

EPHESIANS: LIVING IN ALIGNMENT WITH OUR HIGH CALLING

Part I: Our High Calling In Christ, Ephesians 1:1-3:21

G. God's Gracious Revelation Of The Institution Of The Church (Ephesians 3:1-6)

I. Introduction

- A. Postmillennialists believe the Church is raptured at the end of the Great Tribulation and claim that it will experience the fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham and David (Charles C. Ryrie, A Survey of Bible Doctrine, 1978, p. 162-163) where amillennialists deny a literal thousand-year reign of Christ over Israel by figuratively making the Church replace Israel today. (Ibid., p. 164-165). Both theologies "blur . . . the distinction between Israel and the Church." (Charles Caldwell Ryrie, Dispensationalism Today, 1970, p. 137)
- B. This is an important issue, for if either of these theologies is correct, we believers must focus on making the Church dominate the world's kingdoms versus focusing only on discipling individuals for Christ's future Millennial Kingdom. (cf. John F. Walvoord, The Blessed Hope and the Tribulation, 1976, p. 13-15)
- C. Ephesians 3:1-6 is a passage that has become a theological battleground on this issue, so understanding its proper interpretation offers us insight and direction on our ministry as a church today (as follows):

II. God's Gracious Revelation Of The Institution Of The Church, Ephesians 3:1-6.

- A. The Apostle Paul wrote that he was a prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of his Gentile Christian readers, that he was suffering imprisonment upon being bitterly opposed by his Jewish countrymen for his ministry to Gentile believers as being the people of God along with saved Jews, for which belief he had been "attacked in Jerusalem and put on trial in Caesarea and Rome," Ephesians 3:1; Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 628.
- B. Paul explained that in the current dispensation of the grace of God, the Lord had revealed unto him a mystery, or a "truth hitherto unknown," the mystery of Christ, Ephesians 3:2-4; Ibid.
- C. He added that this mystery in past ages was not made known unto men "as" it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit, the mystery that the Gentiles should be fellowheirs and of the same body and partakers of God's promise in Christ by the Gospel, Ephesians 3:5-6. This mystery clearly is the Church.
- D. Yet, the comparative adverb "as" in verse 5 can be interpreted two ways with huge theological consequences:
 1. It can be understood in a **restrictive** sense to mean "to the same extent" in support of the amillennialist view that the Church existed in the Old Testament but in a less obvious way than it does now, Ibid., p. 629.
 2. Conversely, it can be understood in a **descriptive** sense to mean a "comparison of kind," that "no revelation of this mystery was given in the Old Testament but that this mystery was revealed for the first time in the New Testament," Ibid.
- E. To **complicate** the matter, even dispensationalists may concede that Paul *may* have used the **restrictive** sense here, **but not to support amillennialism**, for the Leviticus 23:15-22 Feast of Pentecost prophetically "typified the formation of the Church on the day of Pentecost" as the "two loaves of bread . . . made with leaven" teaches the "Church, the Body of Christ, is composed of sinners (leaven typifies sin)" according to Exodus 12:15-20, the sinners being "saved by the grace of God . . ." (Ryrie St. Bib., KJV, 1978, fn. to Lev. 23:15-23)
- F. Thus, even **were** the comparative adverb "as" in Ephesians 3:5 to be rendered in a **restrictive** sense to claim that some **prophecies ABOUT** the Church existed in the Old Testament, "this does not mean that the body composed of Jews and Gentiles was in existence in Old Testament times." (Ibid., Ryrie, Dispensationalism Today, p. 133-134) Paul had "just written in the same Ephesian epistle that only in Christ was the middle wall of partition broken down between Jew and Gentile so that He could 'reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross' (Eph. 2:16). This was not done before the cross; therefore, it is clear that the new man, the one body, was not in existence in Old Testament times. Even if it had been partially revealed, as [Oswald T.] Allis claims, that did not bring it into existence." (Ibid., p. 134)

Lesson: *Though the Old Testament typologically predicted the coming of the Church, the Church as an institution did not then exist in the Old Testament, but was instituted on the Day of Pentecost distinct from literal Israel. God will yet LITERALLY fulfill His Abrahamic and Davidic promises to Israel so that the Church, as distinct from Israel, will be raptured before the Great Tribulation and the Millennial Kingdom of Christ.*

Application: *May we hold to the dispensational view of keeping Israel distinct from the Church and minister to make converts to Christ instead of adopting errant reconstructionism of posttribulationism or amillennialism that directs the Church to build God's Kingdom on earth by subjugating the kingdoms of this world to the Church.*