Eph. 3:20; Phil 4:7). Although we have this capability, all Christians fall far short of perfection, though it should be our goal (Phil. 3:12-16). A realistic view of our present level of growth will make certain we remain humble in this endeavor.

We have just considered six passages in which the noun or verb form of “create” (κτιζω) is used in relation to believers. This idea is uniquely portrayed in Paul’s

Letters, where God directs him to describe the *newly revealed “mystery” program* associated with us – His “*new creation*”.

Peter speaks about Paul’s New Revelation

Peter speaks in his writings about “our beloved brother, Paul, who wrote to you according to the wisdom which has been given to him” (2 Pet. 3:15). Many believe Peter is referring to the Book of Hebrews by this statement because that Book is written to Jewish believers and is similar in style to Paul’s writings. The opinion Paul authored Hebrews is reasonable, but not conclusive. For, Peter could be referring to some other epistle(s) Paul had written since parts are directly addressed to Jewish believers (Gal. 2:15-21; 6:16; Rom. 2:1-29, 7:1-6). Or, he could be referencing another letter Paul wrote which has not been preserved. In any case, *Peter encourages his Hebrew audience to apply “the wisdom” Paul wrote to them.*

In the next verse, it says, “as also in all the letters (Paul wrote) speaking in them concerning these things, among which certain things are difficult to understand, which the unlearned and those not established distort as also the rest of the scriptures toward their own destruction” (v. 16). While Peter endorses all of Paul’s letters, he warns these believers some of the things Paul writes about are “difficult to understand”. For, *Paul advanced many new, heavenly truths which were foreign to Jewish thinking because these ideas are not contained in their Old Covenant Scriptures* (Eph. 1:3). This supports Paul’s assertion the “wisdom” he spoke about had been a “mystery” in past times (1 Cor. 2:6-8).

Using the designations of “unlearned” and “not established” to describe those who refuse to pursue the intended meaning of Paul’s instructions, Peter says they “*distort” certain teachings in the Letters of Paul*, and then proceed to distort the other Scriptures as well. This folly reaps a consequential outcome advancing them “toward their own destruction”. When biblical teachings are confusing, God wants us to simply believe what we read while asking the Spirit to help us figure it out. Those who seek to *learn* what the instructions of God mean and *follow* the knowledge gained will avoid damaging effects in their lives which accompany misrepresenting His will.

Characteristics Used to Describe this Revelation

Having touched on passages which discuss the *divine standard* God uses to administer the Church and its *newly revealed nature*, let us consider other aspects

of this message. This section details various *characteristics presented in His Word which describe “the mystery”, further defining its core principles.*

Grace of God

First, this “administration” is “associated with the grace of God” (Eph. 3:2). I have translated the grammar usually rendered “of” with the phrase “associated with” because the word “*grace*” (χαρις) is in the *genitive* case. This means the administration of truth God uses to manage His Church is *affiliated with* or *characterized by* “grace”. The word “grace” means a *gift* or *unmerited favor*. It consists of the wonderful things God has made available to man. He did not give these things to us because we did anything to deserve them, but simply because of His kindness expressed through mercy and love (Eph. 2:4-5; Titus 3:4-7).

Earlier in this Book, Paul writes about how God’s “grace” is central to the salvation of both Jews and Gentiles. In Ephesians 2:8-9, he says, “for by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not out of you, it is the gift of God; not out of works in order that no one might boast”. *Today, salvation is fully characterized by a grace gift from God.* This grace is available to anyone who by faith accepts the redemption from sin which Jesus Christ secured on the cross for mankind (Eph. 1:7). The Book of Galatians is also predominantly about how we are saved by the “grace of God” through “faith”. There, Paul states, “I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness is through the law, consequently Christ died needlessly” (2:21, see vv. 16-21).

Beyond teachings about salvation, the concept of “grace” is used to encompass all “richness associated with Christ” now extended to the Gentiles. It is also used to describe the mystery revelation which manages “all” in the Church – both Jews and Gentiles (Eph. 3:8-9). Understanding gathered from the Letters of Paul will enable believers to increasingly grasp particular aspects of how we are related to God in Christ, how this relationship determines our worth, what His purpose is for our lives, and what He expects us to do as His children.

In Titus 2:11-13, we are told “the grace of God . . . is training us for the purpose that, after having denied ungodliness and worldly lusts, we might live in a sober and righteous and godly manner in the present age, while waiting for the blessed hope, even the appearance of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ”. *The grace teachings recorded in the Book of Titus and other Letters written to the Church contain the philosophy of life God wants us to adopt so we will grow in “the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18).*

Wisdom of God

Another significant element presented to us which describes the now-revealed truth administering the Church is “wisdom” (σοφία). This word speaks of the *skillfulness* involved in any art or craft. Used in reference to the truth given to manage the Church, it speaks of the *skillful application* of God’s plan for us. Now that this “wisdom” has been revealed, we can know the *perfect philosophy* He wants us to live by. The word *philosophy* is made up of the Greek words “φίλος”, meaning *love*, and “σοφία”, meaning *wisdom*. We should want to *love the wisdom* given to us since God wants it to govern our thoughts and actions.

“Σοφία” is used in Ephesians 3:10, where Paul continues to explain how God revealed the “administration” of His grace to him and expresses one of the purposes for which He gave it (3:2). It was “in order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the heavenly rulers and authorities through the church.” According to this passage, we members of the Church are described as actors on God’s universal stage being watched by a heavenly audience. Incorporating what God says here by faith, we can begin to understand the amazing reality of how celestial beings gain a comprehension of God’s present “wisdom” while they observe it being lived out in our lives. Also, this verse should expand our concept of God’s purpose since it shows how our life changes affect things far beyond the limited perspective of what we see happening on earth.

The Greek adjective “manifold” (πολυποικίλος) describes the *many varied* or *faceted aspects* of God’s “wisdom”. Later in this context, the phrase, “breadth and length and height and depth” is also used to metaphorically define the *spiritual dimensions* of this “mystery” revelation” (Rom. 11:33; 1 Cor. 2:10). This thought occurs within Paul’s prayer to God so these believers will be able to understand the multiple features of the “mystery” truth he just finished writing about. Comprehending the content of this revelation enables us “to know the love of Christ which exceeds knowledge” (Eph. 3:18-19; see also 2 Cor. 5:14-21). By grasping these previously unknown spiritual realities, we will obtain the understanding needed to reach our spiritual potential – to be “filled unto all the fullness of God” (v. 19).

Ephesians 1:7-9, is a passage combining the use of the terms “grace”, “wisdom” and “the mystery”. Speaking of Jesus Christ, it says, “In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the richness of His grace, which He abounded to us in all wisdom and insight, after having made known to us the mystery of His will . . .” This context means, by grasping His abundant “wisdom” provided for us within the revealed mystery truth, we can

acquire a full understanding of how our sins can be forgiven by God's grace through the blood of His Son. Man's primary eternal dilemma is solved by this one *wise grace principle*. Though we are yet sinners, believers are truly considered righteous before a Holy God based solely upon Christ's death on the cross (Rom. 5:6-8; Eph. 2:1-9).

Then, in Colossians 1:24 – 2:3, Paul again speaks of his message as an outgrowth of the revelation of the "mystery" and the "administration of God" (1:25-26). This "now" (v.26) revealed truth revolves completely around the Person of Jesus Christ culminating in "a full knowledge of the mystery of God, *which is* Christ, in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden" (2:2-3). God's "*wisdom*" found in the message Paul preached shows how we are to view and follow His Son, Jesus Christ (Col. 1:28; Rom. 16:25). If we use this revelation as the *wise standard of Christian thinking*, we will not be swayed by other secular philosophies, which God warns about in the following context (Col. 2:4-10). Later in this Letter, "wisdom" associated with the "mystery of Christ" gives us a foundation by which we can formulate answers to questions from those who do not know the Lord (Col. 4:2-6).

In First Corinthians 2:6-16, Paul again speaks of this "wisdom" associated with the previously hidden "mystery" truth. Now that this "wisdom" is known, it became the truth Paul used in his ministry "among the mature" (v. 6; 2 Pet. 3:15). However, he was not able to share the full extent of this "wisdom" with many believers in Corinth because they were too immature. For, this message is characterized by "the deep things of God" – things which cannot be grasped without understanding spiritual prerequisites (v. 10; 3:1-2; see also Rom. 11:33). In order to comprehend many of the heavenly truths Paul taught, believers need to first renew their minds with foundational concepts before these "deep things of God" can make sense (Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:23; Titus 3:5).

The "wisdom" in this passage is also spoken about as that "which God predestined before the ages resulting in our glory" (v. 7). Since this truth was "predestined before the ages" combined with the fact it had been kept a secret until Paul's generation, it is important to recognize some of the "wisdom" found in the Letters of Paul is not completely the same as what is revealed in the Old Testament. Therefore, Christians should be careful when seeking to apply concepts taken from God's revelation intended for the Nation of Israel, including Psalms and Proverbs. Application of these ideas should only be made if they correlate with the "*wisdom*" contained in the truth of the "*mystery*", God's present day standard.

As we learn more about how God relates to His people today through this now revealed “wisdom”; our minds, hearts, and actions have a foundation to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. Amazingly, when this “wisdom” is implemented into practice, it will lead us to experience some part of the eternal state of “glory” He has promised while we are still on earth (1 Cor. 2:7-8).

Glory of God

This passage introduces the next concept illustrating the essence of “mystery” truth which is “*glory*” (δοξαν – 1 Cor. 2:7). The root meaning of this word conveys the idea of an *opinion* or *notion* we get about something. Regarding the glory of God, we obtain an *idea about His greatness or splendor* when we grasp the tremendous realities about who He is and what He has done for us (Eph. 1:6, 12, 14). Also, we acquire an *idea concerning what our future state will be like* when we read about how we will “be made manifest with Him in glory” (Col. 3:3-4). If Christians want to understand how this state of “glory” will happen, we can learn about the process in the now revealed “wisdom” contained in Paul’s writings which originated from “the mind of Christ” resulting “in our glory” (1 Cor. 2:7, 12, 16).

The topic of “glory” is also used to conclude Paul’s discussion of the administration of Grace in Ephesians 3:1-13. He encourages the Ephesian believers, especially the Gentiles, not to be “discouraged by the afflictions” he was suffering from his imprisonment for preaching “the administration of the grace of God”. This is because they significantly benefit from the message for which he was held captive. For, it explains how they are now part of God’s program including actualities relating to their future “glory” (3:1-2, 6, 13; see also 2:14-22).

In Colossians 1:26-27, this same “mystery” is cited as the source which illustrates the remarkable relationship we have with our Lord; “Christ in you, the hope of glory”. Based on this relationship, believers can gain restful confidence in our future “*glorified*” state which will be culminated when we are conformed to our Savior’s image at His coming (Rom. 8:28-30). This passage also teaches when we incorporate learned truths related to this promised “glory” they will have a major impact on *completing our present connection with God through His Son* by giving us this “hope” (v. 27-28).

Richness of Christ

Another term of endearment Paul uses to describe the quality of spiritual blessings we have in our Lord is “*richness*” (πλουτος). This noun is almost always translated “riches”. However, it is not plural in number, it is *singular*. Therefore, the meaning

it conveys is not the amount of riches, but the *kind of richness or wealth* associated with something. The message Paul preached expresses the “richness associated with Christ”, the “richness of His grace” and the “richness associated with the glory of this mystery” (Eph. 1:7; 3:8; Col. 1:27; see also Rom. 11:33). Our *wealth* in Christ is eternal and certain by which we can experience rich, spiritual growth. It is not like earthly riches which are fleeting, and if pursued for the purpose of gaining prestige will cause all sorts of trouble in our lives (1 Tim. 6:9-10, 17).

The Basis for Spiritual Health

Lastly, let us return to the first verse considered in this article where Paul speaks about the “pattern of sound words” Timothy is to follow (2 Tim. 1:13). The word translated “*sound*” (υγιαινωντων) means *that which is healthy*. The English word “hygiene” is a transliteration of this Greek word. When we have good dental hygiene, it means our teeth and gums are healthy. In the same way, when we recognize Paul’s “*words*” are to be the “pattern” of our message, we will be theologically “sound”. As the content of this message is effectively applied to our daily practice, it will make us spiritually *healthy* laying the foundation for a *wholesome Christian mindset and lifestyle*.

When this “sound teaching” associated with the “gospel” which was “entrusted” to Paul is followed, it will assist us on the path toward godliness (1 Tim. 1:10-11; 6:3; 2 Tim. 4:3; Titus 1:13; 2:1-2). This is most clearly seen when “sound teaching” is stated as the basis which qualifies a Church elder to both instruct believers and reprimand those who oppose the gospel. This *healthy* foundation for ministry is gained from a comprehensive knowledge of the “faithful message” originating from Paul (Tit. 1:9).

Summing up this section, these characteristics are only some of the designations used to define merits of the message given to Paul. *Truth, knowledge, deep things, hope*, and many other descriptive terms are used to draw a more complete picture of the gospel of Grace. These distinctive features would take a great deal more time to expound upon individually. Through your own study of the Word, you can attain a greater comprehension of what the administration of the Grace of God entails by learning more about the fundamental traits used to describe it. Please take ample time to “let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly” (Col. 3:16). A daily, personal quiet time with the Lord will yield spiritual fruit as the Holy Spirit empowers you to “know the things having been freely given to us by God” (1 Cor. 2:12).

Who Received This Revelation and Where Is It Found?

We have already seen the “administration of the grace of God” was revealed to Paul, the apostle. Because of Paul’s frequent use of “I” and “my” in regard to receiving this message, some consider him *egotistical* or *arrogant*. Actually, Paul only recorded historical events and divine truths based on revelation which was given to him for the purpose of reporting it to us. Remember, the Holy Spirit prompted him to record exactly what God wanted him to write about how he received revelation of “the mystery” and how he was told to concentrate on spreading it. These concepts will encompass the initial focus of this section.

Also, passages in which Paul minimizes his own importance in the process of receiving this message will be considered. Similarly, contexts which show Paul recognized he was expendable regarding the continuation of his gospel will be touched on. Then, passages which teach “mystery” revelations were received by other apostles and prophets beside Paul will be addressed. With these topics in mind, let us take a look at various contexts which elaborate on how the “mystery” message was given to the Church.

Paul Received Revelation Directly from Jesus Christ

In Galatians 1:12, Paul says, “For, I make known to you, brethren, the gospel having been preached by me, that it is not according to a man; for I neither received it from a man nor was I taught it, but through revelation from Jesus Christ.” These verses teach two things related to this subject. First, *Paul did not receive the gospel he preached from any man*, which includes all of the other apostles, specifically, James, Peter and John (Gal. 2:2, 6, 9). Essentially, this concept dominates the subject matter in the following context as Paul records historical events to support this claim (Gal. 1:13 – 2:10). Second, this passage teaches *Paul received his gospel message directly from Jesus Christ*. This idea is corroborated by passages already covered and some yet to be considered (1 Cor. 2:16; Eph. 3:3).

Another key verse regarding the message Paul received is Romans 16:25. It says, “To the One who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the mystery which had been kept silent in eternal times”. The word translated “according to” (κατα) means *in line with*. The first usage of this word here is connected with the phrases “my gospel” and “the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery”. The idea is, *God is able to “establish”* (στηριξαι) or *spiritually ground*

believers who order their lives in line with the truths found in the gospel Paul proclaimed which centers on the Person of Jesus Christ (Col. 1:27-28; 2:3).

Paul's gospel presents Jesus in a distinct way as the *Head* over the Body, the Church. This message also teaches we have *positional righteousness* before God as we are found in Him (2 Cor. 5:21; Eph. 1:22). These two truths cannot be traced in biblical revelation given prior to the Epistles of Paul. Because Paul was the recipient of this gospel, he is described as a "wise master builder" who laid the irreplaceable foundation for us – "Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 3:10-11; 1 Tim. 2:5-7).

Second Corinthians 12:1 is another passage which expands on what God wanted to accomplish through the process of giving revelations to Paul. He writes, "It is necessary to boast; on the one hand, it is not profitable, but I shall come to visions and revelations from the Lord". Note, the nouns "visions" and "*revelations*" are both *plural in number*. Paul first saw the Lord on the road to Damascus in Acts, chapter 9. This was followed by countless visions and revelations through the course of time which are alluded to in this Corinthian passage. Some of these are recorded in the Book of Acts and the thirteen Books authored by Paul. The content of his Letters contain divine truths which were given to him through these "revelations". And again, he received these "revelations from the Lord", Jesus.

Numerous passages attest to the fact that *God made known to and entrusted Paul with this "mystery" message*. In Romans 16:25-26, the content of Paul's "my gospel" was made known "according to the arrangement of the eternal God for obedience of the faith unto all the gentiles". In Second Timothy 1:10-11, Paul says, "I was appointed as a preacher and an apostle and a teacher" of the "gospel". And, in First Timothy 1:11, Paul speaks of "the gospel of the glory of the blessed God, with which I was entrusted." There are many other passages throughout the Letters of Paul containing similar statements.

Others Received Revelation of Church Truth

Let us turn our attention to passages teaching *others beside Paul received "mystery" truth*. Ephesians 3:5 is most often cited regarding this as Paul speaks about the mystery, "which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men as it was now revealed to His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit." Who are the "*apostles and prophets*" Paul references here? The reality is they are never defined so we need to consider who they might be from known facts. The most common interpretation is these "apostles and prophets" are *the Twelve* whom Jesus chose. Of the original Twelve, Judas was replaced by Mathias in Acts 1:26. Even though not one of these apostles ever uses the word "mystery" in

their writings or claims to have received new truth by revelation from the Lord, there is evidence some of them received and/or understood certain facets of mystery truth.

For instance, in Acts chapters 10-11, *Peter* was given a vision by the Lord which became the foundation for him to receive messengers from Cornelius (a gentile proselyte), go to his home, and share about how God sent the Christ to Israel so all who believe could receive forgiveness of sin. In this vision, God told Peter to “kill and eat” unclean animals, which is directly opposed to teachings in the Law (Acts 10:11-16). This is actually the *first historical indicator in the timeline of the biblical record which shows God’s program was moving away from the Law*. It is significant that God, Himself, was the One who initiated this process. Also, this event became the crucial foundation upon which God used Peter to validate the ministry of Paul so his Gentile-oriented message would be accepted by the other Jewish apostles and believers in Jerusalem (Acts. 15:6-12).

Similarly, in his Epistles, Peter makes reference to the Law as no longer being in effect, teaches positional righteousness before God in Jesus Christ, and emphasizes the need to submit to the Holy Spirit, which are truths first introduced in the distinct teachings of Paul. *First John* also contains some of the same teachings. Doctrines from the Letters of Peter and John, along with supporting references, will be detailed later in this article. In addition to Peter writing down Grace truths he received, we know he had significant contact with Paul and they worked together in ministry (1 Cor. 15:5-11; Gal. 1:18; 2:11-21; 2 Pet. 3:15-16).

Beside the Twelve Apostles Jesus chose, these “apostles and prophets” could include *those who are mentioned in association with Paul’s Church ministry*. The names of these “apostles” are: Barnabas (Acts 14:4, 14; 1 Cor. 9:5-6); Andronicus and Junias (Rom. 16:7); Apollos (1 Cor. 4:6-9); Silas and Timothy (1 Thess. 1:1 with 2:7); Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25); and Titus as well as two unidentified brothers (2 Cor. 8:23). Some of these “apostles” are also designated as “prophets” along with a number of other individuals talked about in the Book of Acts (Acts 11:27; 13:1; 15:32; 21:9-10). However, there is no indication any of these apostles or prophets were inspired to record even part of the revelation they may have received.

After identifying the possibilities of who these “apostles and prophets” are, how should we interpret the whole picture? Romans 12:6, provides a hint. In this context, Paul writes about believers receiving gifts which differ to edify the Body. If a Christian had received the gift of “*prophecy*”, it was to be practiced “according to the proportion of the faith.” The phrase translated “of the faith” (της πιστεως) means

in association with the faith since it is in the *genitive* case. The phrase, “the faith” is speaking of the *body of truth we believe* (Rom. 3:31; Gal. 3:23-26). It is not referring to a person’s faith as some Bible Versions indicate by adding the personal pronoun ‘his’, which is not in the Greek text. So, the idea expressed is: Prophets were to *exercise their gift according to the portion of the truth they had received* by sharing what was revealed to them with the other Body members. *This was the way Christians had access to the Word of God before it was written down.*

The image provided regarding how this practically functioned is recorded in His Word. Many believers possessed the gift of prophecy but each one had only portions of the truth revealed to them. This scenario created the need for all to be interdependent on one another. Therefore, it was necessary for all Christians to hear the prophecies from each gifted individual in order to get a full understanding of what God had revealed for the Church to believe and practice (1 Cor. 14:1, 29-33). This method of distributing the Word of God continued until full revelation had been given to the Church. When God’s revelation to man was adequately recorded, He stopped utilizing the gift of prophecy (1 Cor. 13:8-13).

Having defined what a “prophet” is, the fact that they received revelation of mystery truth, and who may have received this revelation, how should we synchronize this information? Taking into account all the evidence, *Paul is still the only one who claims to have received “the mystery” from the Lord in his Letters. Furthermore, Paul teaches he fully received it* in Colossians 1:25-26, where it says he was made a minister of the Church “according to the administration of God which was given to me for you to fulfill the Word of God, the mystery which had been hidden from the ages and from the generations, but now was made manifest to His saints.”

The word translated “to fulfill” (πληρῶσαι) means to *fill up* or *complete*, as seen by its use in other passages within this Book (Col. 1:9; 2:10; 4:17). Then, there are two phrases which are *direct objects* of this filling since they both occur in the *accusative* case, “the word of God” and “the mystery”. The idea is *Paul divinely received the complete “Word of God”, which is equated with “the mystery” revelation*, and it is designed to be the “administration” for “his body, which is the Church” (Col. 1:24-25). There is proof others received mystery truth by revelation. However, *Paul is the only one to whom God chose to fully reveal it, write it all down, and become the “pattern of sound words” by which we are to judge what members of the Church are to practice* (2 Tim. 1:13).

Before moving on from who these “apostles and prophets” are, let us touch on a couple of related passages. Ephesians 2:20, speaks of the Gentiles in the Church as “having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone.” Some claim this statement refers to Old Testament apostles and prophets, but it occurs in a running context which teaches today *Gentiles are equal with the Jews in the spiritual Body of Christ*. These ideas are contained in the mystery truth which was not revealed until the “now” generation during which the Law no longer applies (2:14-16; 3:5). Because these truths are not found in the Old Testament or Gospel Accounts, the prophets God employed to record those Scriptures from this past era cannot be the ones referred to here.

In addition to this passage, Romans 16:26, speaks about the mystery as having been revealed “through prophetic writings”.² Some English Versions incorrectly translate this phrase as ‘scriptures of the prophets’, which may give the idea the mystery is able to be found in the writings of Old Testament prophets. However, the word “prophetic” (προφητικῶν) is an *adjective* describing the kind of “scriptures” (a noun) the mystery is found in. Based on the word “now” used in this passage, which shows the mystery revelation was just made known, these “prophetic writings” refer to New Testament Scriptures associated with Paul’s generation (1 Cor. 2:8; Eph. 3:5; Col. 1:26). The broad analysis would be: *Paul is referring to his own writings as well as other Epistles containing some of the same truths distinct to God’s present administration of Grace*.

Christians Should Not Concentrate on the Person of Paul

Before moving forward, one final point should be made. It is essential for believers to focus on *the One around whom the message of the mystery revolves, Jesus Christ; not Paul, the man through whom God made it known* (1 Cor. 3:11; Eph. 4:20-24; Col. 1:28-2:10). Otherwise, we might find ourselves saying, “I am of Paul” instead of “I am of Christ”. Emphasizing our common association with the Person of Jesus Christ is the only solid foundation which will protect believers from causing division in the Body of Christ, similar to what happened in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:12).

In order to remedy this root cause of sectarianism – men associating themselves with other men rather than Jesus Christ – God had Paul write, “so that let no one boast in men; for all things are associated with you, whether Paul or Apollos or

² This rendering is found in the New International, Revised Standard, and Darby Translations.

Cephas or the world or life or death or things present or things to come; all things are associated with you, and you are associated with Christ, and Christ is associated with God” (1 Cor. 3:21-23). A careful reading of the first three chapters of First Corinthians directs our focus to the Savior, Jesus Christ and His spiritual Body, the Church. For, these chapters contain part of the “mystery” revelation designed to accomplish this goal. Paul even cites this truth as a vital component given to help prevent division-causing associations with men (2:6-8).

Then, in Second Corinthians 12, *the Holy Spirit distances the person of Paul from his message*. In regard to receiving revelations of truth, Paul was prompted to write about a man he knew who had been taken up into the third heaven and “heard inexpressible words which are not permitted for a man to speak” (2 Cor. 12:1-4). Paul says, “in behalf of such a one I will boast, but in behalf of myself I will not boast except in afflictions” (v. 5). In the next few verses, it becomes evident Paul is actually speaking about himself. However, in this passage, *the central focus is on “superiority of revelations”* (v. 7). Paul, the man through whom God gave these revelations, pales in importance when compared with the truth given to him (1 Cor. 15:8; Eph. 3:8).

When speaking about himself, *Paul is prompted to write concerning the part he contributed to this entire process which is his fleshly pride*. This self-importance in Paul is a representation of how human beings respond when God chooses one of us for a special purpose. To counter Paul’s pride, God allowed a “minister of Satan” to torment him in order that he might not be “puffed up” (2 Cor. 12:7). Although Paul prayed three times to be relieved of this “thorn in the flesh”, God had a lesson for him to learn: “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness” (v. 9). After sufficient trial-time had passed, Paul finally submitted to God while exclaiming, “I will rather boast in my weaknesses in order that the power of Christ might tabernacle (come to have a home) upon me” (v. 9).

Paul had to take the same road we all need to travel in our Christian lives. Ultimately we will credit God for the gifts He has given us and come to acknowledge it is His power which successfully leads us through temptation. God wants us to proclaim along with Paul that living for Him can only be successful when we admit, “whenever I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor. 12:10). When we realize we lack strength to triumph over temptation, then we can take steps to utilize the available power of God to overcome it.

While imitating Paul’s example of a victorious life, at the same time, we must be careful not to associate our Christian experience too closely with his. For, he saw numerous visions and possessed gifts which we do not have such as healing or

apostleship. In addition, just like Moses received the Law for Israel, God revealed a whole new administration of truth to Paul as the point man for the Body of Christ. Speaking in regard to this gospel revealed to him, Paul exclaims, “For, if I practice this willingly, I have a wage; but if unwillingly, I have been entrusted with an administration” (1 Cor. 9:17, see Eph. 3:2; Col. 1:24-25).

Because we will never experience the same level of divine intervention during this lifetime as Paul did, nor the greater temptations associated with it, he uniquely qualifies as an example to follow. For, his greater appointment by God coupled with subsequent victory through tremendous human suffering serves as a model for us. Our triumphs come in the lesser endeavors of our Christian walk when we depend on God’s power after first reaching a place of humble surrender obtained at the outcome of each trial.

The Gospel Alone Sustains Christianity

On a related theme, in his last Epistle, Paul is not alarmed about his impending death which ultimately caused him to pass off the scene. In this same Book, *Timothy is repeatedly directed to follow the message he had received from Paul as a sufficient basis for his ongoing ministry* (2 Tim. 2:2, 15; 3:14; 4:2-3). Concerning himself, Paul says “the time of my departure has come” (4:6). Paul knew God was able to empower Timothy in his times of need just like he was divinely strengthened when men forsook him (1:15-18, 4:16-18). Timothy did not need Paul’s human support to stand strong in his service for Jesus Christ.

Regarding the truth Timothy received as “a pattern of sound words”, Paul commanded him to “guard the good deposit through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us” (2 Tim. 1:13-14). Because of this adequate foundation for ministry, *Paul recognizes he is expendable in regard to the continuation of the message he preached*. In his absence, the “good deposit” (the message) combined with empowerment from the “Holy Spirit” ensure Timothy was fully equipped for every good work (3:17).

Summarizing, *Paul’s importance began and ended with God choosing to use him as a vessel through whom He revealed the gospel of Grace* (Gal. 1:15-16). God inspired him to write it down and make clear this message was a new heavenly program intended to replace the Law of Moses. Although this is true, we should not focus on or worship Paul. For, the content of his Epistles always present Jesus Christ as both Savior and Lord. He is the only One through whom we are acceptable to God, around whom we have unity as believers and who is worthy of our praise. Nonetheless, *Christians must recognize Paul’s Letters constitute the*

standard which explains how Jesus Christ is associated with us today if we are to properly understand our relationship to God through Him (Rom. 16:25).

Paul's Message Combines Law Principles with New Truths

We have considered Scriptures supporting the idea the recorded “administration of the grace of God” is complete. Also, we have seen this message sufficiently enables us to understand how God relates to man during this age and how we are to live in a manner pleasing to Him. The next step is to direct our attention toward specific teachings contained in Paul's letters in order to comprehend what is involved with how God is working in this new administration.

Observing the writings of Paul, there are many portions which speak about *new, distinct truths* which are different from those contained in the Law, God's previous program. Then, there are numerous parts of Paul's instruction which are *aligned with truths in the Law*. The clear intent is for the Law principles referenced in these passages to be applied to the Church, the Body of Christ. This section will consider both of these aspects associated with the message found in Paul's Epistles, which together make up the “administration of the grace of God”.

Unique Truths Revealed for the Church

A logical place to start contemplating *truths which are distinct to this age* is by focusing on passages where the word “mystery” is used. This is because these contexts speak about things God is now accomplishing, which were not being performed in the past since they were hidden.

In regard to one aspect of “the mystery”, Ephesians 3:6 says, “for the gentiles to be heirs with and body members with and partakers with in association to the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel”. Under the Law, the Nation of Israel existed as God's people and the Gentiles were mostly excluded (Eph. 2:11-13). At that time, the only option a Gentile had to connect with God was to become a proselyte – one who acknowledged and supported the Jews as God's chosen Nation. But, under the Law, the Gentiles were never considered *equal* with the Jews.

However, based on this new revelation, *Gentile believers are now equal “with”* (συν) *Jewish believers in the Body* (Eph. 2:14-16; 3:3-6). This Greek preposition is a prefix attached to six words in the extended context to emphasize this point. Three of these occur in this verse. The other three are “citizens with” (2:19), “fitly

framed with” (2:21), and “built with” (2:22). Previously excluded from God’s “household”, Gentiles are now part of the “dwelling of God in the Spirit” (2:19, 22).

Other distinct truths found in this greater passage are as follows. *The Law is set aside* and no longer the truth God’s people are ruled by (Eph. 2:14-16; see also Rom. 6:14; 1 Tim. 1:3-11; Heb. 7:18-19; 8:13; 1 Pet. 1:18). *Jewish and Gentile believers are now at peace with one another in a spiritual Body*, a radical change from the hostile relationship they had under the Law (Eph. 1:3; 2:14-16). *Today individual Jews and Gentiles make up God’s children*, taking the place of the Nation of Israel. This is in contrast to Old Testament promises given to the Jews which guarantee they will again assume a position as God’s people in the future Kingdom (Isa. 59:20-21; Matt. 10:5-7). In addition, *“through Him, we both have access in one Spirit to the Father”* (Eph. 2:18; see also 3:12; Rom. 5:2; Heb. 10:19-23). Under the Law, only the high priest had direct access to God once a year. In Christ, all Body members have constant confidence to enter into His presence (Heb. 4:16).

Although having the indwelling Spirit is not distinct to the administration of the Grace of God, a Christian’s relationship with Him is different. Paul says a few times we have “the Holy Spirit of promise” (Eph. 1:13). This means we have the same Holy Spirit who was promised to Israel in the Old Testament Scriptures (Isa. 59:21; Ezek. 36:27; 37:14, Joel 2:28-29; Gal. 3:14; Eph. 3:6).

On the one hand, when Israel receives *the promised Holy Spirit* upon Jesus’ return to establish His Kingdom on earth, He *will “cause” them to walk in the statutes of the Law* (Ezek. 36:26-27). They will *be made righteous and no longer sin* (Isa. 60:21; Ezek. 11:18-20; 14:11; 36:26-31). The initiation of this promise can be observed in the *sinless record* associated with the Jewish believers and proselytes awaiting Christ’s return in the first chapters of Acts. This followed an event describing how they received the Holy Spirit according to prophecy (John 14:26 Acts 2:14-42; 3:11-26). The only sins noted in these chapters are those of Annanias and Saphira, who proved by their actions they did not have the Spirit. At that time, true believers were enabled by the Holy Spirit to keep their pledge of having all things in common, as well as every Law-oriented requirement in their lives (Acts 2:43-47; 4:32-5:11).

On the other hand, members of the Church are commanded to “be filled” with and “walk” by the Spirit (Eph. 5:18; Gal. 5:16). *The extent to which we exercise our volition to employ power from the Spirit for living the Christian life, we will be “led by the Spirit”* (Gal. 5:18; see also Rom. 6:16, 7:6; 1 Pet. 4:14; 1 John 3:24; 4:4). Galatians 5:18 also emphasizes if one is “led by the Spirit, you are not under

Law”. *In today’s program, the Holy Spirit does not direct us to keep the Law in order to become righteous before God. Also, He will not help us if we attempt to keep these Statutes.* Following his salvation, Paul recounts his experience of failed spiritual renewal when he attempted to keep the Law in his new life under Grace (Rom. 7:13-25; Gal. 2:15-21).

This brings us to the central issue in the Epistles, which is *how we can become righteous before God*. Under the Law, faith combined with works is presented as the way to gain eternal life by establishing personal righteousness before God (Deut. 30:1-10; Matt. 19:16-22; Rom. 2:6-13; 3:20; 10:2-5; James 2:14-26). Under Grace, God considers “*a man to be justified by faith apart from the works of the Law*” (Rom. 3:28; see also Acts 13:38-39; Gal. 2:16; Heb. 4:10; 9:14; 10:22; 1 Pet. 1:5, 21; 1 John 5:5,13). What is this faith directed toward? It is belief the “blood” of Jesus Christ fully satisfies God’s demand for a perfect sacrifice to pay for our sins (Rom. 3:21-26; Eph. 1:7; Heb. 9:11-14; 1 Pet. 1:19). When Christ died on the cross, His payment for sin was “once for all” – it was complete, having no need to be improved upon or repeated (Rom. 6:10; Heb. 7:27; 9:12; 10:10; 1 Pet. 3:18).

Although Christ’s death also provides the basis for righteousness in the Kingdom, it will apply in a different way. The resurrected Old Testament Jews as well as those who believe in the great tribulation will be made righteous and no longer sin (Isa. 60:21; Ezek. 11:18-20; 14:11). In contrast, *our righteousness before God in Jesus Christ is positional* and not actual like the Jew’s will be in the Kingdom. *The concept believers can be acceptable before God as we are found “in Christ”, while still having sin present in us, is unique to the administration of Grace.*

As members of the Church, we are “alive” to God in our Savior (Rom. 6:11). We have “peace with God” through Christ (Rom. 5:1; Eph. 2:14). We are “the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21). Presently, we have “no condemnation” regarding judgment which would separate us from God, but we possess guaranteed eternal life (Rom. 8:1, 38-39). And, speaking about the “mystery” God made known to the Gentiles, at this time “Christ” is “in us”, He is our “hope of glory” (Col. 1:27). Peter and John in their Epistles and the Book of Hebrews teach the same thing regarding *positional righteousness* in Christ. (Heb. 2:10-11; 10:10, 14; 1 Pet. 1:3-4, 18-19; 2:24; 1 John 2:1-2, 12; 5:12-13).

In conjunction with this, Paul teaches we can *still sin even though we have been declared righteous based on our position in Christ* (Rom. 6:1-14; Phil. 3:8-16). This is an idea which cannot be found in the Old Testament and the Gospel Accounts. At that time men were never considered completely righteous, but their sole endeavor was to attain acceptance before God by their own works. It is

evident this approach to righteousness did not work (Rom. 3:19-20; 10:1-4). In addition, we have seen *how God's Jewish people will be made righteous in the future Kingdom*. However, they will not reach this state of perfection by their works under the Law, but through redemption from their Messiah and ultimate intervention from God.

The idea we can sin after being declared righteous by God is a *distinct truth first introduced in the Letters of Paul*. John and the author of Hebrews both teach this same concept (1 John 2:1; Heb. 12:1-11). Also, Peter chimes in regarding *positional righteousness in Christ* as well as *the need to eliminate sin from our lives after being saved*, calling this teaching “the true grace of God” (1 Pet. 5:12; see also Heb. 4:16; 13:9; 1 Pet. 2:1-4, 19; 2 Pet. 3:18).

Ephesians 5:32 is another passage which specifically addresses an aspect of “mystery” truth, “This mystery is great, but I am speaking in reference to Christ and the church”. In this context, Paul illustrates the relationship husbands and wives ought to have in a marriage by using the relationship of Christ and the Church as a pattern. The truths regarding *Christ being “head” of a spiritual “body”* are found only in the Epistles of Paul (Eph. 1:22-23; 2:16; 4:15; 5:23 and occurrences of the words “head” and “body” in his other Letters). Christ’s joint relationship with His children forms the framework we are to imitate in our marriage unions since we are so closely connected with Him that we are called His *Body*. We have the potential to replicate this same connection with our spouse by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us.

In Romans 11:25, Paul shares a “mystery” about what God is accomplishing today in regard to Israel. He states, “*A partial hardening has happened to Israel* until the fullness of the gentiles might come in, and in this manner all Israel will be saved . . .” In the past, under the Law, the Nation of Israel was God’s people. Now, under Grace, Jews and Gentiles to whom God has extended His mercy are His people (Rom. 11:30-32). The Holy Spirit has Paul address this “partial hardening” in order that the Gentiles would not think they are better than the Jews. For, some Jews were excluded from God’s present program while Gentiles were added (9:18; 11:7). This “hardening” involves *God not predominantly saving Jews as His special people today like He did under the Law and, subsequently, not working with them as a Nation during this administration of Grace* (11:11-24).

This new “mystery” revelation explained by Paul in Romans 11, is central toward helping us understand how *today God has suspended His relationship with the Nation of Israel by temporarily setting aside His promises regarding their ultimate glory*. The reason why God will bring about the future salvation of the Nation of

Israel “in this manner” is so the Jews will be forced to realize they have need to be saved by His mercy just as much as the Gentiles, who they considered inferior (11:25, 30-32). However, the following verses clarify when Christ comes back to earth God will again revert to a national relationship with the Jews in the Kingdom. They will be returned to the Promised Land in fulfillment of His pledges to their fathers recorded in countless biblical prophecies (Rom. 11:26-29).

First Corinthians 15:51 is another passage which contains information about “mystery” truth. It states, “Behold I tell you a mystery, we shall not all die, but we shall all be changed”. There are numerous passages in the Letters of Paul teaching *we will be transformed into the image of Jesus Christ* when we are caught up to be with Him at His coming (2 Cor. 5:4; Phil. 3:20-21; Col. 3:3-4; 1 Thess. 4:15-18; 5:9-11). In the meantime, believers who have died are “present with the Lord” in spirit, awaiting these “changed” bodies (2 Cor. 5:1-8; Phil. 1:23).

The “*judgment seat of Christ*” is spoken about in one context which describes the future transformation of our bodies (2 Cor. 5:10). Apparently, this will take place at the same time. It is worth noting, this is *the only final judgment in the Bible which does not determine whether a person is saved*. In contrast to all of the others, this judgment is specifically in relation to works we do after we become believers (1 Cor. 3:14-15). This teaching only makes sense in conjunction with grasping that we are righteous in our *standing before God* – our position in Christ – not in our *actual state*. For, in our present condition in the flesh, we can and do still sin.

In closing the Book of Romans, it says, “to the one who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the mystery” (16:25). This statement covers the entire content of this Book, if not all of Paul’s Letters. Within this Book and his other Epistles we read about who Jesus Christ is in relation to us and how we are to walk in a manner pleasing to Him. The above passages contain some of the distinctive truths in these Epistles, but are not intended to be a comprehensive record of all the unique teachings which can be found. They are a sampling intended to stimulate your own journey of discovery while personally studying revealed contents of the “administration of the grace of God” (Eph. 3:2).

Law Principles which Apply to the Church

Now let us consider passages which show *similarities between truths found in the Law and those which apply under Grace*. Basically, we find these Law principles God intends for us to practice today spelled out within the text of Paul’s Epistles.

Since many Jews had become Christians, the Holy Spirit chose to use a technique of applying Old Covenant truths to the Church in circumstances where those teachings are compatible. This divine approach emphasizes inclusion – focusing on common thought as much as possible (1 Cor. 9:19-23). *Because God used this method of applying Law concepts to the Church, we should follow His example to both recognize and emphasize the likenesses between this past program and His present administration of Grace. Emphasizing similarities between Law and Grace is just as essential as emphasizing differences if one is to acquire a balanced understanding of the gospel.*

Some of Paul's Letters contain few or no quotations from the Old Testament. In churches to which these Epistles were written, the teachings of Judaism had not become an issue which threatened Paul's claim of receiving a revelation intended to replace the Law. The absence of quotes from the Law in these Letters should convince Christians Paul did not need proof texts from prior revelation to authenticate the message he received from our risen Lord.

To begin noting Old Testament teachings which apply to believers today, let us take a trek through the Book of Romans. First, a passage is cited regarding how we should understand *the righteous nature of our God*, which is an eternal reality transcending time (Rom. 3:3-8). Also, passages which demonstrate *the sinful, depravity of mankind* are quoted (Rom. 3:10-18). Man's sinful state has not changed since the time sin entered the world through Adam. Then, passages related to being *justified by faith* are discussed. This concept is shown to be founded on Old Testament Scriptures (Rom. 1:17; 3:27; all of chapter 4, regarding Abraham and David).

Sometimes, in regard to Old Testament thinking applicable to the Church, passages are not quoted but just alluded to. In Romans 3:21-22, the *payment Jesus Christ made for our sins* is connected with the Law and the Prophets. For, this teaching is one of the central promises contained in the New Covenant (Jer. 31:34, see also Isa. 53:5; 1 Cor. 11:23-26; 15:3-4). While discussing *how we are to deal with the sufferings* we undergo in our Christian life, Paul quotes Psalm 44:22 (Rom. 8:36). In chapters 9 through 11, many passages are mentioned regarding *how God carries out His purpose by mercifully choosing Jews and Gentiles for salvation while hardening others*. Jesus also taught many of these same concepts which can be found recorded throughout the Gospel Accounts.

As Romans transitions into addressing our Christian lifestyle, Paul instructs how we should not avenge evil acts done against us. Then he quotes Deuteronomy 32:35 for supporting Scripture, *"Vengeance is mine, I shall repay, says the Lord"*

(Rom. 12:14-21). In chapter 13:8-10, Paul states, *“love is the fullness of the Law”*. The Law truly embodies what love is. Love and all the spiritual characteristics we are to obtain as members of the Church are the same as the ones defined in the Old Testament. The difference is Israel was told to acquire these qualities to become *acceptable to God*, a goal they failed to achieve. In contrast, we are instructed to put them on as people who are already inseparably related to Him, who also have the ability to *please Him* by power from His indwelling Spirit.

In Romans 15:9-13, Paul illustrates the way *God is extending mercy to the Gentiles* today by referencing numerous Old Testament verses which show how He plans to do this in the Kingdom. At that future time, Gentiles will not be considered equal with the Jews like they are in the Church. Nonetheless, God’s purpose for saving Gentiles by His mercy is the same now as it will be then. Lastly, Paul uses a quote from Isaiah to parallel *how the Lord has led him in his apostolic ministry* with how He directed prophets in past times. The point in both cases is they were led to places where God’s message had not yet been heard (Rom. 15:21).

On the flip side, the Book of Romans also uses Old Testament references to express truths which are contrasted with how God works today. Paul details how *we must not pursue “the works of the law” in order to gain righteousness before God* because no man was ever saved by this method (3:20, 27-28; 10:2-5). In addition, after we are saved from sin by the blood of Christ, he teaches *we will not be able to overcome sin in our lives if we try to pursue righteousness by following teachings from the Law* (6:14; 7:4-7, 13-25).

Summing up the use of the Law in the Book of Romans, Paul says, “Therefore, do we nullify the law through the faith? Let it never be, but we establish the law” (3:31). Just by reading the content of this Book, while observing how the Law does and does not apply, forms an adequate key for how Christians are to “establish” a proper application of the Law. God’s present “administration” operates completely on “the faith” principles expanded upon in the Letters of Paul. To achieve God’s will in our lives, believers ought to follow only Law principles which He expressly approves for practice – those quoted in and consistent with teachings found in the Epistles.

In his other Letters, Paul also writes about many things which connect Old Testament terminologies with how God is working today. *Christians are said to be the “temple” of God* replacing the physical building in Jerusalem as the place God dwells (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19). In a similar vein, we are also described as the *“household” of God* (Eph. 2:19). And, we are called *“the circumcision”* alluding to

the *separated-from-sin* relationship we have with God. This is similar to the holy relationship He will have with Israel in the coming Kingdom (Deut. 30:6; Phil. 3:3; Col. 2:11). These comparisons could go on and on as Paul frequently cites or alludes to Old Testament Scriptures to illustrate concepts which directly apply to the Church (Rom. 15:3-4; 1 Cor. 10:1-13).

When we look past the fact that passages from the Law are quoted for support and pay attention to *how Paul actually uses them in each context*, we can understand the proper application God intends. If this same principle is used to study the Book of Hebrews and Peter's Letters, with all their Old Testament quotations, the content of these Books will be seen teaching many of the same truths as Paul does, just to a believing Jewish audience (2 Pet. 3:15-16).

Concluding this section, while coming to understand truth contained in the Epistles of Paul, we can acquire the "richness of the full assurance of understanding, resulting in the full knowledge of the mystery of God, *which is Christ*" (Col. 2:2). The noun translated "*full knowledge*" (ἐπιγνῶσιν) portrays the idea of *complete knowledge*. It is used many times by Paul concerning our ability to attain a *full understanding* of the truth he is writing about which focusses on the Person of Jesus Christ (Rom. 10:2; Eph. 1:17; 4:13; Col. 1:9; 3:10; Titus 1:1; 2 Pet. 1:3). As we progressively comprehend what God desires to accomplish through the Church by concentrating on His Grace standard found in the writings of Paul, *we will gain a full knowledge of His will* (Col. 1:9). With this foundation we can conform our thinking to His revealed truth in order that we might make appropriate choices to perform within His will.

How this Message should Affect Believers

You may say, 'Okay, what does this have to do with me?' A response to this question is, 'There are many practical, life-changing ramifications'. This segment will focus on how each believer ought to be impacted by the "mystery" message. For, *Paul's Letters contain the pattern of truth we are to follow* and, as such, could be described as our *Spiritual Constitution*.

To begin with, *God uses this "mystery" message to "establish" His children*. Romans 16:25, says, "To the one who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the mystery". The word translated "establish" (στηριξαι) means He *causes us to stand*. This verse ties *standing solid and secure* in our faith with understanding essential truths found in Paul's "my gospel".

In Ephesians, another word built on the same root as “στηπιζαι” is used in regard to implementing the Lord’s power to “stand (στηναι) against the methods of the Devil” (6:11). Its verb form occurs three more times in the next few verses showing how the “armor of God” enables a believer to successfully “stand” for the Lord in “the evil day” – this Satan-dominated time in which we live (6:13, 14; see also 2 Cor. 4:4). Then, in verses 19-20, Paul ties his need for boldness in this battle against “spiritual wickedness in heavenly places” with proclaiming the “mystery of the gospel”, for which he was placed in prison (v. 12). When believers travel the same road as Paul did by depending on heavenly truths provided in his writings, we too can withstand every trial presented by this world which promote the Devil’s ways (1 John 2:16).

How does this message help believers to “stand” in our faith? In Colossians, while Paul writes about the mystery revelation centering on “Christ in you, the hope of glory”, he says, “Whom we proclaim, admonishing every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, for the purpose that we might present every man complete in Christ” (Col. 1:25-28). As we grow in our understanding of how we are righteous before God through Jesus Christ, and as we increase in our knowledge of how to overcome the control of sin by utilizing His power, we gain the foundation to become *stable Christians*. The message of the “mystery” can provide spiritual confidence arising from “the full assurance of understanding” so we will not be fooled by worldly philosophies which challenge our faith (Col. 2:2, 8).

Beyond providing a constant by which we can thrive in the midst of an evil world, the message of the “mystery” defines *how we are to obey God*. Speaking of the mystery truth, Romans 16:26 says, “but now having been manifested and made known through prophetic writings according to the commandment of the eternal God for obedience of the faith for all the gentiles.” The word “obedience” (υπακοην) is made up of the words “υπο”, meaning *under*, and “ακοη”, meaning *that which is heard*. God wants us to be *under the hearing* of “the faith” – the contents which make up the message we are to *believe*. Christians are to *submit* to God so our lives will be conformed to His standard of conduct (Rom. 6:16-22; 12:1-2).

Obedience to God results in godliness. In the Epistles Paul wrote near the end of his ministry, more emphasis is placed on “*godliness*”, directly connecting it with obedience to the “mystery” message. In Titus 1:1, Paul ties his apostleship with “the faith of the elect of God and the full knowledge of the truth which is according to godliness”. The phrase “full knowledge of the truth” is another way Paul speaks of the message revealed to him (Eph. 1:17; 4:13; Col. 1:9; 3:10).

Then, In First Timothy 3:16 Paul exclaims, “The mystery of godliness is great!” As this passage unfolds, it repeats a similar idea seen in other passages: *Godliness associated with the mystery message revolves around the Person of Jesus Christ* (v. 16; see also Col. 1:27-2:3). Continuing this thought in the next paragraph, Paul tells Timothy, “when submitting these things to the brethren, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, while being nourished by the words of the faith and the good teaching which you have followed” (1 Tim. 4:6). “These things” involve truths Paul writes about which center on serving our Lord and Savior. When Timothy is spiritually “nourished” by “these things” on a personal level and while he is “submitting” them to believers so they too might integrate them into their lives, he becomes “a good minister of Christ Jesus”.

Further developing this thought, Paul writes, “discipline yourself toward godliness, for bodily discipline is profitable for a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having the promise of life now and in the future” (1 Tim. 4:7-8). The second occurrence of the word “discipline” (γυμνασια) is a noun meaning *exercise*, from which we derive the word “gymnasium”. The idea expressed is as we exercise our bodies to attain an increased level of physical health, in the same way, we are to exercise ourselves spiritually to obtain godliness in our lives. We are to utilize the spiritual machine in God’s gym – the message Paul preached – to exercise our minds and hearts (Heb. 5:14). This practice will benefit us by conforming our thoughts and actions to His desires. This exercise is not presented to us as an option since the first occurrence of the word “discipline” is a verb in the *imperative mode*, meaning it is a *command*. The significance of this action is emphasized by adding how *it profits us “now” and will reap rewards “in the future”*.

Proceeding with the subject of “godliness”, later in this Letter Paul writes, “Teach these things and exhort. If anyone teaches otherwise and does not come to sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, even the teaching according to godliness, he has been puffed up, knowing nothing, but being sick concerning questions and law fights . . .” (1 Tim. 6:2-4). Here, Paul is referring to the “words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ” which Jesus revealed to him for the Church. These are the words which, if obeyed, result in “godliness”. These are *the “sound words” which will engender spiritual health enabling believers to grow in the faith*.

Paul’s instruction is contrasted with *other teaching* (see 1 Tim. 1:3; 6:3) and “law fights” (1:7-8; 6:4) which raises “questions” (1:4; 6:4) and makes believers spiritually “sick” (6:4). Those who endeavor to apply teachings from the Law to the Church, namely truths which are not compatible with the “mystery” message, are not benefiting the Body of Christ. They are harming it. However, if we follow Paul’s exhortation in this passage, our ministry will focus on teaching Christians to apply

biblical truth intended to help us be “sound” and *healthy* in our faith. If taken, this path provided by God will result in “godliness”.

Based on the controversy caused by Paul’s message, since it was given to supplant the long-embedded Law, we should not be surprised *it resulted in his incarceration and became the reason for his ultimate death*. Yet, he bravely proclaimed it for the benefit of believers. Ephesians 3:1-2 says, “For this reason I, Paul, am a prisoner of Jesus Christ in behalf of you gentiles if indeed you heard the administration of the grace of God which was given to me for you”. Then, to finish his discourse about “the mystery”, he says, “Wherefore, I ask *you* not to be depressed by my afflictions in your behalf, which is your glory” (3:13, also see verses 3 & 9). A study of Paul’s Letters together with the Book of Acts will show the greater part of his sufferings, imprisonment, and eventual demise were a direct result of his propagation of the message revealed to him because it was designed to replace the Law (Acts 20:24; Col. 1:24; 2 Tim 3:12; 4:6-8).

Although broadcasting the message entrusted to him resulted in suffering, Paul never wavered in this endeavor. He knew this message was essential for our spiritual establishment and health. So, *rather than “shrink back” from proclaiming things which were “beneficial” for believers, he continued to teach “all the counsel of God”* (Acts. 20:20, 27). Paul did not compromise in spreading the gospel, but instead asked believers to pray for him so he would faithfully continue. Ephesians 6:19-20 says, “And, (pray) in behalf of me, in order that a message might be given to me in the opening of my mouth, in boldness, to make known the mystery of the gospel, in behalf of which I work as an ambassador in a chain, in order that I might be bold in relation to it as it is necessary for me to speak.”

The word translated “in boldness” (παρρησια) means *openness* or *freedom of speech*. The idea portrayed is, even though Paul was imprisoned “in a chain”, he asked for prayer which would assist him to proclaim “the mystery of the gospel” in *a bold and free manner*. “It is necessary for” him to preach in this way since he was *made a divine ambassador* to distribute this message for the Church’s benefit.

The phrase “the mystery of the gospel” means “the mystery” *associated with* “the gospel” as the *genitive case* indicates. As discussed earlier, “the gospel” regarding salvation and redemption already existed prior to any revelation given to Paul since this teaching is based on part of the New Covenant. However, the revelation of “the mystery” *in association with the gospel* emphasizes aspects of the message which are newly revealed, distinct truths. *This revelation was given to*

Paul for the purpose of being added to the already existing gospel of prophecy. Together, these two parts constitute God's administration of Grace for the Church.

How does Paul's willingness to suffer while spreading the gospel of Grace relate to us? Remember, he is the example we are to imitate in all aspects of the Christian life (Phil. 4:9). So, *we should follow the same course of action he took while knowing it will profit the Body and view this process as a spiritual risk worth taking* (1 Cor. 11:1). We should carry this out while remembering God promises to reward us for faithful work done in the midst of afflictions associated with this life (1 Cor. 3:14; 4:1-5; 15:58). In Colossians 4:3-4, Paul repeats most of the same things taught in Ephesians 6:19-20. However, in the Colossian passage, proclamation of the "mystery of Christ" is specifically tied with *how we can relate this message to unbelievers*. It says, "Walk in wisdom toward those outside, while redeeming the time. Let your message at all times be in grace, having been seasoned with salt, for you to know how it is necessary to answer each one" (Col. 4:5-6).

"Grace" teachings contained in the message of the "mystery of Christ" help us understand the holiness of God and the sinfulness of man, in which unbelievers "outside" the Church are trapped. When our understanding of "grace" is "seasoned with salt" by careful study and experience gained from applying it to all aspects of life, we develop a base from which to answer important questions about God, sin, salvation and eternity which non-Christians may ask (Heb. 5:11-14; 1 Pet. 3:15). Furthermore, if our lives are perceived as notably different, while we reach out with approachable love, this can spark all sorts of questions (Titus 2:10).

Concluding this section, truths revolving around the administration of the Grace of God will *spiritually establish* us. With this foundation we are able to *stand secure* in the midst of this Satan-dominated age and not be controlled by related, secular philosophies. We can also become solid Christians while acquiring *godliness* and gaining *spiritual health* as we walk in *obedience* to God. Finally, *Paul's faithfulness* in declaring "the mystery of the gospel", even though this caused him great suffering, *should inspire us* to do the same. Because, proclaiming this gospel builds up members of the Body of Christ and forms a basis for our evangelism.

Two Contexts which Expand on this New "Administration"

Ephesians 1:9-10:

This first passage reads, "having made known to us the mystery of His (God) will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Him (Jesus Christ) resulting

in an administration of the fullness of times, to sum up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens and the things upon the earth.” These verses teach God made the “mystery” message known “resulting in an administration of the fullness of times”. The preposition translated “resulting in” (εἰς) means *in the direction of*. The concept is God revealed the previously hidden “mystery” truth to *direct us toward a new administration* (Eph. 3:2-3). Occurring in the *genitive case*, this “administration” is *in association with* “the fullness of times”.

What does the phrase “*fullness of times*” mean? The word translated “fullness” (πληρωματος) means *completeness*. The noun translated “times” (καιρων) is *plural in number*, and as such speaks of *the totality of all time*. The indication is when God made known the “mystery” message; this resulted in Him not only unveiling a new “administration” by which He manages His household, the Church. This phrase also points to an “administration” which operates during a time period not previously prophesied, but which is now fully revealed. *This time period completes the final piece of the puzzle regarding the total amount of time during which God’s eternal purpose takes place* and indicates no more unrevealed timeframes exist in which God will carry out His purpose throughout all of eternity (Eph. 1:9; 3:11).

This newly revealed time extends beyond the timeframe found in other Scriptures. Daniel 9:24-27 refers to a time of “Seventy weeks” in which God will “bring in everlasting righteousness” – the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom (v. 24). In Hebrew, the word “week” means *seven*, so the literal meaning here is *seventy sevens*. Then, it says, “from the going forth of the commandment to restore and build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks and threescore and two weeks”, then “shall Messiah be cut off” (vv. 25-26). Sixty-nine of these seventy weeks had taken place when Jesus Christ was crucified, which means the “seventy weeks” represent *four hundred and ninety years*. Four hundred and eighty three years had passed when Jesus died leaving just seven more years, or “one week”, on God’s prophetic clock prior to founding the Earthly Kingdom (Dan. 9:27).

Jesus makes reference to this passage when He cites Daniel in regard to a time of “*great tribulation*” which will occur before He returns to establish this Kingdom in Jerusalem (Matt. 24:21, see vv. 15-28). Also, the urgency concerning which John the Baptist and Jesus both taught about the coming Kingdom is explained by a timeline of just seven years between the crucifixion of Christ and its establishment. The short timeline remaining on Daniel’s prophecy also explains why the Twelve Apostles expected this Kingdom to be instituted so quickly in the first chapters of Acts (Acts 1:6). “The kingdom of heaven is near” was consistently the dominant message surrounding Jesus’ ministry and commission (Matt. 3:2; 10:7; 28:16-20).

In addition, the Book of Revelation confirms an understanding all of this will take place during a *literal seven year period*. The first “twelve hundred and sixty days” (3 ½ years) will be characterized by God’s “two witnesses” prophesying and being persecuted (Rev. 11:2-3). The last “forty-two months” (3 ½ years) is the time the “beast” will rule until Jesus defeats him at His coming (Rev. 13:4-5).

Combining all these facts we learn: The revelation of the “administration of the fullness of times” given to Paul not only exposed a different program than mankind had ever known but it also *disclosed a new time period which was in addition to the already known timeline of prophesy*. We are living during this newly revealed period between the cross and return of Christ. At present, *this time period is approaching two thousand years*.

The Law was in effect for about fourteen hundred years. Given the point that the “administration of the grace of God” has been operating almost fifty percent longer than the Law did emphasizes the importance God places on what He is accomplishing during this time. Furthermore, it is significant this Grace message has now been in place one third of the total framework of time we find detailed in the Scriptures during which His purposes are being carried out (about 6,000 years). This should motivate us, His people, to become co-participants in what God is achieving in this substantial time allotted to administer the Church by Grace.

Finally, this passage teaches God revealed His new “administration” in order “to sum up all things in Christ” (Eph. 1:10). The infinitive rendered “to sum up” (ανακεφαλαιωσασθαι) literally means *to head up*, essentially *to make Christ the Head* of “the things in the heavens and the things upon the earth”. Later in this same chapter we are told, “And He subjected all things under His feet, and He gave Him headship over all things to the church” (v. 22). Since we are living in a time when God is carrying out “heavenly spiritual blessings in Christ” (1:3) in relation to believers and heavenly forces, in this realm Christ is Head and all things are subjected under His feet. However, all others, including unbelieving people, rulers on earth and Satan, himself, are not yet subordinate as Scripture teaches they will be in the coming Kingdom (Psalm 8:6; 1 Cor. 15:27; Heb. 2:8).

In most of Paul’s letters, the first full paragraph is an outline of what can be expected in the upcoming body of the letter. This is certainly true here. For, while studying the Book of Ephesians, one can gain an expanded understanding of the purpose for which God made the mystery known, the content of the administration it revealed, what He is accomplishing during this un-prophesied time period, and

how Christ is the spiritual Head over all believers in the Church. Christians, who read this Book and the other Letters of Paul, will be able to “understand” his “comprehension in the mystery of Christ” (Eph. 3:4).

First Timothy 1:3-11:

This second passage details how Paul left Timothy in Ephesus so he “might command certain ones not to teach other doctrine” – viewpoints Paul did not teach (v. 3). The word translated “other doctrine” (ετεροδιδασκαλειν) means *to teach other*, equating with the word “Heterodox”. However, Christians want to be *Orthodox – straight in our teaching*.

Those who persist in holding to the “other doctrine” regarding “stories” and “genealogies” associated with God’s revelation of the Law, which is what this context is about, will only end up with “questions” (v. 4). These questions result from teachings within the Law which create uncertainties. These insecurities arise since the Law does not offer adequate assurance answering the question of how a man can become righteous before God while we find ourselves hopelessly affected by the disease of sin. Also, Old Testament Scripture does not provide solutions for overcoming the powerful control of sin found in our lives.

In contrast, *real answers to these and many other questions can be found in “the administration (οικονομιαν) of God which is in faith”* (1 Tim. 1:4). Not all English Versions read “the administration of God”, but this is a literal representation of the Greek text and is reinforced by both the New American Standard & Darby Translations. So, Christians who desire to be *orthodox* need to base their ministry on the “administration” of God which emphasizes “faith” for salvation and Christian living (2 Cor. 5:7). This truth gives *real answers* for how sinners can be acceptable to a Holy God through Christ’s shed blood. It also includes an expectation of how we can attain godly change in character by conquering sin in our bodies through the power of His indwelling Spirit.

The ultimate quality we can attain is “love”, for Paul says “the end of the commandment is love from a clean heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” (1 Tim. 1:5). The “commandment” is for Timothy to tell these Ephesian believers not to heed those who “teach other doctrine” but to follow “the administration of God which is in faith” (vv. 3-4).

The Law taught about love and the need for Jewish believers to implement it. However, this could not really happen because the Law operates in conjunction with man’s sinful “works of the flesh”. Old Covenant believers could not utilize “the

Spirit” as Paul teaches in the administration associated with faith (Gal. 5:19, 22; see 6-23). If we want to truly achieve “love”, we must first obtain “a clean heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith”. These qualities can only be gained *by using the power of the Holy Spirit in conjunction with following the principles found within the “administration of God which is in faith”*.

The next verse teaches those who gravitate toward the Law as their standard of truth have abandoned these essential qualities. They miss the mark of “love”, ending up with “vain speech” (ματαιολογίαν – v. 6). This word means *empty speech, indicating it is void of spiritual value*. Verse 7 further profiles those teaching this *other-doctrine-resulting-in-vain-speech* as people “desiring to be teachers of the law; not understanding which things they say nor about which things they confidently assert” (v. 7). The participle translated “understanding” comes from the Greek word for “mind” (νοῦς). Paul is stating the reason these teachers do not have the “answers” we need nor can help us attain the “love” we so desperately want is because they base their *mindset of what they teach* on the Law.

In conjunction with this, Paul says they do not understand “which things they say nor about which things they confidently assert”. This means *those who teach Law principles as the basis for Christian practice today do not know what they are talking about*. For, the “administration” emphasizing “faith” should be their standard. Paul not only says they do not understand what they are saying, but he adds they have no understanding of what they “confidently assert” (διαβεβαιουνται). This word literally means *to confirm throughout*, and is well translated *confidently affirm* or *strongly assert*. Because of the sheer confidence by which these teachers promoted Law principles, many followed their views and were “turned away” from God’s “administration” intended for the Church (vv. 4, 6).

How many believers in Paul’s day were being led astray from truth which would give them “answers” in contrast to the spiritually destructive nature of this “vain speech” based on the Law of Moses? We are not told. But, this was happening in Ephesus, a place where Paul spent the most time establishing believers. This should accentuate the potential of doctrinal corruption based on false teaching. Now, take a look at the Church today. Because of the volume of inappropriate, *confident assertions* from the Law made by Bible teachers, it is no wonder why many Christians are confused about what the Bible teaches for them to follow. This source cannot lead believers to experience God’s provision for “answers” and “love” which come from adhering to the “administration of God which is in faith”.

In verse 8, Paul continues his discussion on this theme by saying, “But we know that the law is good if anyone might use it lawfully, knowing this that the law is not for a righteous man . . .” This passage says *a lawful use of the Law*, that is, *the proper (or standard) use of the Law, is for the purpose of convicting unbelievers of their sin* (vv. 9-10; Rom. 3:9-20). At its foundation, the Law condemns. It was not given to make a person appear righteous before a Holy God (Rom. 5:20). The Law and its condemnation are not profitable for believers because we have already been freed from bondage to sin which the Law actually promotes (Rom. 3:19-20; 6:18-20; 8:1).

So, *Paul is saying if we teach the Law in its literal sense, which emphasizes condemnation before God, the target should be unbelievers characterized by the listed immoralities “and if anything other (immoral act) is opposed to sound teaching”* (1 Tim. 1:10). This “sound teaching”, already discussed numerous times, *stimulates spiritual health*. This *healthy instruction* is found in “the administration of God which is in faith” and is “according to the gospel of the glory of the blessed God, with which” Paul “was entrusted” (vv. 4, 11).

The teachings God has provided in Ephesians 1:9-10 and First Timothy 1:3-11 are as follows. Initially, the revelation of “the mystery” posts details of a new “administration” in which God is engaged during the *un-prophesied period of time* we live in. Following this “administration” will keep us on the *orthodox path* while providing a foundation for *real spiritual health* which gives us the “answers” and “love” we strive for. Paul repeatedly warns those who follow Law-oriented precepts will suffer psychological condemnation. In contrast, the “administration of the grace of God”, superseding the Law, can *establish, build up, encourage and comfort* us.

Closing Thoughts

Many Scriptures make evident Paul’s teaching is intended to be the standard which directs the Church. It was the Spirit who prompted Paul to say, “You become imitators of me, according as I also am of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1; 4:16; Phil. 3:17; 2 Thess. 3:9). Today, many Christians are confused about what the will of God includes. This reality is directly connected with a lack of recognition about where the “pattern of sound words” explaining His will is found (1 Tim. 1:13).

A popular thought being championed today is that the whole Bible teaches the same thing. This assertion ridicules the idea Christians ought to obtain beliefs from some parts of the Bible as opposed to others. When believers reflect upon the Scriptures mentioned in this article, it is my hope they will recognize this

position is both untenable and counterproductive toward *establishing believers in the spiritually healthy teachings of Grace* (Acts 20:24).

Consider these facts. Instruction consistent with the Law, intended for the Nation of Israel, covers more than 82% of all the pages in Scripture found between Exodus, chapter 20 and Acts, chapter 7. The thirteen Letters which bear Paul's name make up less than 6% of the Bible. When Christians give equal emphasis to all parts of Scripture, while seeking to apply every context, it should be no surprise many truths which Paul teaches are not recognized and fall by the wayside.

In addition, "questions" arise as Christians literally approach portions of Scripture written about events from when the Law was God's active program (1 Tim. 1:4). 'Should we stone people for various sins?' (Lev. 20:2; 24:14) 'Why aren't miracles happening today similar to what we see recorded in the Bible?' (Mark 16:17-18; Acts 3:1-11) 'Is it God's will for us to kill our spiritual enemies?' (Num. 31:16-18; 1 Sam. 15:3; 22:18-19) Justification for these and many more things can be found throughout the pages of the Old Covenant.

The latter point mentioned above is supported by numerous commands God gave the Nation of Israel so they would be a pure Nation, not corrupted by the ungodly. Their wholesome way of life was to be accomplished by wiping out their opposition, including women and children. Historically, Christians have obtained rational from passages such as these to support involvement in the Crusades and the Inquisition. Even execution of church heretics by Christians in the city of Geneva, a place now known for encouraging peace, was based on teachings found within the Law.

These Bible-based concepts as well as many more have resulted in numerous dark days throughout Church history. This kind of application has given far too much cause for criticism as the world judges our Christianity. As a consequence of this sort of instruction originating from the Old Testament, many believers have been discouraged from taking Scripture literally or as seriously as God intended. But, when Christians become aware that the "mystery" message given to Paul is the revelation God expects them to practice, they are liberated to take the entire Bible literally while recognizing He did not intend for all of it to be applied today. Comprehending this principle alone solves a vast number of doctrinal problems and helps us navigate the Word of God from a solid theological bearing.

Repeating the core point of this article, *Christianity is founded upon the teachings our Lord, Jesus Christ revealed to Paul*. In the 1500's The Reformation was triggered by *men returning to reacquaint themselves with the divine facts found in*

the actual pages of the Bible. This brought about a rediscovery of gospel truths which had been predominantly lost among the majority of non-Bible-reading Christians. One of these truths was *Justification by Faith Alone*. Where did these brethren find this teaching? The primary source was the *Book of Romans, the remaining Letters of Paul and other New Testament Epistles*.

Today, if the Church is to experience similar renewal based on God's revealed truth, we must seek transformation from targeting the same "pattern of sound words" which has directed believers in the past. This is the path which will guide the Church to its ultimate destination – "to know the love of Christ which exceeds knowledge, in order that you might be filled unto all the fullness of God" (Eph. 3:19; 1:22-23; 4:13).

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Written 2013

Old Testament quotes are from the KJV.

New Testament quotes are original translations by the author from the Greek text.