

THE PREACHING OF THE CROSS

Part II

Messages for Both the Saved and the Unsaved

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"For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish [*lit.*, 'that are perishing'] foolishness; but unto us which are saved [*lit.*, 'which are being saved'] it is the power of God..."

And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God.

For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified...

That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought:

But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory:

Which none of the princes of this world knew, for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (I Cor. 1:18; 2:1, 2, 5-8).

Commentators invariably associate that seen in I Cor. 2:1-8 with *the preaching of the gospel of grace to the unsaved*. And, undoubtedly, the main thing facilitating this type understanding of these verses is a failure to see any continuing aspect to the gospel message, *i.e.*, *a preaching of the cross to the saved as well*.

Among most Christians today (years past as

well), if the gospel message is mentioned — proclaiming the gospel — *only one message invariably comes to mind*, which has to do with a message proclaimed to the unsaved, not to the saved.

But, the manner in which the word "gospel" is used throughout the New Testament is quite different. Referencing all usages of this word in the New Testament (the Greek word *euaggelion*, "gospel," "good news," appears about eighty times), a person will find that over four-fifths (closer to nine-tenths) of the different times that this word appears, contextually, the word refers to "good news" *OTHER THAN the gospel of grace*.

But, despite this, Christians continue to see the usage of this word *only one way in Scripture*, having to do with *only one message — a message to the unsaved*.

Individuals seeing and understanding things in the preceding manner can only have major problems with the text from I Cor. 2:1-8, particularly the last four verses (vv. 5-8), for *NOTHING in any one of these last four verses can have anything to do with the preaching of the gospel message to the unsaved. ONLY material pertaining to the saved can be in view throughout, which can only present major problems when trying to relate these verses to the gospel of grace*.

And, this is no small thing, for individuals improperly understanding this passage, attempting to proclaim the simple gospel of grace from these verses, *can only corrupt one facet of the gospel message and destroy the other*.

With the preceding in mind, note a number of different things about I Cor. 2:5-8:

A Mystery (v. 7)

That in view in these verses is referred to as "a mystery," having to do with God's "power" and "wisdom," seen in verses five through seven: "the power of God" and "wisdom among them that are perfect ['mature']."

And understanding how the word "mystery" is used in the New Testament will form a base for a correct understanding of this passage.

1) Usage of "Mystery" in the N.T.

The word "mystery" is used twenty-seven times in the New Testament.

It is used one time in each of the three synoptic gospels, for the same event — *the mysteries of the kingdom* (Matt. 13:11; Mark 4:11; Luke 8:10).

It is used twenty times in the Pauline epistles.

Paul used the word numerous times to reference *the gospel which he had been called to proclaim throughout the Gentile world* (Rom. 16:25; Eph. 3:3, 4, 9; 6:19; Col. 1:26-28).

He used the word to reference *Israel's blindness*, awaiting the fulness of the Gentiles, to be followed by Israel's salvation (Rom. 11:25, 26).

And, among several other usages, Paul used the word to reference *the coming resurrection of Christians and the corresponding removal of the living at the end of the present dispensation* (I Cor. 15:51ff).

The word is not used in Hebrews or the general epistles, but it is used four times in the Book of Revelation. It is used of *the seven stars* (1:20), of *God* (10:7), and of *the Woman and the Beast* (17:5, 7).

2) Definition of "a Mystery"

"A mystery" in the New Testament does not have to do with something completely new, something not dealt with at all or unknown in the Old Testament (a common misconception which is often taught concerning the meaning of the word). This, of course, couldn't be true, for *there can be NOTHING in the New that cannot be found after some form in the Old*.

If there were something in the New that could not be found after some fashion in the Old, note what this would do relative to *perfection in the Word made flesh* (John 1:1, 2, 14) before a single word of the New had been penned.

Rather, "a mystery" in the New Testament has to do with *an opening up and unveiling of something previously introduced and dealt with in the Old Testament*. "A mystery" has to do with *additional revelation, commentary, on that already existing in the Old Testament, allowing the Old Testament revelation to be fully opened up and revealed* (*e.g.*, note that a full

revelation of the Son in the Book of Revelation, which is the announced subject matter of the book in the opening verse [1:1], allows the “mystery of God” [Rev. 10:7] to be correspondingly fully opened up as well, for Christ is God manifested in the flesh).

3) Paul’s Gospel

Note in the preceding definition and coverage of the word “mystery” in the New Testament that the word is used in connection with *Paul’s gospel* a number of times. And, comparing Scripture with Scripture, it is clear that the gospel which Paul had been called to proclaim had to do with *the preaching of the cross to the saved*, not to the unsaved (cf. Rom. 2:16; 16:25; II Cor. 4:3, 4; Eph. 3:1-6).

The word “mystery,” associated with Paul’s gospel, is NEVER used in the New Testament in connection with the gospel of grace, only with the gospel of glory.

Also, in this respect, note “unto our glory,” and “the Lord of glory” in I Cor. 2:7, 8).

The Princes of this World (vv. 6, 8)

A great deal of controversy exists among commentators over the identity of “the princes” referenced in I Cor. 2:6, 8. The Greek word translated “princes” in the passage is *archon*, used of both *men on earth* and *angels in Satan’s kingdom* (Matt. 9:23, 34; John 3:1; Eph. 2:2). This same word was used by the Septuagint translators (Greek O.T.) in Dan. 10:13, 20, 21, verses referring to *ruling angels in the heavens*.

Then there is the related Greek word *arche*, meaning “beginning” (e.g., John 1:1), but sometimes used in the same sense as *archon*. Both words mean “beginning,” and both words are used relative to “rulers,” “principalities,” with *archon* used more so than *arche* in this respect.

The way *arche* is used in both the Books of Ephesians and Colossians though would be an exception to the preceding. The word is used in Eph. 1:21; 3:10; 6:12 and in Col. 1:16; 2:10, 15, principally of *angels in Satan’s kingdom* in both books (human rulers are included with angelic rulers in Eph. 1:21; Col. 1:16; 2:10). Then the word

is used relative to *rulers among men* in Titus 3:1.

But, how is *archon* used in I Cor. 2:6, 8? Does the word refer to *rulers among men here on earth*? Or, does it refer to *rulers in Satan’s kingdom in the heavens*?

Understanding two things — *the subject at hand* and *what these rulers were failing to see in I Cor. 2:5-8* — forms the crux of the matter; and, to properly understand the passage, *these two things MUST be understood*.

As previously seen, the subject at hand has to do with different things surrounding the preaching of the cross to the saved, not to the unsaved; and these rulers had failed to see and understand the full ramifications of Christ’s crucifixion.

That is to say, they saw no more than most Christians see today — nothing beyond a simple preaching of the gospel of grace, the preaching of the cross to the unsaved. Had they seen what lay beyond the preceding — *the preaching of the cross to the saved, along with the ramifications of this preaching — they would have done everything in their power to prevent the crucifixion* (I Cor. 2:8).

Why? The answer is not only very simple but the answer will also identify “the princes of this world” in verses six and eight.

Earthly rulers COULDN’T POSSIBLY be in view, for *they have absolutely NOTHING to do with the subject matter at hand. But Satan and his angels have EVERYTHING to do with it.*

Results of the simple gospel of grace are of no danger to Satan and his angels. An unsaved person being saved through the preaching of the cross DOES NOT place that person in a position to one day replace one of the angels ruling under Satan. And these ruling angels would have known, from Old Testament Scripture, the ramifications of Christ’s finished work at Calvary in this respect.

The text (v. 8) clearly indicates that the preceding was not something which they tried to prevent. In fact, from events which transpired, Satan’s angels, ruling through the Roman rulers of that day (Dan. 10:12-21), evidently either caused or looked favorably on the crucifixion being carried out by the Romans on behalf of the Jews.

(Angels act under *fixed laws in God’s kingdom*, with their actions becoming the Lord’s actions [e.g., actions of angels and the Lord in Gen. 18, 19].

And, within Satan’s kingdom, “angels” form *the gods of the nations* [cf. II Chron. 32:13-15; Ps. 96:5], with *rulers in the Gentile nations conducting affairs under them [under their gods]*. And it is evident from I Cor. 2:8 that *a form of this same fixed-law government exists in Satan’s kingdom between angelic rulers in the heavens and human rulers on the earth*.

The manner in which the government of the earth has been established — patterned after God’s government of the universe — would leave *both heavenly and earthly rulers EQUALLY RESPONSIBLE for the actions of earthly rulers, occupying positions of power under the heavenly rulers, as seen in I Cor. 2:8*.

What Satan and his angels didn’t see and understand, *which they would have tried to prevent at all costs had they known*, was the same thing which angels outside of Satan’s kingdom also didn’t know, inquiring about the matter as seen in I Peter 1:12 (the saving of the soul [vv. 9-12]).

What they didn’t know had to do with a present and future salvation, having to do with *the preaching of the cross to the saved*. This present aspect of salvation had to do with *bringing man into a position where he could replace angels ruling under Satan*, and the future salvation had to do with *this present salvation being realized*.

And it is plain to see how this would affect these angels and why *they would have done everything within their power to prevent Christ’s crucifixion had they known these things*.

The opening up of these things from the Old Testament, to both men and angels (Eph. 3:1-11), awaited the Apostle Paul, with this revelation given through him. And *it was this message that he carried throughout the Gentile world* (Col. 1:20-23).