

**The 7-FOLD Excellencies of the Mystery:
"The Church which is His Body:
The Excellency of Suffering, Under Such Abundance of Grace"**

Review:

In our last several fellowships we considered the many enablings or empowerings the Lord God provided to the church which is his body. The included the new nature, the indwelling Holy Spirit, the opportunity to bring forth the fruit of the spirit, and, the special enablings given during the early years of the dispensation of grace. Those latter included prophecy, miracles, healings, and gifts regarding the use of foreign languages. Some of these gifts were "sign" gifts primarily for Israel.

Once Israel was formally set aside at the end of the book of the Acts, and, once the revelation for the Body of Christ had been completed, there was no longer any reason for those special enablings and they either passed away over time or were terminated, depending of the gift. But, Paul wrote in 1 Cor. 13, that love continued on and will continue forever. What a contrast. Since love is one segment of the fruit of the spirit, what the apostle is saying is that the fruit of the spirit should dominate our lives and not the supernatural sign gifts and prophetic utterances. Those have been terminated by God but Satan keeps using them and will continue to use them according to the working of the mystery of iniquity (2 Thess. 2).

We also looked at 1 Cor. 15:45 as that verse indicates that the Christ "became a life giving spirit" in his resurrection.

The apostle gave testimony of that risen life in Phil. 1:19 & 20 where he wrote these words concerning "the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ":

For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and **the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.** According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death.

I believe this work of God under grace is hereby being distinguished from the works of God in other dispensational contexts. Yes, God still uses the Holy Spirit

today in the lives of believers. We saw that as we studied Galatians 5, remember? Previously the Holy Spirit worked in ways harmonious to how he was at that time working through the preaching of the coming millennial kingdom. Signs, wonders and miracles were the rule of the day, even at times in the churches as a witness to Israel with whom God was still working. This continued until Acts 28:28 when Israel was formally set aside by the apostle Paul.

Today we are privileged to continue where we left off last time with this grand supply of the spirit of Jesus Christ finishing that Fifth Excellency concerning Body Truth.

Our Scriptures for Today:

- **2 Cor. 4:3-4**

3 But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost:

4 In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.

- **2 Cor. 4:6-7**

6 For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency (ὑπερβολή) of the power may be of God, and not of us.

- **2 Cor. 4:10-12**

10 Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.

11 For we which live are alway delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh.

12 So then death worketh in us, but life in you.

- **2 Cor. 3:17-18**

17 Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

18 But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

Our Outline Today:

#1: Paul Suffered -- For the Sake of the Gospel

#2: Paul Suffered -- For the Sake of Our Knowledge

#3: Paul Suffered -- For Our Resurrected Life

#4: Paul Suffered -- For God's Glory and Ours!

I. Paul Suffered -- For the Sake of the Gospel

[READ] 2 Cor. 4:1-4

1 Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not;

2 But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

3 But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost:

4 In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.

- ***Paul was committed to the Lord and his work no matter what the circumstances***
 - ***Satan was and is always to opponent and he is the one blinding the minds and hearts of mankind.***
 - ***Nevertheless, he writes here that God had through the Lord Jesus made a way out of this blindness by sending forth his Son to die for the sins of the world and through his resurrection to provide for the full and complete justification of sinners who would believe this good news. was through the proclamation of the gospel. Accordingly, Paul was committed to preaching that gospel no matter what the consequences of that might be.***
 - ***And now "the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God" shines gloriously into the hearts of those Satan has blinded! Such light is given through the gospel of grace. But this light must be received or it shines into the darkness without effect. Faith is the key here, taking God at his word. Amen.***

[Your comments?]

#1: Paul Suffered -- For the Sake of the Gospel

II. Paul Suffered -- For the Sake of Our Knowledge

[READ] 2 Cor. 4:5-7

5 For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake.

6 For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency (ὕπερβολή) of the power may be of God, and not of us.

- ***Note the words here carefully as figurative language is being used here. If one looks into the sun directly, one will be blinded, either permanently or for a time. Similarly here. ILLUSTRATION of looking aside rather than directly at the bright and setting or rising sun.***
- ***This is such a glorious teaching here, is it not? That we have this teaching today is most excellent indeed. The fullness of grace does indeed change everything.***
- ***Paul concluded that the Lord God had chosen the weak things of this world that his power may be used and revealed through the weakness of preaching.***
- ***CHALLENGE: Do we see the things of this life as Paul did? In verse 5 he writes that his ministry was for our sakes, that we might come to understand what he had learned -- and now dearly hopes that we will also come to know of “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” through this letter and others.***

#1: Paul Suffered -- For the Sake of the Gospel

#2: Paul Suffered -- For the Sake of Our Knowledge that we might know what Paul had come to know, that our suffering as well in this life has an eternal benefit as God uses our weaknesses and frailties to communicate his strength and power under the fulness of grace.

III. Paul Suffered -- For Our Resurrected Life

Our Life NOW! Paul restates this with these words underscoring the critical importance of this truth. That is something we need to be living NOW! We cannot wait until tomorrow for this, since the issue of life is for right now. Let us read about it in verses 8-12:

This is all about clay pots (“earthen vessels”) and this is to be taken quite literally first of the apostle and then of ourselves of course.

[READ] 2 Cor. 4:8-12

8 We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair;

9 Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed;

10 Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.

11 For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh.

12 So then death worketh in us, but life in you.

- ***Here the key to understanding the working of God under grace is given: God has called us into the sphere of his working and his eternal plan (verse 12) AND IT WILL BE ACCOMPLISHED BY HIS WORKING IN US. THIS IS ALL ABOUT THE CONTINUAL FLOW OF HIS ETERNAL LIFE IN US, DAILY, AND MOMENT BY MOMENT.***
- ***We may refer also to Gal 2:19-21 for a similar teaching:***
 - ***Gal 2:19-21***

19 For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God.

20 I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

21 I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.
- ***CHALLENGE: Do you agree that you and I may also be blessed as the apostle was, here and now, with not only the dying of the Lord***

Jesus in our sufferings, but also his living, his resurrection quality of life that is being always poured out in us? He writes here these words: "life in you"! Do you know this? ARE YOU SEEING THE GLORY OF GOD IN THE FACE OF JESUS CHRIST REVEALED IN PAUL'S LETTER HERE?

[Any testimonies?]

#1: Paul Suffered -- For the Sake of the Gospel

#2: Paul Suffered -- For the Sake of Our Knowledge

#3: Paul Suffered -- For Our Resurrected Life

IV. Paul Suffered -- For God's Glory and Ours!

[READ] 2 Cor. 4:13-18

13 We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak;

14 Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you.

15 For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God.

16 For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.

17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding (ὑπερβολή) and eternal weight of glory;

18 While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.

- ***We see here the culmination of his teaching here, so if we miss this we have missed most of everything here! And, to make the matter worse, we may have missed out on the blessings God offers under his grace since these scriptures are the vehicle he would use to provide those blessings to us.***
- ***Having introduced the sheer magnitude of this revelation and this reality in verse 7 with the word "ὑπερβολή", the apostle now in this section states the transforming revelation in the only appropriate words he can find, and, again using the same word, "ὑπερβολή".***

- ***And, he boldly states, quite contrary to what we might have thought, that we are all in this together! We are all part of God's eternal plan through Jesus Christ. It would be easy to read all of this as applying ONLY to the apostle himself or perhaps only to a few or perhaps only to the so-called "saints", as some groups might call them.***
- ***But, instead, he proclaims that whether now as we live out the resurrection life of Christ Jesus that dwells within each of us, or at our bodily resurrection together with the apostle, we shall each bring great glory to God BECAUSE OF HIS GREAT WORK IN EACH OF US! This is so humbling and so transforming to know, isn't it?***

Conclusion:

- ***DON'T FORGET PAUL'S ANALOGY HERE! WE HAVE LEFT THE BEST FOR LAST, THOUGH IN THE LETTER ITSELF, THIS COMES FIRST, JUST BEFORE THE CHAPTER WE HAVE DWELT IN TODAY --***
- ***But we need to look back to chapter 3 to get the full meaning here:***
 - ***[READ] 2 Cor. 3:17-18***
17 Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.
18 But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.
 - ***Verse 17:***
 - ***Lit. "Now the Lord is the Spirit" - two definite articles here, very unusual wording. This is another direct reference to the same "supply of the spirit of Jesus Christ" he revealed for us in Phil. 1.***
 - ***And, "where the the spirit [Lord] is, there is liberty"***
 - ***Verse 18:***
 - ***"With open face"***
 - ***"Beholding as in a glass"***
 - ***"Are being changed"***
 - ***"Into the same image"***
 - ***"From glory to glory"***

- **“By the spirit of the Lord [lit. by Lord spirit]”**
 - **Open face beholding the glory of the Lord**
- **What are we seeing? Are seeing in this mirror the glory of the Lord as Paul has written or not?**
- **We are to look at Paul and see the glory and to look at ourselves and see the glory - in earthen vessels! We can do this because of this revelation concerning how God is working today in the Body under the fullness of his grace! Amen and amen.**
- **WHAT IF WE IGNORE PAUL’S TESTIMONY AS SO MANY DO TODAY? KNOWING THIS CHANGES (OR ABSOLUTELY SHOULD CHANGE) EVERYTHING FOR US IN THIS LIFE. OUR BURDENS ARE LIFTED, OUR TRIALS ARE MADE LIGHT. Have we believed that?**

[Any Testimonies?]

- **“ALL THINGS ARE WORKING OUT SO GLORIOUSLY FOR US!!”, he adds here (my paraphrase - forgive me!). The apostle uses such “ὑπερβολή” in his writing here and elsewhere. A FAR MORE EXCEEDING (ὑπερβολή) “WEIGHT OF GLORY”. AMEN AND AMEN. This is so humbling, isn’t it?**
- **CHALLENGE: Is this revelation of the working of God Almighty toward and in us today drawing you into the realm of this special blessing as it did me so many years ago now?**
 - **Do you see and know his promises regarding our death now and our life through that death?**
 - **Do we identify with Christ in all of this as Paul did?**
 - **Do we know the reality of his resurrection quality of life poured out into and through us day by day and moment by moment?**
 - **Is our “inner man” renewed “day by day” as Paul’s was?**
 - **If not, why not. Paul says in verses 17 & 18 that this possible ONLY IF the “WHILE” is fulfilled, only if we “look” at the promises regarding our future glory!! Only if we take God at his word. Only then.**

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