

The Progressives' KINGDOM CHURCH

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The purpose of this Polemic Paper is to establish the fact the **Progressive Dispensationalism**,-- via its primary leaders, **Dr. Robert L. Saucy**, **Dr. Darrell L. Bock**, and **Dr. Craig A. Blaising**-- 1) places the Church in OT prophecy, 2) eliminates the mystery and exclusiveness of the Church, and 3) makes Paul's message secondary to OT prophecy.

PAULINE DISPENSATIONALISM -- Several indispensable teachings of Pauline Dispensationalism are:

1. The Church was neither prophesied nor revealed in OT Scriptures.
2. The Church was a complete mystery until revealed doctrinally by Paul.
3. Paul, in the Church Epistles, was the minister of Church truth.

CLASSIC (TRADITIONAL) DISPENSATIONALISM -- From its inception, all the way back to Darby, Classic Dispensationalism:

1. Broke the scriptural barrier separating Israel and the Church by linking Israel's New Covenant blessings with the Church.
2. Made OT prophecy to include the Church, thereby eliminating the mystery.
3. No longer viewed Paul as the initial, and primary, source of Church truth.

This rending of the scriptural barrier enabled Covenant Theology to come in, and enabled Progressive Dispensationalism to go out--right into Covenantism.

PROGRESSIVE DISPENSATIONALISM -- The Progressives "progressed" beyond the Classics:

1. Included the Church in OT prophecy, mainly via Israel's New Covenant.
2. Eliminated the Pauline mystery.
3. Made Paul's ministry secondary to that of Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

1) THE CHURCH UNPROPHESIED -- The first truth to establish is that the Church is neither in the OT, nor its prophecy. John Darby insisted upon that fact in his *Collected Writings*, Vol. 11:

The Church is not of the world. It, as such, sits in heavenly places in Christ where prophecy reaches not. It will never be established on the earth, as the Jews. That is not its calling (p. 42).

The Church is not the subject of OT prophecy. As to OT prophecy, the NT declares in the most absolute and positive manner that it was a mystery hidden in all ages, and now revealed by NT

apostles and prophets by the Spirit. The Church belongs to heaven; prophecy relates to earth (p. 45).

SCRIPTURE RE PROPHECY -- OT prophecy concerns a kingdom, a political, governmental organization (Dan. 2:44; Matt. 6:10). It predicts a kingdom to be established on earth (Jer. 23:5; Matt. 6:10). It mainly concerns nations as such (Isa. 60:1-3; Zech. 8:22,23). It concerns Christ coming to the earth (Isa. 59:20; Zech. 14:4). It predicts Israel's supremacy over the nations (Isa. 60:10-12; 61:6).

BOCK & BLAISING -- In their *Progressive Dispensationalism*, they make the heavenly Church an integral part of the Kingdom, via Israel's OT New Covenant:

It is undisputable that the NT views the new covenant predicted by Jeremiah and Ezekiel as established in the death of Jesus Christ with some of its promised blessings now being granted to Jews and Gentiles who are believers in Jesus.

These are not blessings which are like those predicted by Jeremiah and Ezekiel. They are the very same blessings which those prophets predicted. For the new covenant which is presently in effect through Jesus Christ is not one like that prophesied, but it is the very same covenant which they prophesied which is in effect today (p. 202).

The inauguration of the new covenant under the eschatological Messiah has brought realities belonging to that kingdom into present existence. Here is where the church finds its identity [!]. All of the language describing the church in the NT is either directly drawn from or is compatible with the genres of covenant promise and the Messianic Kingdom (emphasis theirs). The present dispensation is the full and complete revelation of the eschatological kingdom. It is a progressive stage in the revelation of the kingdom (p. 260).

John Darby knew Israel's New Covenant for what it is:

Israel's New Covenant does not go beyond forgiveness, remembering sins and iniquities no more. And it does not include any entrance into the presence of the Father in the Sanctuary, which is our position in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Are you not shocked at the denigration of the Church by these doctors?

The millennial empire of the Messiah is the next phase of the eschatological kingdom after that phase which is now present--the community of the King, the church (p. 281).

The down payment guarantees the future just as much as it itself is a part of that future reality. Accordingly, the work which the Holy Spirit does in the church, is a partial revelation in the present of that kingdom which is coming in the future. Since its reality belongs to the kingdom [!], and since it exists in the present, consequently the church must be understood as a present form of the eschatological Kingdom (p. 258).

2) THE MYSTERY DEMYSTIFIED -- While Bock and Blaising kingdomize the Church by relating it to Israel's New Covenant, Dr. Saucy continues the debacle by eliminating the mystery.

Dr. Wm. R. Newell -- Dr. Newell describes the scriptural characteristics of biblical mystery:

The mystery, in a general sense, includes all those peculiar revelations kept in silence from the "aeons" before Adam and from the "generations" since Adam. Heavenly revelations they were, given by the glorified Lord to Paul, according to which his entire ministry proceeds.

The mysteries reveal resurrection things; they are non-earthly and heavenly in their character, and are connected in no way with Judaism. "We are the circumcision [that is, those cut off by the death of the Cross from the old-Adam line and all earthly things (Gal. 2:20; Rom. 6:6)], who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus [His risen Name, as connected with the Church] and have no confidence in the flesh (Phil. 3:3) (Romans and Acts, p. 370).

Dr. Robert Saucy -- If the Church is to be downgraded to the status of nothing more than a present phase of the coming Millennial Kingdom, the mystery of its total heavenly uniqueness in Christ must be eliminated--which Dr. Saucy proceeds to do in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, by Bock and Blaising:

The evidence from the OT prophecies and in some cases their later Jewish interpretation shows a relationship between what was promised and what is now revealed [hence no mystery!]. Specifically, the promises concerning the salvation of the Gentiles along with Israel, a certain solidarity between the promises, concerning Messiah and his people, and, perhaps most important, the prediction of the indwelling Spirit of God, make it difficult [not at all] to deny some connection between this OT hope and the mystery of the union of Gentiles and Israel in Christ found in the Ephesians 3 mystery.

Despite the unrevealed time of this age to which the revelation of that mystery of Ephesians obviously refers, it is clear that the truth of that mystery of the union of Gentiles and Israel in Christ's salvation does relate to OT prophecy. Consequently, the revelation of this previously hidden mystery relates primarily to the actualization or realization through Christ of that which the prophets foretold and longingly anticipated (p. 150).

DOCTRINAL IGNORANCE -- Did you catch this Progressive method of kingdomizing the Church, by these doctors of evangelical dispensational theology? It doesn't seem that they are attempting to be devious, or guilty of overt subversion in seeking to establish their kingdom theme. It is more likely a matter of sheer ignorance concerning the rightly-divided Word of truth.

Is this not inexcusable biblical nescience? They take the prophecies of the OT concerning the salvation of the nation of Israel and the Gentile nations in the Millennial Kingdom--having already made the Church nothing but a phase of that coming Kingdom--and apply those kingdom prophecies to the Church!

The Gospel of the grace of God has to do with individual believing Jews and Gentiles--the Gospel of the Kingdom has to do with nations. First, the **Nation of Israel**:

"For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits: that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved; as it is written, There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob; for this is My [new] covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins" (Rom. 11:25-27).

Then, the **Gentile Nations**:

"When the Son of Man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory. And before Him shall be gathered all the [Gentiles] nations.... Then shall the King say unto them on His right hand, Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 25:31,32,34).

This is kingdom salvation, and has nothing whatsoever to do with the heavenly Church. Salvation in the Body of Christ is an individual matter, confined to this present dispensation of grace, where individual believing Jews and Gentiles become members of the Body of Christ, seated in their heavenly position before the Father, "hidden with Christ in God." No kingdom nation, including Israel, nor any individual in them, will ever know anything of this! Tragically, all too few Christians know it! But Progressivism can only see on the earthly, horizontal kingdom level:

We have seen that the mystery of the church is vitally related to the OT promise of spiritual salvation in the Messianic era. It is part and parcel of the one great mystery of Christ--namely, God's eschatological salvation through His Son (p. 153).

Eschatological salvation of Israel and the Gentiles was the obvious theme of all OT prophecy--there is no mystery about that! But the truth of the Church, composed of individual believing Jews and Gentiles (Christians), was unknown throughout the OT, and the Synoptic Gospels. That mystery was not in the Scriptures, but was "hidden in God." And it was not revealed until Paul:

"If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me toward you, how that by revelation He made known unto me the mystery, (... by which, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men as it is now revealed unto His holy [NT] apostles and prophets by the Spirit:

"That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same Body [not kingdom], and partakers of his promise in Christ by the Gospel [the Gospel of Grace, not the Kingdom Gospel], and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages hath been hidden in God who created all things by Jesus Christ" (Eph. 3:2-6,9).

THE PROGRESSIVES' - "MYSTERY" -- The mystery of the Church is no mystery to the all-seeing Progressives. To them the mystery is not a matter of the revelation of previously unknown truth, but rather the making real or actual of something that was already foretold--right there in OT prophecy, but not yet fulfilled:

Our discussion of the apostle's teaching concerning the Ephesians 3 mystery leads to several conclusions. First, the unity of Gentile and Jew in Christ is the fulfillment of the divine salvation promised for messianic times, when the nations along with Israel would enjoy God's blessing (emphasis mine) (p. 155).

While the OT picture of salvation for the Gentiles involves all aspects of life, including international peace, it most certainly includes the spiritual salvation that is presently enjoyed by believers in Christ. This salvation, as the NT reveals, is nothing less than the beginning of the fulfillment of the new covenant promised in the OT.

When we set these prophecies alongside Paul's teaching about the union of Jew and Gentile in salvation through Christ, it seems difficult to believe that he intends no reference to those prophecies and that his use of "mystery" means previously unknown truth absolutely (p. 163).

Absolutely, Robert! The Word of truth is absolute concerning the mystery of the Church prior to Paul! And an absolute mystery means the prorogation of Progressivism!

In addition to the fact that the equal sharing of Jew and Gentile in the present spiritual salvation found in Christ is in accord with the OT prophecies, this conclusion is supported by the fact that the teaching of the relationship of Jews and Gentiles in Ephesians 3:6 is in reality part of the broad [not that broad!] "mystery of Christ" that is clearly related to OT prophecy.

Thus we agree with the non-dispensationalists [Covenantists] that Paul's teaching concerning the mystery of the church in the union of Jew and Gentile in Christ is a fulfillment of OT prophecies (p. 164).

The Progressives relate the unrelatable, i.e. , individual members of the heavenly Body of Christ, to the nations of the earthly Messianic Kingdom.

The NT's connecting the truth of the mystery to the OT concepts of human solidarity, and especially the prophecies of the inwardness of the divine work in the heart and the indwelling of God himself through the Spirit in the new covenant, also shows that this mystery is not totally unrelated to previous prophecy.

As in the case of the mystery of the one body in Ephesians 3, the nature of the mystery in Colossians 1 has to do with revelation in the sense of making real or actual something that was previously foretold, but not yet fulfilled (p. 172).

But God says the mystery was a tale untold--until Paul. "Even the mystery which hath been hidden from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to His saints. To whom God

would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:26,27).

The mysteries are made manifest to the saints. Nevertheless, it is manifest that to the Progressives they are not manifest:

Our study of the Pauline mysteries related to the Church leads to a mediating conclusion between traditional dispensationalism and nondispensationalism. Contrary to the former, the contents of both mysteries--i. e., the equal participation of Jew and Gentile in the body of Christ (Eph. 3) and his indwelling in his people (Col. 1)--are best understood as fulfillment of OT prophecies.

Although a greater understanding of these mysteries is revealed in the NT, their basic substance was already contained in the OT prophecies. The former hiddenness thus related as much to their not being realized or actualized in history as to any new disclosure of information. The particular truth of Ephesians 3--that Jews and Gentiles have equal standing with God--is only the fulfillment of the promise that Gentiles would one day share God's eschatological salvation along with Israel (p. 173) .

Slight the Bride, and you have insulted the Bridegroom. "He is the Head of the Body ... that in all things He might have the preeminence" (Col. 1:18).

3) PAUL IN THE CHURCH EPISTLES -- If you minister to the heavenly Body from her exclusive Church Epistles, you can never--as do the Progressives--make Israel's Messianic Kingdom predominant, and the Church but a phase of the same. If Church truth is ministered faithfully to the Church, Progressive Dispensationalism is a dead issue.

Paul first proclaimed the hidden mystery: "We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the ages unto our glory" (1 Cor. 2:7).

The mystery, as it relates to the present, is the glorious truth that God has concluded both Jew and Gentile in unbelief that He might have mercy upon all (Rom. 11:32); and that He might reconcile both unto God in one body by the Cross (Eph. 2:16).

It is Paul who explains "how that by revelation He made known unto me the mystery," insisting that "in other ages [it] was not made known," that it was "unsearchable," i.e., not to be found in Scripture thus far written, and "from the beginning of the ages... hidden in God" (Eph. 3:3-9).

"And that He might reconcile both [Jew and Gentile] unto God in one body by the Cross" (Eph. 2:16). This "one Body" is not the subject of OT prophecy, but of the mystery first revealed by Paul, and not until then. Nor is it the fulfillment of any covenant promise.

Paul's ministry was not based upon covenant promises or prophecies, but entirely upon the grace of God (Rom. 3:21-28; Eph. 1:7; 2:7). It was a mystery, kept secret until Paul's time (Rom.

16:25; Eph. 3:1-3), and **gradually** revealed to and through Paul (Acts 26:16; 22:17,18; 2 Cor. 12:1-7).

For both growth and ministry, we must center in the glorified One who is the Life and Head of the Church. Thus we will not be drawn down to Israel's earthly Millennial Kingdom. For God "hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:6,7).

Abide Above! Why "progress" to anything less?!

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